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Diamond
Cutting in
London

London is seldom thought of today as playing a major role in diamond cutting. In the past, things were different. Diamonds had been entering Britain, and being set in royal jewels, at least since the mid-1200s, but there is little evidence for cutting there until the later 1500s, when cutting was encouraged even by Queen Elizabeth. Diamonds began to flow into England in greater abundance following the establishment of the East India Company in 1600, and within a couple of generations London had become a major cutting center.

The earliest mention of commerce involving unset diamonds we hear of in England is *a Roche diamont* (uncut diamond) for which, along with other gems and jewelry, two Genoese merchants requested an import license into England in 1491 (Rymer 1727, 12:460). The document describes the stone as an “amigdalat diamont,” presumably because its shape resembled an almond (Latin *amygdalus*). In 1536 Sir John Gostwick, Henry VIII’s treasurer, paid “Andrew Thomas, merchant of Venice,” £1,520 on the king’s behalf for a diamond. This was an enormous sum of money in those days, but the diamond was probably already cut (Gairdner 1888, 151). Some such diamonds came north overland across Europe, others with the galleys that plied to Antwerp from Venice (Brown 1864, cxli). The Venetian Bartolommeo di Pasi produced a comprehensive catalogue of the objects being traded to and from Venice around

Detail of a portrait of King James I of England painted by John de Critz in 1604. The diamond hanging from the hat jewel is the Sancy. Credit: National Galleries of Scotland, PG 561.
