



THE GOLDSMITHS' COMPANY



The History of the Goldsmiths' Company from their records

BY SUSAN M. HARE

A 'goldsmith' has always been understood to mean a worker in both gold and silver exactly as 'un orfèvre' in France where, incidentally, there is still no equivalent to our word 'silversmith'. Since gold and silver have always been essential for the coinage of the realm and much sought after for ornament and display of wealth, it is not surprising to find a 'guild of Goldsmiths of which Ralph Flael is alderman' in the earliest surviving reference to the city companies, a Pipe Roll entry of 1179-80 of eighteen guilds fined by King Henry II for operating without a licence. The Goldsmiths head the list of these adulterine guilds with a fine of 45 marks, or £30, far higher than any other. When considered in modern monetary values, this sum, which would have been more than a master craftsman could have earned in four years, is enormous and proves that the guild must have even then been of long standing.

Various ordinances were enacted in the thirteenth century by which leading goldsmiths, acting as individuals, were selected to superintend regulations governing the exchange of coin and standards for the precious metals. In 1300 King Edward I passed a statute in which definite metallic standards were laid down. Gold was to be of 'the touch of Paris' (19.2 carats), silver was to be of the sterling standard, as was the coinage and no vessel of silver was to depart out of the hands of the workers until it had been assayed by 'les Gardeins du Mester' or Guardians of the Craft and marked with the leopard's head supposedly taken from the royal arms and later known as the King's mark. This is the first legal recognition of the Company. Twenty-seven years later its first royal charter (Edward III) strengthened this position and it won the additional right to elect Wardens to enforce good authority and the standards within the trade and emphasised its standing over provincial goldsmiths.

At this point the Goldsmiths decided they should have a headquarters, their own 'common-place', an expensive and complicated business as they were, so far, an unincorporated body. The chosen property lay near the 'Goldsmithery' or goldsmiths' area, at the north end of Foster Lane in the parish of St. John Zachary. It had formerly belonged to Sir Nicholas de Segrave, brother of the Bishop of London, and in 1323 his executors had sold it to William de Clyf, clerk. It was after the latter's death in 1339 that nineteen goldsmiths bought it for the use of the Goldsmiths' Company. Though extended in area, this is the identical site on which Goldsmiths' Hall stands today and no other Company can claim a longer or earlier tenure, though the Merchant Taylors followed very closely.

In 1341 the Goldsmiths sought to extend their privileges in order to help those injured at work, as well as the poor. They obtained a licence to purchase and hold tenements and rents to the value of £20 for the relief of infirm members but this later proved to be legally inadequate, possibly because the Company's lawyers had been incompetent, more likely that the Crown had resisted their full demands, fearing the amount of land that was likely to pass into perpetual tenure. The final wording was left deliberately woolly and vague so that it could later be called into question.

Edward III passed a new statute in 1363 containing a variety of provisions, among them a new ruling that every goldsmith must have his own mark which was to be known by the Company, and that this mark was not to be stamped on any object until it had been assayed and found good. Sometime in the next century this was altered to the present arrangement, whereby the maker's mark was put on before the piece was assayed.

The Goldsmiths at last managed to regularise their position in the new charter which they received from the young King Richard II in February 1392/3. From henceforth they were to be a 'perpetual community' yearly to elect for themselves four Wardens 'to oversee, rule and duly govern the said craft and community and all and every member thereof', they were now legally able to purchase estates and rent tenements, to accept charitable donations, and to retain a chaplain to say masses for the souls of departed members.

By Letters Patent in the second year of his reign (1462), Edward IV, after confirming the previous charters, granted that the Wardens and their successors be a body corporate having perpetual succession and a common seal and that as 'the Wardens and Commonalty of the Mystery of Goldsmiths of the City of London' they may implead and be impleaded in any court. They were to be able to make good and reasonable byelaws and ordinances for the regulation of the mystery, to retain their right of search and powers of publishing offenders in London and elsewhere. *The word 'mystery' is often questioned but it means no more nor less than 'craft' and derives from the same source as the French 'métier'*. This marks the high point in the history of the Goldsmiths' Company. Other charters followed but they mainly examined and restated the position achieved by the Goldsmiths in 1462.

The London goldsmiths were divided into two classes, native and foreigners, the latter being called 'Allowes', ie licensed. They had long overflowed the confines of shops in Cheapside though this remained their centre and there were constant checks to see that other trades did not infiltrate the street. The whole Company met at least three times a year when the ordinances were read aloud and decisions by the Wardens ratified. Such questions as new leases, choice of almsmen, election of liverymen and trade disputes were dealt with on these occasions.

