

Horn and bone thimbles

including some sewing tools

This is another thematic topic, this time bringing together the makers of horn and bone thimbles and various types of each used.

Edwin Holmes owned a 19th century Indian-made horn thimble. From these early examples below I was able to straighten out in my mind what horn thimbles should look like. They are of a dark mottled colour.



L: 19th century Indian ox horn

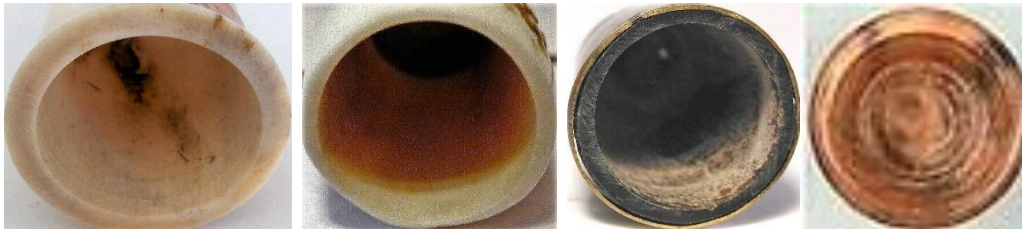
In the 21st century there have been many cow bone or bovine thimbles made of a very pale colour, almost resembling ivory (and can be mistaken for ivory once their labels have been lost).

In the 1990s, thimbles of synthetic material replacing real ivory appeared on the market. I have seen them advertised as horn. Examples are included here as a buyer beware.



L: synthetic – polymer R: synthetic material Melissa Hookway (MH), UK

The inside of a horn and bone thimble will be darker or have a chalk-like appearance.



elk – red deer – buffalo – reindeer

Horn and bone thimbles are made of animal material from the horn, antler or hoof.

water buffalo – cow or cattle – buffalo – yak, are composed of keratin (horn) – the term bovine covers all these animals

red deer stag – elk – moose – any of the African buck, have antlers (bone)

Thimbles can be left natural or be scrimshawed, etched, handpainted. Some makers combine horn and bone in their thimbles.

Like all natural materials used for thimbles, the material will always reveal a hidden colour awaiting polishing to bring out the natural beauty.

I have noticed that on the second hand market, that some thimbles were offered as made of bone -they are early plastic. The inside is very different with bone.



showing natural reindeer rim

No two horn or bone thimbles are ever the same.

Horn and bone is naturally hollow with only the tip having a closed end. This means that other than a thimble made from the tip, all will have to be filled with a different material to create a thimble apex or a separate piece of bone. One thimble in a Gimbels catalogue inadvertently stated "... Thompson can only make one thimble from one antler."

Most are made in two parts, which is the only practical way to use horn and bone to make thimbles. I have been surprised by the variety of the apex materials that these thimble makers have used.

Thimbles made of animal tooth or tusk, which include elephant and whale ivory, hippo etc - are not included in this topic.

for other topics made of natural materials see

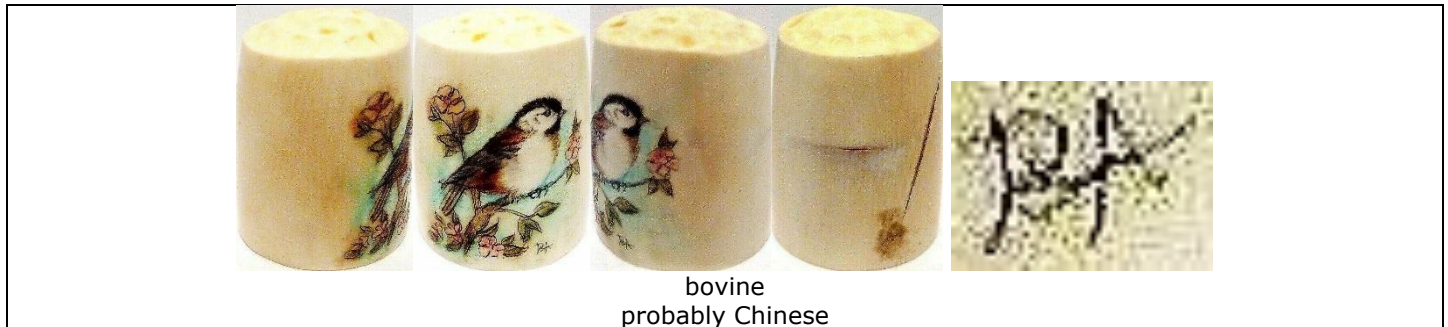
Bog oak sewing tools

Ivory thimbles

HORN AND BONE THIMBLE MAKERS

Most horn makers do not mark their thimbles. Where only the initials of the maker is shown, these are found on the thimbles. Handling a variety of horn and bone thimbles will make a collector familiar with traits of the horn and bone thimble maker. I have added dates where thimbles first offered for sale by mail-order catalogues.

