

Arts & Antiques

The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths by Abby Cronin

When you become acquainted with the history and varied activities of the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths you can indulge your appreciation of jewellery and precious metal articles. The Goldsmiths' Company preserves a unique heritage. It received its first royal charter in 1327 and is one of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of the City of London. As a medieval guild for the goldsmith trade, the Company was established to support and regulate the hallmarking of precious metal articles. Over time it has become responsible for promoting excellence in craftsmanship, design and technical innovation within silversmithing, jewellery and allied crafts. The Company has flourished through seven centuries by adapting to the demands of an ever-changing competitive market.



The Grand Staircase

While it is not a business as such, the core functions of the Goldsmiths' Company include operating the Assay Office, supporting and encouraging the trade, funding numerous educational and charitable initiatives and promoting contemporary craftsmanship in precious metals through competitions, exhibitions and events. The Assay Office of the Goldsmiths' Company has been recognised for quality hallmarking since 1478. Gold and silver in their pure form are not sufficiently durable so an alloy is essential to improve their wearing qualities. Traditionally the metals used for an alloy of gold have been silver and copper and copper is used for strengthening silver. The process of testing the metal's quality guarantees a standard of purity. Once the purity of precious metals such as platinum, gold, palladium and silver is established a series of marks, the hallmarks, are then applied. There are strict legal requirements for hallmarking articles containing precious metals. The UK has been a signatory to the International Convention of Hallmarks since 1972 and UK Hallmarking Acts ensure that standards

are adhered to. These laws exist to ensure the purity of the metal and a hallmark consists of a minimum of three elements which the assay office stamps on the item: the maker/ manufacturer, the metal and fineness and the Assay Office mark. (1)

Plan a visit to the Goldsmiths' Hall, a magnificent hidden architectural treasure at the corner of Foster Lane and Gresham Street, north east of St Paul's Cathedral. This has been the site of the Goldsmiths' Company since a building was purchased in 1339. The original building was a merchant's house near the goldsmithing area in Cheapside. The present Hall is the third building on the same site. Designed by the Company's architect, Philip Hardwick, it opened in 1835. Restored to an exceptionally high standard after bomb damage in 1941, today the interior is an exquisite example of high Victorian grandeur with the charm of an urban palazzo. The stunning rooms are filled with high profile exhibitions several times a year. While there, be sure you take time to enjoy the sumptuous furnishings. Behold the extraordinary Grand Staircase! Wander slowly through the Livery Hall and Drawing Room. Take time to appreciate the fantastic chandeliers, marble statues, superb ceilings, mirrors and the gold gilt throughout.

Several exhibitions are planned for the summer and autumn months in 2013. 'Ultra Vanities – Bejewelled Make-Up Boxes from the Age of Glamour' is currently open to the public and runs until 20th July in Goldsmiths' Hall (free admission). This is a rare opportunity to see a unique private collection of remarkable *objets d'art* made by designer-craftsmen from the world's most distinguished jewellery houses. In the 1920s through to the



Necessaire by Van Cleef & Arpels, 1930

1970s make-up boxes were all the rage. More than 200 pieces will be displayed in a setting reminiscent of an elegant Parisian salon of the 1930s. Step back in time and enjoy the ingenious engineering artistry of these miniature works. These cases were regarded as an essential accessory, designed to be shown off. They were also a practical way of carrying powder, lipstick, a comb, mirrors and a cigarette holder, exactly what a woman would need on a night out. On the previous page is one superlative example by Van Cleef and Arpels circa 1930. Either by design or accident, the timing of this exhibit is perfect because it will run in step with the release of the blockbuster film *The Great Gatsby*. Throw the gloom of economic austerity aside while you enjoy the world of glamorous luxury from a bygone age.

The Goldsmiths' Company Pavillion at Somerset House offers the public an accessible summer venue from June 26th -29th. The Pavilion will be held in the West Wing Galleries. This is a superb opportunity to see work by top jewellery, silver and furniture designers working in the UK today. If your shopping list includes a gift for a special occasion, why not commission something unique and tailor-made in keeping with your budget from one of these innovative designers. The black bangle on the next page is just one example of jewellery available at the Pavillion.