Two renters were annually appointed to collect the rents and keep an eye on the condition of various properties. These were men of standing on the Livery but unlike other companies they were not Wardens. There were four Auditors, all past Wardens, also a Clerk and a Beadle. The Wardens were chosen at a common assembly in April and took office on 19th May, the feast of St. Dunstan, the Company's patron saint. That day would begin with a solemn procession to church and end with a feast.

Important decisions were made at an assembly in 1469, one being that the samples of gold and silver scraped from articles for their testing, loosely described in the min-

utes as 'the assays', were no longer to be the perquisites of the Wardens but were to be accumulated and 'shall be wholly employed to the behoof of the said fellowship: that is to say in two standing cups covered, of silver or gilt or parcel gilt and in other jewels necessary for the fellowship'. These were to be locked in the Company's treasury chest with six keys and had to be accounted for and handed over with the puncheons to the new Warden on 'Give-up Day'. This then is virtually the start of the Company's plate collection though subsequent lack of funds and little respect for objects not in the current fashion, must have soon condemned these particular pieces to the melting pot. Indeed the earliest object in the collection which has been in the continuous possession of the Company is the Bowes Cup of 1554, donated in 1561.

Other decisions taken in 1469 stiffened penalties for non-attendance at assemblies, funerals and obits, unpopular because they were tedious and time-consuming; laid down strict rules for the wearing of livery clothes which were for ceremonial occasions and not for working in 'lest they be enbawdyd and defouled', and announced new controls to limit the number of foreign workmen.

Foundation of the Assay Office, 1478

The preamble to a statute of King Edward IV in early 1478 declared that the country was being flooded with counterfeit money; that gold and silver, both coin and plate, were being exported in spite of existing prohibitions; that goldsmiths and others were daily melting down coin; and that great quantities of gold were being wasted by goldsmiths and cutlers in gilding, dangerously diminishing the country's stock of coin. London goldsmiths in particular were accused of selling substandard wares and omitting the maker's mark to avoid penalty. By the statute, the Goldsmiths' Company was made specifically responsible for wares found below standard, and for the penalties involved. The gold standard was lowered from 19.2 carats to 18 (where it remained until 1576 when it was raised to 22 carats), and in order to differentiate between the old wares, condemned in the statute, and future wares, the leopard's head (or the so-called King's mark) was henceforth to be crowned. Now if the Company was to be held responsible for infringements of the law by individual goldsmiths, the Wardens were determined to establish a situation they could control. So in December 1478, they undertook a major reorganisation which established a system still recognisable today. Up till that time, the Wardens had tested wares at infrequent intervals

and often on the goldsmith's own premises, the goldsmith paying for the service in cash or sometimes with pledges which he later hoped to redeem.

Now this was replaced by a regular centralised system with the appointment of Christopher Elyot as the Company's first Common Assayer in a full-time post with a salary of £20 a year. No longer was there to be payment for assays, but a levy of 8d. a quarter 'on every man being a Brother'. Payment of quarterage was already a well-established practice in other companies. The Assayer was to have his own mark, now called the date letter, changed annually on St. Dunstan's Day. Therefore at this date all London silver should have carried three marks as is best shown by a contemporary ordinance: 'It is ordained by the assent of all the whole Fellowship of Goldsmiths that no goldsmith put to sale no manner (of) plate nor other stuff of silver until he hath set thereon his own mark, and then the same stuff so marked to be brought to the assay house at Goldsmiths' Hall there to be assayed and abled good, and then the assayer to set thereon his mark and after, the Wardens to set thereon the leopard's head crowned'. At last there was a properly established Assay Office and it is at this point that one can truly say the word 'hallmark' entered the English language for from December 1478 all goldsmiths had to bring their wares to Goldsmiths' Hall to be marked.

The boys taken by goldsmiths as apprentices, usually for a term of seven to ten years, were expected to be of a high standard. In the 1490s it was ordained that the apprentice must be able to read a passage out loud to the Wardens and write in English and Latin in a book that was to 'lie dormant' in the Hall for the purpose, consequently it was the 'Dormand'. Occasionally the rule was relaxed, most often when the boy was an orphan, but the master was then bound to teach him to read and write and later had to produce evidence that he had done so. This shows a much higher level of education than most people expect to find at this early date and it is interesting to note, at least from the evidence in the Company's records, that it was not until the onset of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century when parents deemed it more practical to send young children out to earn rather than to learn in school, that the level of literacy fell considerably. The Dormand has gone but the first Apprentice Register started in 1578 survives, each entry written and signed by the boy himself.