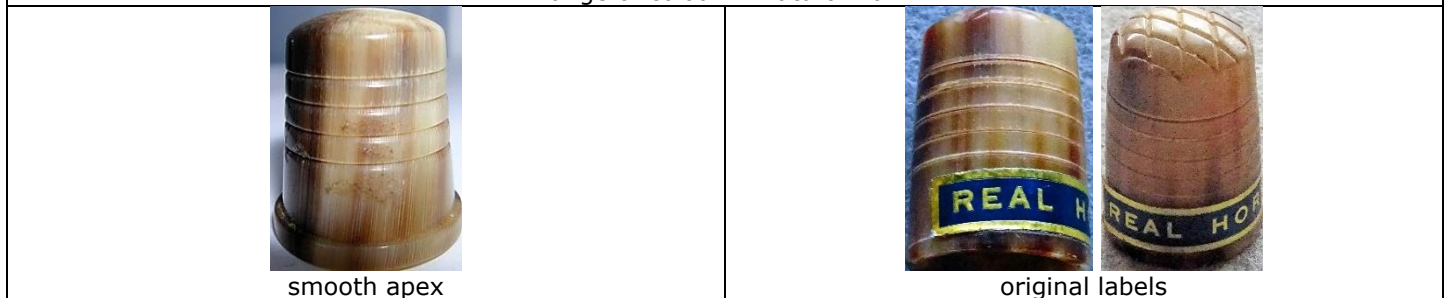
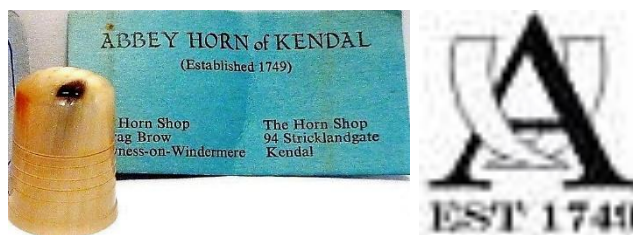
BA



Abbey Horn of Kendal Lake District UK

Abbey Horn thimbles are made of cow horn. The thimbles have a criss-crossed apex where the apex is of the same material. The shape is roughly square with incised rings and a finely stepped rim. They were issued with a 'Real Horn' sticker around the rim. Paul Kleasby is the thimble maker

www.abbeyhorn.co.uk



I was sent these bone thimble photos as part of a larger group in 2010. Made of camel bone.
similar thimbles were for sale by TTG 2011



feathers
R: orange camel bone



King Tut
R: orange camel bone



Nefertiti
inset brass



pharaonic
inset brass



pharaonic
inset brass



orange camel bone
inset brass



inset gilded brass



Christmas tree
limited to 24
TTG November 2011



hieroglyphic patterning
TTG June 2011



inset brass
TTG August 2011



carved trees
TTG February 2012

Reza Baharlou Spain



camel bone

Bone Dry Musical Company USA

made to play the washboard, which requires them to be graded in size for all fingers



bleached horn



horn

Richard Carpenter Salmon Idaho USA



deer antler
parrot



moose antler
sunflower



bat of buffalo horn, thimble of moose antler, magnifying glass
of lucite
created for BATS (Bay Area Thimble Society)

two-three created
signed RC 4-22-09



moose antler
lady slipper orchid

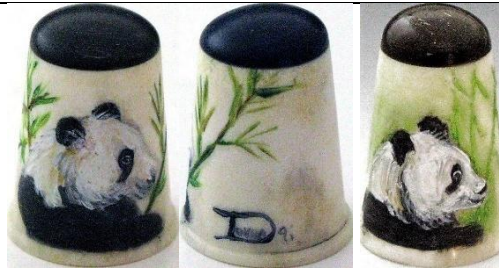
CB



cow horn
duck

Dovea USA

This painter may be one of Thompson's painters. Signed and dated.
wholesaler: Heirloom Editions



elk antler and buffalo horn
panda
1991

Dykehead Horncraft Irvine North Ayrshire Scotland

no longer in business



label in thimble boxes



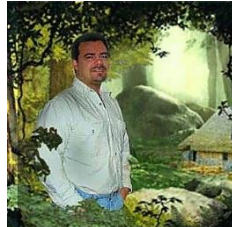
range of colours in natural antler – the apex is made from the same material

Brad Elfrink Elvenkrafte Studios Missouri USA

made of fossil bone from Siberia
 most designs feature fairy tales - mainly one-off creations
 the thimbles are signed on the inside and dated with day month and year
elvenkrafte.com for commissions



R: date 8.23.13



 Alice and caterpillar	 Alice and Cheshire cat	 Alice and dodo
 Alice and White Rabbit	 Alice and teaparty with Mad Hatter	 cat with cotton reel with place to keep needle
 butterflies		 corgis with a bone – Ozzie and Mozzi
 fairy	 Hey diddle diddle	 Goldilocks and the three bears

			
Hansel and Gretel	Jack and Jill moving parts	kittens chasing	
			
kittens playing	Little Boy Blue		mice in corn
			
lion and mouse 8.23.13	nativity	Night before Christmas	
			
owls	Red Riding Hood		Rub a dub dub
			
Rumpelstilskin	Scottie dog black and red enamel		sea creatures - fish starfish seahorse shell
			
shepherds	SINGER sewing machine moving parts black enamel		squirrel



squirrels



steam train

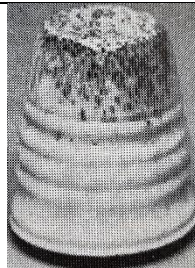


Three Wise Men



three monkeys

Conan Fisher USA



b&w photo

Glenfiddich Horn Product New Zealand



Bill Haley New Zealand



cow horn

Heathergems Pitlochry Scotland

According to the information on their thimble boxes, Hugh Kerr of Heathergems took out Patent 1143252. This would protect their unique creation of using dyed, dried and pressed heather roots and stems, which was incorporated into the natural antler hollow.