In keeping with its charitable commitment, the Company embarked on a £17.5 million project in 2005, the creation of the Goldsmiths' Centre. This undertaking involved the restoration of an existing listed Victorian London Board School. Today the Centre is up and running in a purpose-built sustainable four-storey building designed to accommodate workshop space for established firms of silversmiths and jewellers. There are also subsidised workspaces for young people starting out in the business. (2) During the summer the Company will co-sponsor 'British Silver Week -Festival of Silver' in the Goldsmiths' Centre. This selling



Silver vase being hallmarked

exhibition from 8th July – 13th July is part of a programme to promote awareness of modern contemporary British silversmithing.

Without a doubt the premier autumn destination for lovers of jewellery and silversmiths is the twice-yearly selling exhibition, Goldsmiths' Fair -2013, held in the Goldsmiths' Company Hall. Established in 1983, this superlative selling exhibition has grown in stature and allure and is regarded as the most prestigious event of its kind in Europe. The Fair takes place over two separate weeks in order to provide enough space for 180 selected designer-makers to display their work. This year the Fair opens on 23rd September and closes on 6th October. Exquisite original works by independent designer-makers fill the Hall. The works are presented in glistening vitrines that have a magnet attraction. If you want to see outstanding cutting edge works by dedicated contemporary silversmiths, this is it -- a chance to talk with the makers and learn more from them about their craft and techniques.

On the next page are a few examples of innovative pieces from established exhibitors whose work can be found in the Fair. Ornella Iannuzzi's distinctive 'wearable sculptures' embody elegance and audacity. Her jewellery originates from her childhood love of stones, crystals and minerals. In her own words she says:

'I was born in the Alps and you are surrounded by nature all the time...from a very young age I collected stones, crystals and minerals... I wanted to show these beautiful things to the world...I thought that the best way to do this was to put them on a pendant, or on a ring, so I could take them around with me.'

Another equally original and gifted jeweller is Andrew Lamb, whose approach is influenced by his interest in optical illusion. He comments:

'Optical illusion and visual effects...I create refined, delicately shaped pieces which appear to change in colour as the eye moves over the surface.'

The silversmith Fred Rich is regarded as one of Britain's most dynamic and exciting enamellers working in silver, jewellery and art metals. A set of his beakers are displayed here. For more details about the individual designers be sure to consult the Goldsmiths' Company website. (3)

By now you might be thinking – *so much to learn, so much to see; too little time*, and you would be right. Perhaps it's best to step back from the dazzle and glitter of exhibitions and selling fairs and give some thought to the history of The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths itself. As one of the remaining twelve great livery companies of the City of London, it has skilfully mixed the work of a traditional trade guild with charitable works and provides an exceptionally important showcase for both established and young jewellery designers and silversmiths.

Beakers by Fred Rich



Notes:

(1) <http://www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk/welcome-to-the-assay-office/hallmarking-services/our-hallmarking-services/available-hallmarks>

(2) <http://www.goldsmiths-centre.org/about-the-centre/the-story/>

(3) <http://www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk/exhibitions-promotions/who-s-who-in-gold-silver/>

www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk

www.assayofficelondon.co.uk

www.goldsmiths-centre.org

www.whoswhoingoldandsilver.com

Dates:

1- *Ultra Vanities – Bejewelled Make-Up Boxes from the Age of Glamour*

Free admission. Ends July 20th 2013

2- *Goldsmiths' Company Pavilion at Somerset House. June 26 -29th 2013*

3- *Goldsmiths' Fair -2013. Week One: September 23rd – September 29th*

Week Two: October 1st – October 6th

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Bangle by
Jacqueline Cullen



Rings by Lilly Hastedt



Bangle by Andrew Lamb



Ring by Ornella Iannuzzi