One of the oddest omissions from the Company records and from any official document is the introduction of the lion passant guardant mark, believed to have been used

for the first time in 1544 in retaliation against Henry VIII's debasement of the coinage in that year and denoting that hallmarked silverwares were still of the sterling standard. Certainly there is evidence of the king's anger towards the Company when he reminded them that they held their privileges from the Crown. The following year the Wardens were summoned before the King's Council, humbly confessed their faults and offered to submit their incorporation. They were ordered to send this with a book listing all the lands and secrets appertaining to the same. Subsequently the Company was fined 3000 marks and had to agree to two government officials being imposed to run the Assay Office. All monies formerly spent on obits and other superstitious practices were forfeit to the Crown. It is now believed that the lion passant mark crowned signified, in some way, royal 'supervision' or surveillance of the Assay Office. When Queen Mary came to the throne she gave a general Deed of Pardon with confirmation of the Company's former charters, and the Livery thankfully went to 'exaltavit' at a mass in St. Dunstan's Chapel in St. Paul's Cathedral.

The Company awarded its first university scholarship in 1564 at a meeting on 26th April when the Wardens agreed 'that this companie shall mayneteyne one scholar at one of ye universities with ye yearly allowance of viL. xiijs. iiijd (£6 13s 4d) for his exhibicion condicionally that ye ende of his studie shall tende to divinitie. And that ye same scholar shal be called ye first gold-smythes scholar'. Since that time the Company has always used part of the charitable income for educational purposes.

In 1571, the Goldsmiths' Company was granted the right of a helm, crest and supporters to the arms which it had 'long tyme borne'. The original grant of arms was not known, if indeed there had ever been one, but from various references it is evident that they were in use from the fourteenth century. The leopard's heads are an obvious allusion to the king's mark of 1300, and the cups and buckles are meant to show that all categories of goldsmithing are represented in the Company; the cups for the large or plate workers, the buckles for the small workers or jewellers.

The Wardens Accounts and Court Minutes began in 1334 and only one volume of Court Minutes (1578-92) has been lost. In its pages there must have been some account of the efforts made, by order of Queen Elizabeth, to standardise weights which were in general found to be very faulty. For many years Goldsmiths' Hall had been the repository of a set or 'pile' of troy weights against which all others in the City had to be compared. By Royal

Proclamation of 1587, new troy and avoirdupois weights were legalised, the troy ones having to agree with 'the true proportion of the pile of standard remaining at Goldsmiths' Hall to size all other weights by'.

Unfortunately the early pile has not survived but in 1588 fifty-seven new sets of weights were completed and distributed to various cities and towns throughout the country, also to the Tower of London, the Queen's Hospital and the Goldsmiths' Company; this latter set still remains in Goldsmiths' Hall.

The missing book can hardly have failed to record preparations against a possible Spanish invasion, in so far as they affected the Company. In earlier years there had been mention of the need for troops as in 1577 when the Company's quota was 150 men, fully trained and armed. The Company is fortunate to own a 'muster book' kept in 1588 and again in 1599 by one Richard Robinson, of the names of some contingents of the Train Bands, their officers and the livery company to which they belonged. It is interesting that the only English powder flask of the period to have survived, now in H.M. Armouries in the Tower of London, was of the Goldsmiths' Company's provision as it bears an enamelled silver plaque of the Company's arms.

A disastrous century

There was evident concern within the Company of a general lowering of standards of craftsmanship for, on 4 November 1607, a long memorandum was published wherein the Wardens complained that the 'true practise of the Art & Mystery of Goldsmithry is not only grown into great decays but also dispersed into many parts, so as now very few workmen are able to finish & perfect a piece of plate singularly with all the garnishings & parts thereof without the help of many & several hands...'. Consequently they erected in the Hall a 'workhouse' where any goldsmith who hoped to register his mark and set up his own shop, had to come and make a test-piece 'commonly called a Masterpiece to be begun and finished by himself & approved by the Wardens & 2 skilful workmen of the Mystery nominated yearly'. The production of a Masterpiece was not a new idea, it had been required of all apprentices aspiring to the freedom for many years past, but certainly the establishment of a workhouse at the Hall where the object had to be made under supervision was an innovation. An apprentice seeking the freedom of the Goldsmiths' Company still has to produce a masterpiece, but it no longer has to be made at the Hall.