Opened in 1950s, the firm is still in existence but no longer produce thimbles.



box lid

TTG June 1983 – Gimbels 1996 – Thimbles Only winter 1983



stag antler and heather

Horncraft Argyllshire Scottish Borders

They began their horn business in 1959 and are still in operation but no longer making thimbles.



Gimbels 1981 - TTG March 1983



red deer antler with harder cow horn, flat apex
lower: apex not indented

HL USA



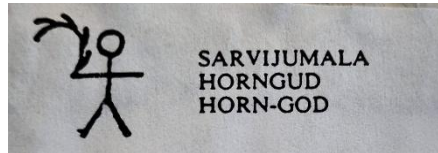
reindeer
very skilful pierced carving



elk antler
pierced elk carving

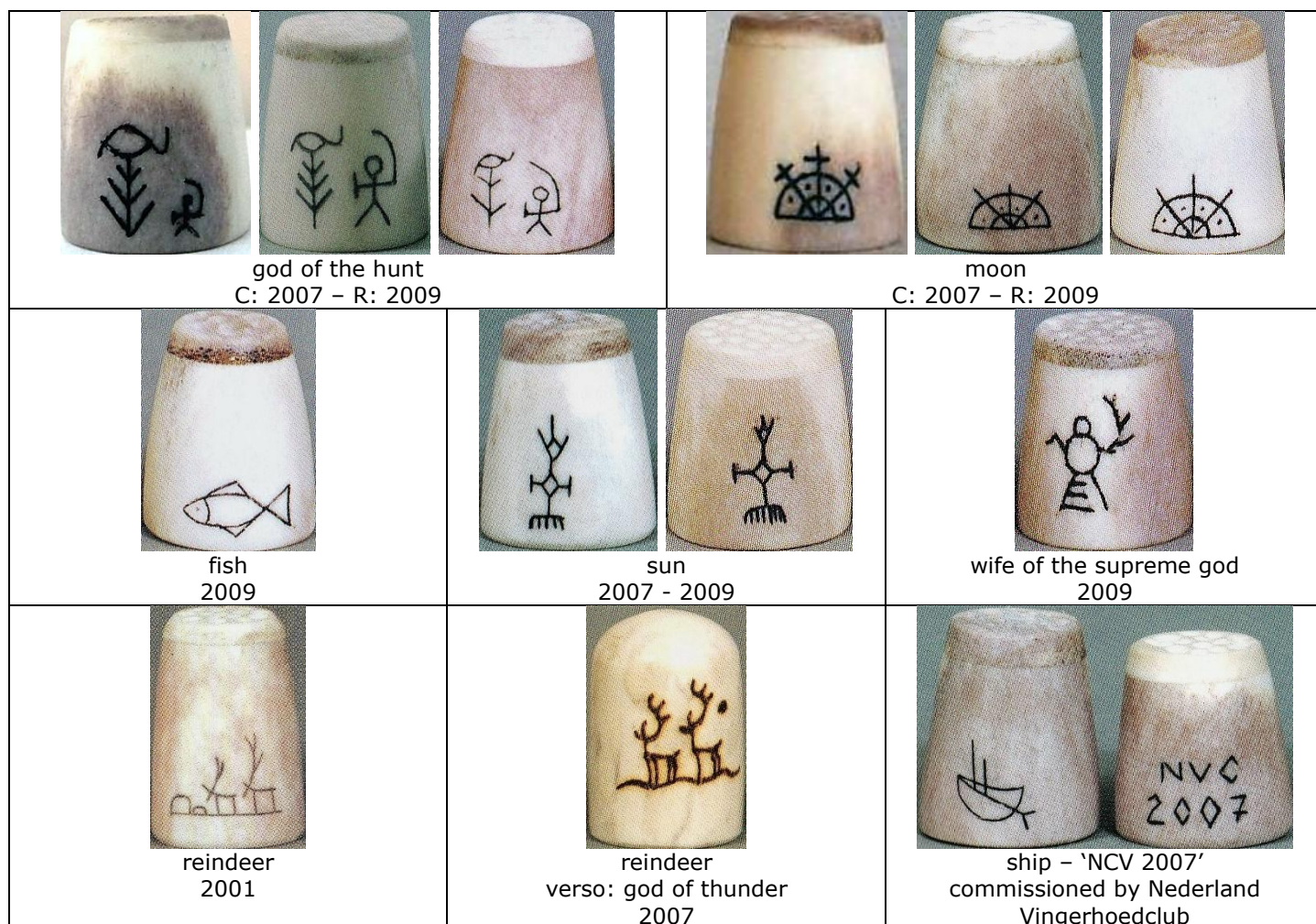
Tuotteet Oy Lauri Rovaniemi Lapland Finland

Lauri Products Limited's thimbles are made from reindeer antler. They are pyrographed with Lapland motifs, created in 1980s with 25 different motifs: for the tourist market. Most have a different part of antler as apex.



accompanying paper with name of Lap god portrayed – in Lap, Finnish and English

'1997'	'Arctic'	hunter	goddess of thunder
shaman with drum R: 2009	walking cat 2007 - 2009	own seta (god) R: 2009	
reindeer	snow crystal 2009	god of thunder 2001	birds of happiness
witchsnake R: 2009	god of fertility 2007 - 2009	horngod 2007	



L'Etacq Jersey

This maker was inspired by the island's Jersey cows. Using their horn, these thimbles are creamy-orange colour. L'Etacq, the name of a village on Jersey, also turn wooden thimbles. The apex is of the same material as the thimble.

