

Tongs Hallmarks – London
All pictures of hallmarks shown are from actual pairs of sugar tongs

From 29th May 1791 to 28th May 1800

1791/92

This was the first year in which sugar tongs were marked with the date letter. The date letter used was a lower case “q”. For the first time tongs were now marked using a single stub for use with a fly press, which means each of the three marks were engraved on one punch as a single punch. This remained the case from this date onwards. Both the lion and the date letter have an ogee base.



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1792/93

Notice that the date letter ("r") has lost its ogee base, which is now a smooth curve. The lion still retains its ogee base. One small curiosity with this date letter is that it is often difficult to make out as is illustrated in this first group of hallmarks.



We also see that the shape of the "r" is not always quite the same. This group are larger and the two tails at the top of the "r" are almost the same size.



With this particular small group, the "r" looks almost like a "v". It is not of course, as "v" was not used by the assay office.



The following group shows the more commonly seen shape of the date letter.



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1793/94

The date letter for 1793/94 was a lower case “s”. The date letter still retains its curved base. The bar across the “s” is not always easy to see but under close inspection it is always there, or at least vestiges of it if the mark is worn. The shape of the “s” does vary. These first two pictures clearly show that the bar of the “s” looks as if it was added on afterwards. At this time John Pingo was the official engraver and we know that he had engraved an upper case 'S' by mistake and rather than scrap all his punches the Company made him put the bar over the letter so that it could be distinguished from the upper case 'S' in the next sequence. (This information is courtesy of David McKinley).



The pictures below are all very similar but one can see the bar almost worn away in a number of cases.



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1794/95

The date letter ("t") still retains its curved base and the lion its canted top corners and ogee base. There are some very slight variations between the marks. We know that a significant number of these marks were made each year so it is not surprising that they were not all identical.

With this first group of marks the bottom left corner of the duty head is almost touching the edge of the punch and in some cases merged with the edge of the punch. This could of course be just wear of the punch.



The remainder of these punches do not quite show as much wear.



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1795/96

The 1795/96 mark retains the same form as with the previous year. This year the date letter is a lower case “u”. This should not be confused with the date letter for 1815/16 which was an upper case “U” and in a different form, with the date letter in between the lion and duty mark.

Notice that with a number of these marks there is some slight damage to the punch with the top left corner of the duty mark being missing.



With these marks we can see some damage to the right side of the lion.



With these marks we can see some damage to the left side of the date letter.



The remainder of the marks show no sign of damage.



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1796/97

For the assay year of 1796/97, beginning May 29th 1796, the date letter reverted back to the beginning of the alphabet, this time in upper case. We can see that some of the marks are slightly damaged, curiously in much the same way as with the previous year.

With four of the marks we can see some very slight damage to the top left of the duty mark.



With two of the marks we can see some damage to the right side of the lion.



The remainder of the marks appear to be undamaged.



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1797/98

The date letter for 1797/98 was a capital “B”. Notice the damage to the top left of some of the duty marks, as was seen with some previous years’ marks.



From 6th July 1797 duty on silver was doubled from 6d to 1s per ounce. To show that the increased duty had been paid the assay office “clipped” the duty mark, cutting a small piece out of the left side and bottom of the duty mark. This was done rather than have completely new marks engraved.

Once again we can see the small flaw to the right hand side of the lion on some of the marks and in some cases the very small flaw to the top left of the duty mark.



The remainder of the marks appear to be un-damaged.



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1798/99

The date letter for 1798/99 was a capital “c”. This mark should not be confused with that of 1818/19, which was a lower case “c” with the date letter punched in between the lion and duty mark. Notice that the shape of the date letter has now changed and it has an ogee base rather than the curved base of the previous years.

We can see the, by now, familiar damage to the top left corner of the duty mark on these first few hallmarks.



The remainder of the marks appear to be in good condition.



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1799/1800

The date letter for 1799/1800 was a capital “D”. The shape of the date letter retains its ogee base.

Notice that with some of the marks the damage to the bottom right hand side of the lion seems to have returned, as was first seen in 1795/96.



On one mark we can also see some damage to the right hand side of the date letter but this may simply be some general wear and tear with this particular pair of tongs.



The remainder of the marks appear to be in good condition.

