

Tongs Hallmarks – London

All pictures of hallmarks shown are from actual pairs of sugar tongs

Up to 28th May 1791

This article is published with special thanks to David McKinley whose research has provided some valuable insights into the format of the assay office punches, particularly with regards to the period of 1786 to 1791.

Prior to 1st December 1784

Silver sugar tongs of the bow form were first introduced in the early 1760's. The earliest pair of tongs that I have seen that can be positively dated were dated 1764. Before 1st December 1784, sugar tongs were marked with the lion passant and makers mark only. These were normally punched on the inside of the two arms, one mark each side (sometimes in the bowls). Sugar tongs that are marked with the lion passant and makers mark only will therefore be dated from c1760 to 30th November 1784. The lion was in a rectangular punch with canted top corners and an ogee base. One needs to be aware that over that period of time, there will have been many, many punches made. Consequently they will not all be identical, so you will see differences between the marks. Also the provincial offices were also using the lion passant and the differences between the London mark and some of the provincial marks can often be difficult to detect, especially when the mark is worn. For this reason pieces can sometimes be mis-identified as provincial or London work.

These eight pictures do not show the ogee at the base of the lion very well. They may well have been identified as London makers but in actual fact be provincial work, or they may just be worn marks.



This mark is curious as the lion has clearly been punched initially the wrong way around and only over half the silver.



The remainder of these marks are all from London made tongs, dating between c1764 and 30th November 1784.



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1st December 1784 to 28th May 1786

Duty (or tax) was first imposed on silver in 1720. The rate was 6d per ounce. This did not at that time involve punching a mark on items. This was replaced in 1758 by a dealer's licence of £2. On 1st December duty at 6d per ounce was re-introduced (in addition to the dealer's licence). Silver was then marked with the duty mark which was the monarch's head (facing left) in an intaglio punch. These two marks were punched with two separate punches and as with later punching of the two marks (lion and duty mark) it did not seem to matter whether the lion was above the duty mark, or vice versa. The assay office was also not too careful about how close to each other the two marks were.



They were also punched side by side, although this appears to be rare, and probably only happened with cast tongs.



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1st December 1784 to 24th July 1785

When a piece of silver was exported the duty that had been paid could be reclaimed. This was indicated by the punching of another mark, the duty drawback mark. This mark was also in intaglio form and depicted Britannia holding a shield and a spear. This mark was discontinued on 24th July 1785 due to the damage it caused on the silver item, although the refund could still be claimed.



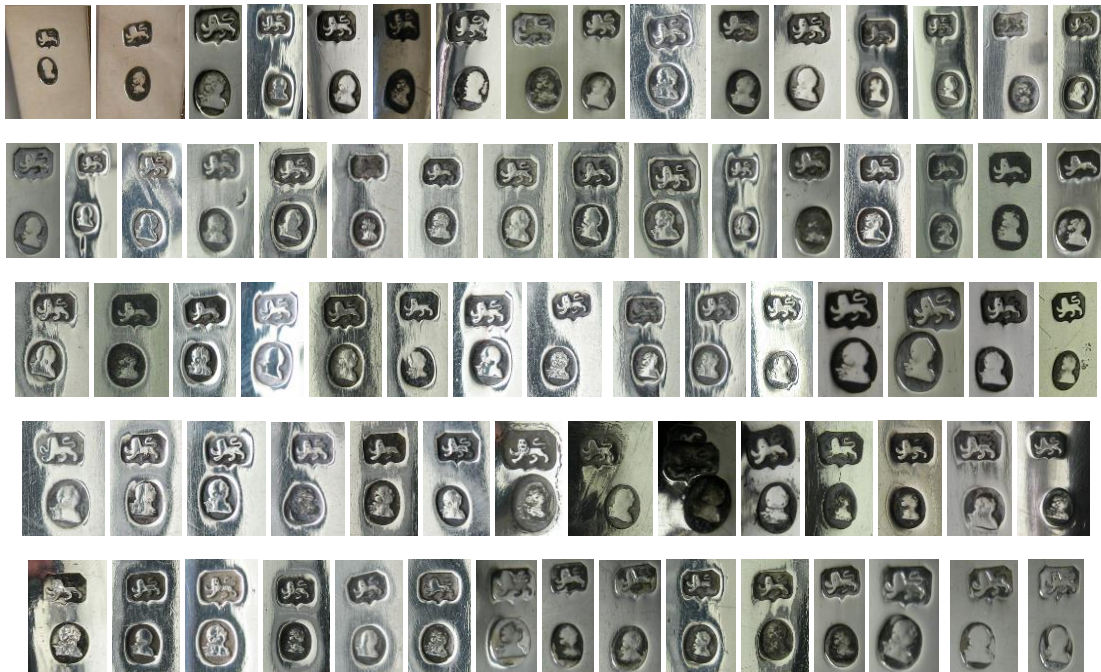
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29th May 1786 – to 28th May 1790

After the incuse duty mark was abandoned, the standard “intaglio” style duty mark was introduced. As sugar tongs were not marked with the date letter until 1791 we have a period of three years during which sugar tongs were marked with just the duty mark and lion (as well as the makers mark). The lion and duty mark were punched one above the other (see next section for clarification of this). There are 102 marks seen dated between 1786 and 1790 with the lion and duty mark punched one above the other. Again these marks were made with two separate punches, struck with a hammer. During this period a double punch was introduced which took the form of a single punch with the two marks engraved on its head. The double punch was **NOT** used for sugar tongs during this period.

Most were punched with the lion above the duty mark.



Some were punched with the duty mark above the lion.



The distance between the two marks was not standard, sometimes the two marks being punched almost on top of one another.



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The assay office were also not always very careful about punching the two marks directly above one another.



These marks all have a “double dot” between them. They are all tongs made by William Sumner, which suggests that they may be some form of journeyman’s mark or something very specific to William Sumner, rather than something done at the assay office. Perhaps William Sumner punched these two dots to indicate to the assay office whereabouts he would like the hallmarks punched. This is of course all just speculation.



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1790/91

1790 saw the introduction of the double punch being used for marking sugar tongs. The double punch comprised the duty mark followed by the lion. For this reason, we know that any pair of sugar tongs marked with the double punch must be dated post 29th May 1790.

Whilst this is the case there comes a problem. Looking at the marks below, they are not all identical and it is unlikely that they were all punched using the double punch. This means that some will have been marked using two separate punches. This therefore means that we cannot be certain that these marks relate to the period 29th May 1790 to 28th May 1791. Some of these tongs could well have been hallmarked prior to this, i.e between 29th May 1786 and 28th May 1790 using the two separate punches and punching the two marks side by side. We therefore conclude that some of these tongs are dated 1790/91 and some prior to that. There are 104 marks with the lion and duty mark side by side.



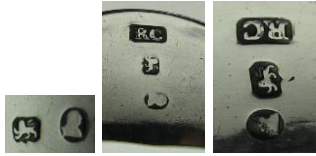
Note that the lion is normally seen with the lion to the right of the duty mark.



- This mark is seen punched in the normal place to the inside top of one arm and will certainly have been punched using two separate punches.

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- These three marks are all punched on Richard Crossley tongs, marked right underneath the bow and most likely punched with single punches.



- The relative sizes of the lion and duty mark are not always the same. In the first of these two marks the duty mark is significantly bigger than the lion.