No longer in business.

TTG February 1985



cow horn

L: smooth apex – R: criss-crossed apex
gold-plated cow's head affixed over finely-turned rings



deer antler with abalone



deer antler with glass millefiori

MD USA

This unidentified bone thimble maker uses elk antler and some with buffalo horn. Signed on verso. Not dated

This painter may be one of Thompson's painters.
wholesaler: Heirloom Editions



cougar



ducklings



horse in desert scene



racoon



owl



panda



siamese

MG USA

this unidentified painter may be one of Thompson's painters, who uses elk antler and sometimes with buffalo horn. Not dated. No two are the same



bald eagle



elk



panda

N.P.M. Bophuthatswana South Africa



marketed by Tswana Crafts Industries



wildebeest horn
etched rhino

J R Mason USA



elk antler
handpainted chipmunk
from Stocky's Stag Shop

Nataly Namzur Russia



bone
alligator
2013



bone
carved flower on apex
2013



bone
seagull
2013

Sergei Polunin



bone
bird



bone
fish



bone
lizard



bone
rabbit

Kevin Pourier USA

the artist is of the Lakota people



buffalo horn
dragonfly
inset abalone
2016



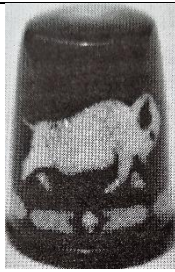
buffalo horn
magpie
inset MOP
2016-2018



buffalo horn
monarch butterfly
inset orange sandstone
2016



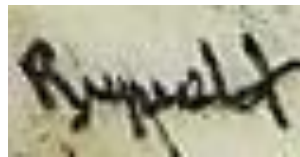
buffalo horn
skunk
inset MOP
2016



buffalo horn with mother-of-pearl inlay
TCI spring 2000
b&w photo

Donna Ruprecht USA

This painter works on elk antler with scrimshaw, sometimes also handpainted, and signs her work: Ruprecht. The thimbles are thick-walled, as they were not meant for sewing: rather showing the scrimshander's skill. I am intrigued by the variety of the bits of horn used, and so show the non-decorated side



bass



bear



compass



dreamcatcher
turquoise stone rim



elk



forget-me-nots



humpback whales



Lady Slipper orchid
commissioned by Lady Slipper Thimblers of Minnesota
2012



iris



lighthouse



lighthouse



loon



moose



roses



roses



schooner



schooner with lighthouse



clipper and compass



clipper and compass



fish



clipper and dolphin



clipper and whale's tail



clipper and lighthouse



clipper and lighthouse



hummingbird
strawberries

Peter Seeley Banff Alberta Canada

moose antler



flower



moose



flower



moose
'drawn on moose antler'



M
moose
'drawn on moose antler'

Janet Thompson Montana South Dakota USA 1981-1983

Thompson's thimbles are made of elk antler, with buffalo horn forming a contrast on the apex. Her thimbles are dated and signed **JT** on the verso. No two are the same