The seventeenth century marks a period of financial disaster for the Goldsmiths as for the other city companies, and it is to their credit that they managed to survive it. The Crown had long looked to the City as an easy source of revenue, especially at times of national emergency. Now compulsory loans and gifts from the City became an important factor in the policy of the Stuart kings to rule without a parliament whenever possible.

First came the notorious 'Plantation of Ulster' a scheme thought up by James I for colonizing the six northern counties of Ireland, lands confiscated from the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell, by settling them with English and Scottish Protestants, having first ejected the rebellious Irish. Having failed to attract individual applicants to his scheme, he decided to involve the city companies in the venture, forcibly if necessary. The Irish Society was formed as a committee of the Corporation of the City of London and the sum of £52,000 was raised somewhat reluctantly by the companies after several Wardens had been imprisoned for default. The lands were then divided into twelve portions between the Great Companies and those minor companies that could be persuaded to join in. The Goldsmiths took in with them the Armourers, the Cordwainers and the Painter Stainers and were given land to the south-east of Derry, which now became known as Londonderry because of its enforced association with the City of London. The Irish lands proved to be a constant source of trouble and a drain on the Company's funds and it was with some relief that they sold the whole estate to the Earl of Shelburne in 1729.

Many other demands for loans to the Crown or new taxes followed, including the imposition of 'Ship Money' at a time when the Company was striving to save to rebuild the Hall. It had to pay for a licence for rebuilding and, a final indignity, when the stone was delivered it was immediately 'detained for the King's use' and a further quantity had to be purchased. Not only was the Company forced to borrow heavily but in 1637 it was ordered that thirty-four major items of plate be sold, the weights and names of the donors being first recorded so that, when they were financially able, they would have the pieces remade. This was the second largest sale of plate. The first had been ten years previously to raise a large loan for the King. In 1640 the King demanded £50,000 from the City, £3,500 being the Goldsmiths' share. The Company, already heavily in debt, arranged to borrow the money at a high rate of interest. Even greater demands followed; in June 1642 the City was asked for a loan of £100,000 a year, the Goldsmiths' share to be £7,000, said to be for the relief of Ireland.

By August of that year, Parliament had taken over the City Companies' supplies of gunpowder and 6,000 muskets and 4,000 pikes were demanded to arm the troops under the Earl of Essex. The Goldsmiths' Company made an inventory of those arms it could supply and agreed also to provide an 'ingine to quench fire', also ladders and fire buckets for the defence of the City. The Beadle complained that he was unable to collect quarterage as so many tenants 'have shut up shop and gone for soldiers'. The garrets at the Hall were converted to store corn, a tremendous fire risk.

It seems incredible that the Goldsmiths' Company managed to hold on to the remainder of its plate and indeed agreed to lend it at the time both to Sir John Wollaston and Sir Thomas Vyner when they both held office as Sheriff and Lord Mayor. After the Restoration, great efforts were made to replace the earlier plate losses and nine cups were remade by Arthur Manwaring, but as a result of the Great Fire of 1666 which deprived the Company of the use of the Hall for three years and meant loss of rent from much City property, seven of the new cups and all the old plate except for the Bowes Cup, Gibbon Salt and Rogers Salt were sold to Sir Robert Vyner to help pay off debts.

Several leading goldsmiths who had for some time past been keeping 'running-cashes' in order to be able to lend money to their customers at short notice, now all but abandoned the practice of making and selling plate in order to run full-time banking houses and the promissory notes they issued formed the style of our first bank notes. Prominent members of the Goldsmiths' Company such as Sir Robert Vyner, Sir Jeremiah Snow, Alderman Edward Backwell, Valentine Duncomb and Robert Blanchard made vast fortunes in their new businesses (and some subsequently lost them in 1672 by Charles II's stop of the Exchequer), and were generous in their gifts to the Company.

The Huguenot Influx

London goldsmiths had long had to compete against foreign workmen, refugees from wars and religious persecution in their own country, and the Company had been vigilant in protecting its own members; but a major problem had to be faced at the end of the 17th century with the influx of Huguenots who fled from France after revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Large numbers of these refugees were now settling in London, either outside the City boundaries or within the Liberty of St. Martin-le-Grand, to which the City regulations did not apply. The

Huguenot goldsmiths first evaded the hallmarking laws by persuading a few London craftsmen who had their makers' marks registered at the Hall, to present the French work for assaying and marking as if it were their own. The Company received various petitions from aggrieved local goldsmiths who resented the competition especially at a time when the price of silver was so high for the New or Britannia Standard (95.84% silver) which had replaced the old Sterling standard (92.5%) in 1697. The Company soon put a stop to this first abuse but was in some difficulty when the Huguenots, having successfully applied to the British Government for Letters of Denization, then approached the Hall to register their own marks. Further petitions from indignant members of the London trade followed but in 1725 the Attorney-General established for the first time that the right of entering a maker's mark at Goldsmiths' Hall could not be denied to anyone, whether he was free of the Company or not. At this the London goldsmiths reluctantly had to back down and accept the Huguenot craftsmen who in fact injected into the trade a much needed boost, both in design and technical skill.

