

Fact Sheet 07: engraving



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Introduction

Hand engraving is described by the Hand Engravers Association as the embellishment of precious objects using traditional hand tools. It goes on to say that few people understand the skill and attention to detail involved in the traditional craft of hand engraving. It is a field that requires specialist knowledge, such as tool making and the understanding the behaviour of different metals and other materials, coupled with substantial artistic and calligraphic skill. Even the simplest engraved details – some initials, a date, or just a few decorative lines – can give personality, life and sentiment to an inanimate object.

Hand engraving is a diverse craft with a long history that is intrinsically entwined with human culture. Historically it has been used in both practical and decorative applications; from hunting arms to royal seals, coins and bank notes to jewellery, its influences are all around us.¹

The term engraving encompasses decorative engraving on jewellery and silverware, seal engraving, heraldry, enamel, champlevé, printing and embossing. Engine turning can also be classed as a form of engraving as can other forms of machine engraving. For the purposes of this fact sheet, we will focus on hand engraving.

Finding a professional engraver

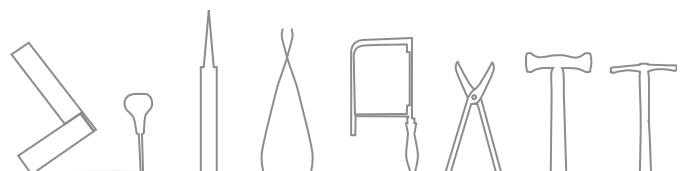
You can find engravers through the trade databases listed at the end of this fact sheet and also through the Hand Engravers' Association website. You could also have a look at websites such as whoswhoingoldandsilver.com and try approaching a crafts person that does engraving to see if they do outwork. Ask for recommendations and go to networking events and seminars to build up your address book.

Preparing your design for engraving

The possibilities for embellishing your jewellery or silverware are endless. Whether you want a beautifully carved inscription or lettering, or whether you want to add some colour to your piece perhaps through the use of enamel techniques, it is really up to your own imagination.

To prepare your work for approaching an engraver, you need to collate any visual reference material you have, along with the piece you have prepared ready to engrave. Prepare to be flexible, engraving is an art form and no two engravers are the same. Once you have your designs ready, sit down with your engraver and discuss your work. Ideally you would discuss your design proposal before going ahead with making it as they might have suggestions at the design stage that might save you time later on.

¹ Hand Engravers Association website: www.handengravers.co.uk



Costing and pricing

As with all professional craftspeople, costing is dependent on many variables as each job is different with hand engraving.

Some engravers charge by the letter but most charge by the job. Ask your engraver to estimate a cost and provide a minimum and maximum for you. You can always negotiate depending on your budget.

Engraving FAQ

Q: Is there a particular gauge metal I should use?

A: An experienced engraver can engrave on very thin metal but 0.3mm is the recommended minimum.

Q: Should I finish and polish my piece before submitting it to the engraver?

A: The more prepared the piece is, the less final finishing there will need to be. It is definitely best to have it finished to a 'prep' polish to prevent excessive wear to the engraving. Liaise with the engraver on this beforehand.

Q: Should I polish the engraving once I get it back from the engraver?

A: It shouldn't need much polishing if you have prepared the metal before engraving but it will need a final buff.

"Working through a design concept takes considerable time and shouldn't be rushed."

Glossary

Bright cut engraving

Typical form of engraving which takes advantage of the play of light of shallow slanted cuts on the surface of precious metal

Intaglio

Relief engraving on metal

Basse taille (French: low-cut)

Form of enamelling where the metal surface is covered with low relief engraving and then enamelled over the top with one colour of transparent enamel. The varying depths of the cuts create depths in the colour

Champlevé

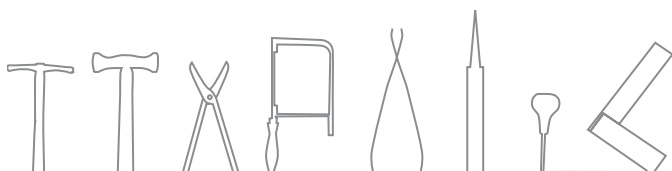
A form of enamelling where cells are engraved into the surface of the piece and then enamelled in different colours.

Graver

Tool used to engrave line patterns, carve details in intaglio in dies, also for carving inlays

Seal engraving

The cutting of metal or stone in such a way as to create a counter-relief negative of the image to imprint – usually a coat of arms or family crest. This item can then be used to produce a finely detailed impression in wax



Databases of industry specific trade services

The following websites hold information about trade services, equipment suppliers, products and educational courses:

benchpeg: www.benchpeg.com

The jewellery industry's leading creative and digital communications network

British Jewellers' Association Trade Product Search: www.bja.org.uk

A membership organisation that represents the jewellery industry

Ganoksin: www.ganoksin.com

An international online resource for the jewellery industry

The Goldsmiths' Company Technical Portal:

www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk

A supplier database of trade-to-trade services and suppliers

Further information

Hand Engravers Association
www.handengravers.co.uk

Guild of Enamellers
www.guildofenamellers.org

Acknowledgements

James Neville, Hand Engraver
www.jamesnevilleengraving.com

Hand Engravers Association
www.handengravers.co.uk