AX

see also: Dovea, MD and MG – where some of these animals appear

Thimbles Only winter 1983 – Gimbels 1991a



big horn sheep
1982 - 1983



bison



deer - doe
1981



deer - doe
1981



elk
1981



elk
1982



elk in the wild



fawn
1982 - 1983



fox



goslings



hummingbird
L: 1983



hummingbird 1982



owl



panda



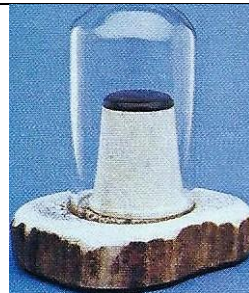
pheasant



squirrel



Siamese



plain horn
on horn plinth

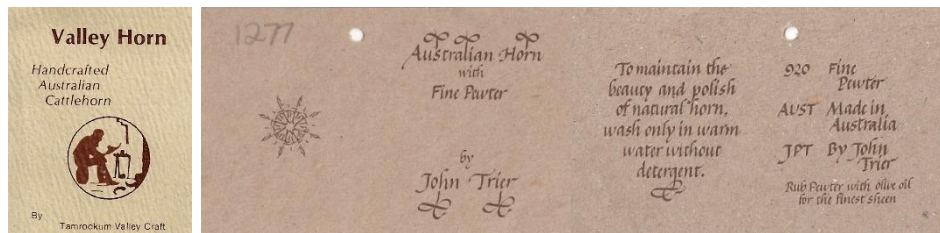
Paul Tichnor USA



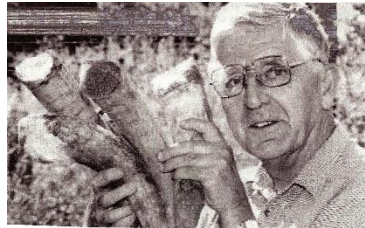
bee
elk horn
special commission

John Trier Beaudesert Queensland Australia

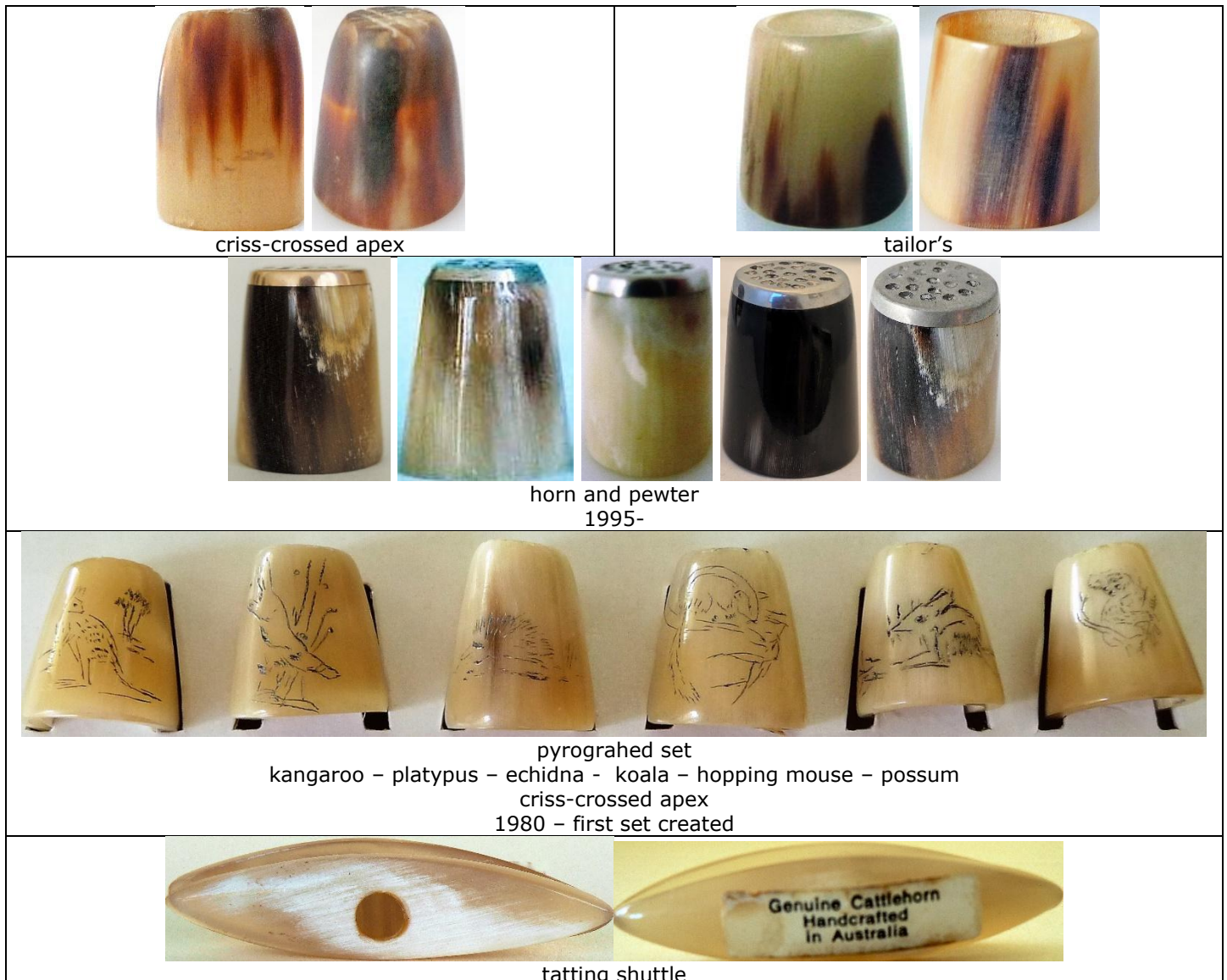
Trier began working with horn from his cattle on his farm in 1977. Largely self-taught he began making thimbles in 1979. His business name is Tamrookum Valley Crafts. His natural horn thimbles have a criss-crossed pattern on the apex. In 1980 he introduced scrimshaw of native animals to his popular range. By 1995 he was using pewter as the apex as this soft metal is sympathetic to the burnished finish of horn.



L: first thimbles vertificate – R: pewter and horn certificate



Trier 2007



John van der Westhuizen Phalaborwa South Africa

John specialised in turning wooden thimbles. He tried kudu horn and achieved a translucency not found in many other thimbles. A small sticker for **JJ K** is in the apex.



JJ K sticker in apex



kudu

John von Hoelle USA



pierced, some with silver apexes or studded with semi-precious stones (turquoise, opal, pearls), gold bands or scrimshaw
b&w photos

Col Ward Brisbane Australia



cow bone



reindeer
2002

HORN AND BONE THIMBLES BY COUNTRY

Country of origin is known - the maker is not.