The Return to Financial Viability

Meanwhile the Company continued heavily in debt and in May 1711, besides announcing various stringent economies, it was decided to sell off the bulk of the plate collection and buy tickets in the Government Classis Lottery. Twenty tickets were purchased, but it appears the Company received no prizes. The next, more sensible action was to find a purchaser for the Irish Estates and when this sale to the Earl of Shelburne was finally completed in 1729, the money received paid off the most pressing debts and the residue was carefully invested.

As if at last emerging from a long dark tunnel, the Company was becoming financially secure again, due mainly to the efforts of Charles Hosier, whose portrait still hangs in the Court Room to remind members that it was he who 'by his good advice and assistance contributed largely, as well to the extrication of the Company out of its difficulties, as to the improving of its circumstances' as the Court of Assistants observed when reporting his death in 1752. It was he also who suggested that the plate that had been sold should be replaced, resulting in the marvellous range of pieces all dated 1740-41 and still in the Company's possession, which were ordered from some of the leading goldsmiths of the day, Paul de Lamerie, Thomas Farren, Humphrey Payne and Richard Bailey. When viewed by the Court in December 1741, this new rococo silver was declared to have been 'performed in a very curious and beautiful manner'.

Because of continuous disputes between the Company's officers and the working goldsmiths, the Company petitioned Parliament to draw up a fixed table of fees for assaying. In 1738 an Act was passed 'For the better prevention of Frauds and Abuses in Gold and Silver Wares' which laid down the maximum charges to be levied and exempted certain smaller articles from hallmarking.

Makers were required to register a new mark 'of a character and alphabet different from their own mark', but the plate duty of 6d. per oz., introduced in 1719 at the restoration of the old sterling standard, was to be continued. As a result, many cases of 'duty-dodging' continued, that is the practice of inserting marks cut from smaller objects, on which duty has been paid, into larger heavier pieces, and also several incidents of forged punches were reported in the next few years until, by a statute of 1758, the duty on plate was abandoned for the time being but the counterfeiting of hallmarks was now made a felony punishable by death.

Though the Company continued to fulfil its statutory hallmarking duties, trade membership fell during the second half of the 18th century and one can feel a resultant lessening of interest in matters relating to the craft. In 1773 when Matthew Boulton successfully campaigned for the establishment of official Assay Offices in Birmingham and Sheffield, the London trade formed an indignant opposition, but the Goldsmiths' Company seemed rather half-hearted in its protests at the attack on ancient privileges. Out of a Court of Assistants of 47 members in 1773, only eight were manufacturing goldsmiths, none of any importance.

The War Effort, 1798-1816

With patriotic fervour, in 1798 the Court once again issued a list of economies to be practised in the running of the Company's affairs and announced that the sum of £1,000 was to be given 'in aid of the exigencies of the State, and that the same be continued annually during the war'. Many special subscriptions were raised for the relief of the widows, wives and orphans of the soldiers, sailors and marines killed or wounded in the various campaigns, two hundred guineas being subscribed for this purpose after the battle of Waterloo in 1815.

The following year an extraordinary Trial of the Pyx was held in Goldsmiths' Hall to test French gold money coined by the Mint 'for the greater facility of paying the troops under His Grace the Duke of Wellington', the British army of occupation in France. These coins later caused great

trouble in France where they were seized as counterfeit. Louis XVIII, having given permission for the coining, failed to circulate this fact in his own country.

Period of Rebuilding

Rigid economies first introduced during the Napoleonic wars were continued whilst a fund for building a new hall slowly accumulated. The Company was determined that there should be no curtailment in charitable work. At the dinner marking the opening of the hall in 1835 the Prime Warden, James Bogle Smith, was able to say that 'Not one pension has been abridged, no charity has been diminished, not one single petition for relief of our poorer brethren has been rejected'. Indeed, during the years of saving, the Company managed to embark on two major charitable schemes, both undertaken with income from corporate funds. In 1812, twenty almshouses were erected on the Perryn Estate in East Acton and in Stockport, the school founded through the bequest of Sir Edmund Shaa was rebuilt in 1832 to plans by Philip Hardwick, and the stipends of the masters were improved.