Argentina



cow horn
silver rim



cow horn
carved



cow horn
engraved silver rim



cow horn
engraved silver rim



cow horn

Canada



bone tailor's

China



water buffalo horn
mother-of-pearl
carved owl
Thimbles Only winter 1983



water buffalo horn
mother-of-pearl
carved flower



water buffalo
pewter
yacht



buffalo bone
handpainted birds in tree



buffalo bone
handpainted elephant and calf



buffalo bone
handpainted mermaid with fish



handpainted monkey*



cow
handpainted rooster*



carved rose



bovine
handpainted tiger*



buffalo bone
handpainted cat



bovine



buffalo bone
handpainted bird - lighthouse with sailing ship - turtle



bone
carved whale
200 purchased by Christina Bertrand for sale at 2004 TCI
Convention
later seen for sale as 19th century scrimshaw



handpainted mountains



handpainted women



buffalo bone
inset stone powder
handpainted owl – flower – frogs – bird



buffalo bone
inset stone powder
handpainted duck – flower – ladybirds – turtle



buffalo bone
inset stone powder
handpainted elephants – elephant – ladybird – cat –
flower – frogs – bird



buffalo bone
handpainted yellow flower



buffalo bone
handpainted village scene



carved bird and leaves*



leaf band*
carved scalloped rim



buffalo bone
handpainted cats



buffalo bone
handpainted dragon



buffalo bone
handpainted mice



bone
handpainted dragonfly



buffalo bone
handpainted rabbits



buffalo bone
carved elephant



buffalo bone
carved turtle



buffalo bone
carved rabbit



buffalo bone



buffalo bone
handpainted duck



buffalo bone
carved butterfly



buffalo bone
handpainted flower



buffalo bone
handpainted butterfly



buffalo bone
handpainted
chrysanthemum



buffalo bone
carved



buffalo bone
carved cats
handpainted flowers



buffalo bone
carved dragon



buffalo bone
carved owl



buffalo bone
handpainted river scene



ox bone
old man god shou



ox bone
old man god shou



ox bone
immortal god Lu



ox bone
Japanese kimono girl
2 inches



ox bone
Japanese kimono girl with fan
2 inches

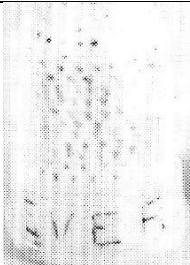


ox bone
carved dragonfly

 bone carved cobra with additional inked work	 bone carved flower with additional inked work	 bone carved mice with additional inked work
 carved frog		
 bone dragon - horse – monkey – pig – tiger set of 5: TTG February 1995		
*these bovine thimbles may be described as ivory in 2nd hand market		

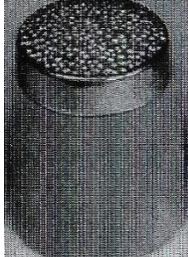
English

For centuries, in the City of London there was a guild, the Worshipful Company of Horners

 early 1900s lovely patina	 reindeer 1987	 sterling silver apex 1820s
 horn 1800s child's	 bone "Ever dear" TSL spring 1983 b&w photo	 bone fingerguard inscribed '15.7.84' TSL autumn 1985 b&w photo

 bone TSL autumn 1996	 horn 1830s TSL autumn 1995	 bone 1825 Kay Sullivan December 1984 b&w photo
		 'Token of regard' 17th century

Finland

 reindeer with gold apex b&w photo	 reindeer with Lap symbol b&w photo	 moose b&w photo
 scrimshawed reindeer hexagon shape with steel apex 1920s		 reindeer with gold apex b&w photo
 reindeer with steel apex late 19th century b&w photo	 etched reindeer	 reindeer

 eight-sided pyrographed reindeer metal apex 1950s	 carved reindeer	 ice crystals 2007	 Lynx 2007
 reindeer at Arctic Circle 2007	 Lap letters and symbols 2007		

France

 horn 1820s
--

Germany

 horn Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1	 rose Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1
--	--

India



water buffalo horn
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - TTG
October 1986



buffalo bone with wood apex
and rim
TTG August 1997



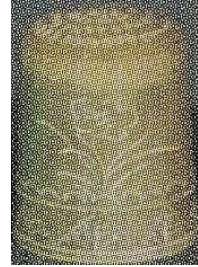
water buffalo horn
Kay Sullivan March 1987



camel bone
Gimbels 1980



camel bone
Gimbels 1981



buffalo bone
VN 69 2001



TTG February 2004

Kenya



bone
carved in Machakos, Kenya
TTG February 1991



antler

Madagascar



zebu (cattle) horn



zebu (cattle) horn

Malaysia



buffalo horn
Feldmann 17-1991

Nepal



water buffalo horn and bone
ying yang apex design

C: silver rim – R: brass rim

Thimbles Only 1996 - TTG October 1986 (R: limited to 40)



elephant
TTG May 1998



frog
eyes: goat's horn from Himalayas
TTG April 1998



dog – owl – rabbit
set of three
TTG August 1999

New Zealand



cow horn
thimble holder
Vingerhoed nieuws June 2007

Paraguay



horn

Philippines



water buffalo horn (Carabao)
TTG February 2008

Russia



deer hoof
R: Cyrillic lettering хибинь (Khibiny)



handpainted ducks

Scotland



showing the ridged natural surface of stag antler – from the antler tip
wholesaled by Charles Buyers, Scotland
they currently specialise selling products that keep alive traditional skills using natural materials
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - Feldmann 8/1989 - TTG February 1996 – Gimbels 1996



reindeer



reindeer
carved thistle-shape
L: Thimbles Only spring 1987 – VN December 2001



reindeer
VN December 2001

South Africa



buffalo
made in Natal
1992



hippo tusk
carved frogs



bone



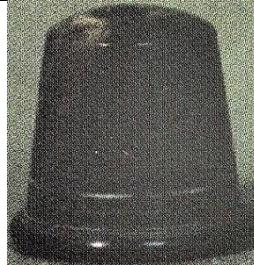
hippo tusk
carved elephant
VN 46 1998



giraffe bone
scrimshaw lion
VN 46 1998



African ox
Feldmann 6-1988
b&w photo



wildebeest
VN July 2001

Spain



bone

Sweden



reindeer
six-sided
Swedish Lapland with steel apex
18th century

Thailand

Thai horn used is carved water buffalo, unless listed differently below. Most thimbles are figural



bird
inlaid eyes
limited to **150**

JHB 1998-2002 – TTG February 1999



cat
inlaid eyes



eagle
inlaid eyes



yak horn
elephant
inlaid eyes



owl
'THAILAND'
inlaid eyes



elephant
ivory eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



frog
inlaid ivory



frog
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes
TTG April 2003

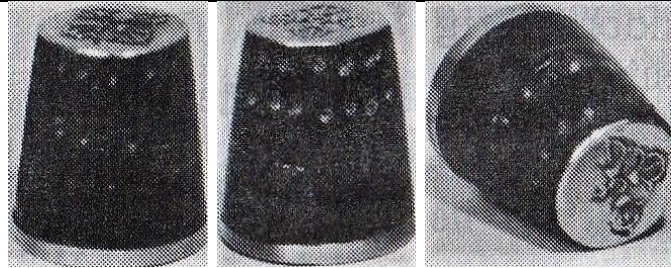


penguin
inlaid eyes



inlaid shell

Tibet



yak horn
brass rim
Buddhist drawings on apex
VN March 1988

Turkiye



camel bone
handpainted



camel bone
handpainted 'Kuradası'



camel bone
handpainted 'Türkiye'



camel bone
handpainted fuchsia



camel bone
handpainted



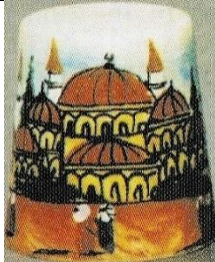
camel bone
handpainted Grand Mosque
yellow trim



camel bone
handpainted 'İstanbul Türkiye'



camel bone
handpainted 'İstanbul Türkiye'

		
camel bone handpainted 'Istanbul Türkiye'	camel bone handpainted blue flowers	Bone handpainted
		
camel bone	camel bone	camel bone VN 1998
		
camel bone handpainted VN 1998	camel bone handpainted	

United States

 handpainted American eagle	 malachite flat stone apex
 sugalite flat stone apex thimble is oval	 turquoise flat stone apex

 flat stone apex thimble is oval	 cow bone North-west Territories	 caribou tailor's 1800s Alaska
 elk tailor's 1953 Helena MO	 elk Dallas	 hummingbird
 reindeer with walrus top scrimshaw reindeer with Alaskan maker's marks from the collection of Alta Thompson 1950s		
 elk oak leaves		

Uruguay

Uruguayan thimbles are made of cow horn

	 Sewing Corner spring 1978		 amethyst
---	--	--	---

Vietnam

handpainted buffalo horn – probably all by the same artist



flowers



scholar



temple



junk



cock



woman



fish



fish



dragon



lotus



lotus



flowers

Zimbabwe

Wild animal horn is used – buck, buffalo or cow horn. Other carved animals: buffalo, elephant, rhino



wildebeest horn
etched elephant – giraffe
1987

OTHER HORN AND BONE THIMBLES



buffalo



cow
19th century



cow



cow
cross-hatched apex



flowers



mid 20th century
gilt metal on apex



elk
tailor's



handpainted bone



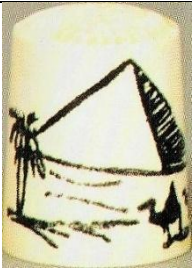
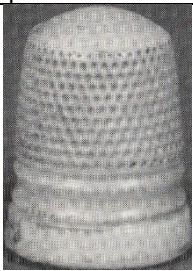
bone
1820s



bone



bone
turned 19th century

 bone carved leaves	 bone handpainted carved flower on apex	 bone	 bone carved elephant head
 bone handpainted elephant diagonal indentations	 bone	 handpainted bison with hoofprints	
 bone painted birds TSL winter 2008	 horn European TSL spring 2009	 camel bone Dutch Thimble Club 2002 Gimbels 1983	
 horn applied bull in ivory	 cow bone	 horn or bone TSL winter 2001	
 bone Vingerhoednieuws 31 1994	 camel	 cow horn and silver	
			



horn with applied silver reindeer

HORN AND BONE SEWING TOOLS



American Caribou antler buttons
Jer – Buckhorn Crafts
Kingston WA



American Eskimo reindeer horn needlecase with octagonal taper reindeer leather liner



American handpainted bodkin
1920s



American hoof pincushion
World's Fair St Louis'
1904



American awl – Alaskan with jointed seal carving



American bird bone needlecase with wooden ends - Alaskan



Chinese bone needlecase
handpainted



Chinese (Canton) cow bone tatting shuttle



Chinese bone needlecase
carved and handpainted



Chinese (Canton) cow bone thimble holder



Chinese etched and handpainted bone needlecase



English horn thimble holder



English cow bone needlecase with brass threader



English cow bone thread winder 1830s



English bone church thimble holder



English cow bone needlecase 1860s



English cow bone lace bobbins 1830s



English sewing kit 18th century



English tape measure 1880s



English thimble holder bone
'Token of regard'