Reawakening of Interest in Trade Matters

The Prince Consort became an Honorary Liveryman in 1840 and it may well have been due to his enthusiasm that the Company decided to take a more prominent part in the Great Exhibition of 1851, awarding £1,000 in prizes 'as a special encouragement to manufacturers of plate in this country' and later purchasing £5,000 worth of ornamental plate to commemorate the exhibition.

Continuing the renewed interest in trade matters, in 1871 it proposed a scheme for improving technical education of artisans engaged in the craft. The Company established an annual competition and offered prizes for design and execution of works in precious metals. A master of drawing and modelling was discovered in Clerkenwell teaching goldsmithing apprentices and he was appointed to give regular free classes to students. Before further plans could be put into operation, it was decided in 1877 to unite with other Livery Companies in a major endeavour for the advancement of technical education in general throughout the country. A provisional committee of representatives from the City Corporation and the Livery Companies was formed and as a result of their recommendations, the City and Guilds of London Institute was founded in 1878. The Goldsmiths' Company has been a major benefactor to the Institute and its interest and involvement continues today.

Royal Commission on the City of London Livery Companies

In 1880 a Royal Commission was set up to inquire into the conduct of the City of London Livery Companies which were openly charged with spending their income on 'gourmandising' and with having ceased to fulfil any useful function in the modern state. The Commission took four years to prepare their report and in the end published two, the majority one antagonistic to companies, the minority one in favour maintaining that the companies had carried out the terms of their charters to the best of their abilities to changing circumstances. Like so many Royal Commissions, no resultant action was taken but there is no doubt that the detailed probings shook the companies out of any feelings of complacency and stirred them to play a more active and useful part in the life of the country.

New Cross Technical and Recreative Institute

Land and buildings at New Cross, in south east London, formerly used by the Royal Naval School, were purchased by the Goldsmiths' Company in 1889 and opened as the Technical and Recreative Institute 'for the promotion of technical skill, knowledge, health and general well-being among young men and women of the industrial, working and artisan classes'. In 1904 the College was presented to London University and changed its name to Goldsmiths' College. The Company still has two representatives on the college delegacy.

Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature

An outstanding collection of books on economic literature gathered together by Professor Foxwell was purchased in toto by the Goldsmiths' Company in 1903 and given to London University. When the Senate House, headquarters of the university, was erected in 1933, the Company gave £50,000 for the installation of a special library within the building to house the collection, now known as the Goldsmiths' Library of Economic Literature. The head of London University Library was formerly known as the Goldsmiths' Librarian from this bequest.

The Goldsmiths', Silversmiths' and Jewellers' Art Council of London

George Booth Heming, a member of the Court of Assistants, was the instigator of a scheme in 1908 to sponsor an annual competition for craftsmen and schools in the Greater London area. It took the title of the Goldsmiths' Silversmiths' and Jewellers' Art Council of London and from the start, was largely financed by the Goldsmiths' Company which organised the competitions, held exhibitions of the work and the annual prize-giving ceremony in Goldsmiths' Hall ever since. Many of the leading craftsmen in the trade in the 20th century have first come to notice through being prize winners at this annual competition.

The Second World War

Life in the Company continued as best it could during the last war until the night of 29th December 1940 when the Assay Office was burnt out. The salvaged punches and equipment were sent down to Reigate where the service was soon re-established, though there was little new work requiring assaying, except for 9-carat gold wedding rings which were thought by the Government to be essential in the interest of morale (or should I say, morals).

In April 1941, a direct hit destroyed the front south west corner of the Hall. However, the outer Portland stone facing was carefully collected and stored and replaced when that portion was restored after the war. So carefully was the work done that we defy any passer-by to notice which part of the Hall has been re-built from street level upwards.

Post-War to 1977

Recent history with the tremendous re-awakening of interest in all matters relating to the craft is well-known; also the work involved in the Hallmarking Act of 1973 and more especially, putting it into operation since January 1975, with the re-registration of all sponsors' marks and the marking of platinum. In 1976 some 11 million objects of gold, silver and platinum were marked in Goldsmiths' Hall. Also, 1976 saw the ratification of the International Convention on Hallmarking with new marks introduced on 1 June, and in 1977 there was a boom in silver sales because of the Silver Jubilee with the special mark of the Queen's Head.