English bone needle gauge



English horn and ivory boot needlecase



English cow bone lace bobbins with glass bead spangles



English pedestal pincushions
'Forget me not'



English pedestal handpainted pincushion
'Love the giver'



English castle turret needlecase



English fish needlecase with steel spangles



English handpainted pincushions with handles



English handpainted pinwheel
'A present from Worcester'



English handpainted needlebook



English cow bone thread spool
1860s



English bone combination pincushion
and tape measure



English stiletto with clenched hand
cow bone



English horn tatting shuttle with
inlaid MOP
1870s



English handpainted bone thimble
holder



English horn knotting shuttle with applied gold musical
instruments



English buttonhole cutter
1790s



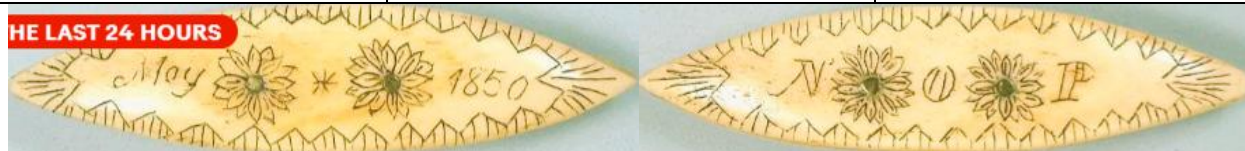
English cow bone thimble and holder
1870s



English needlecases
cow bone
1850s



English stiletto
bone
thistle



English cow bone tatting shuttle
'May 1850' 'NOP'



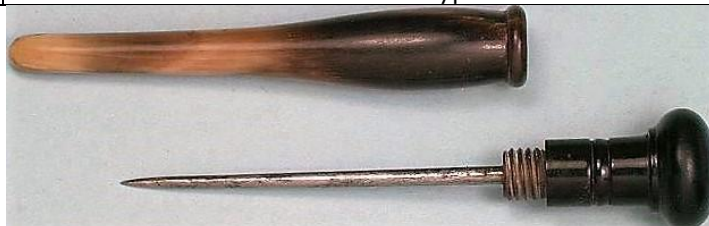
English beaded cow bone thimble holder



English sewing kit
A trifle from Maryport



English cow bone needlecase



English stiletto
1880s



English cow bone pedestal tape measure and pincushions



French tatting shuttle
straw work
Napoleonic prisoner-of-war work



French needlecase
harp
1800s



French carved sewing kit



French tatting shuttle
Napoleonic prisoner-of-war work
bone
hearts on one side – inset in the other



French stiletto
Napoleonic prisoner-of-war work
bone
dog - knot



French workbox bone tools



German handpainted needlebook
'BadKoesen'



Madras Indian pedestal combination
tape measure and emery



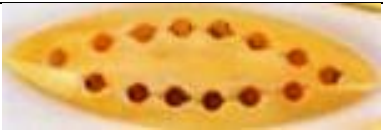
New Zealand deer horn buttons



Norwegian etched reindeer bone
needlecase with thread winder



Swiss carved corn bone needlecase

 crochet hook bone snake coiled around shaft	 needlecase etched and handpainted bone	 needlecase
 needlecase bone etched monkey	 pincushion bellows bone	 stilettoes carved stained cradle – horse – edelweiss bone – bone and steel
 tatting shuttles stained bone 19th century	 tatting shuttle pierced bone 19th century	 tatting shuttle handpainted crocus 1980s
 tatting shuttle handpainted robin 1980s	 thimble holder chalet-shaped bone	 thimble holder cow bone
 4 thimble holder cow bone		

References

- Elizabeth Aldridge *Thoughts on thimbles. Part VII. Other materials.* 1984
Jenny Scharff Bockel *Thimbles of Southern Africa.* 2004
Sylvia Collett *Painted bone needlework tools.* TCI Bulletin winter 2013
Susan Dempster *An Abbeyhorn thimble.* TCI Bulletin summer 2019
Susan Jean Gowan *Thimbles of Australia.* 1988
Irja Helsila *Thimbles in Lapland.* Thimble Society of London autumn 1998
Irene Schwall & Christina Bertrand *The whale thimble saga.* TCI Bulletin summer 2015
Jean Scott *Bone turning in France.* TCI Bulletin spring 2013
John von Hoelle *Thimble Collector's encyclopedia.* 1986

Contributors

Wendi Aguiar | Marta Valencia Betran | Yolanta Bogdziewicz | Pawel Brzyski | Lurene Connor | Caroline Fisher
Micky Garvey | Linda Heggs | Irja Helsila | William Isbister | Nikki Kissane | Caroline Meacham-Elegant Arts
Wanda Ralston-Boulder Bay | Linda Samaripa | Irene Schwall | Clara Sennheim | Jean Taylor | Erin Titmus
Lucerne Wulf

This listing of Horn thimbles does not purport to be complete or accurate in all aspects.
Rather it invites comments and contributions to add to our knowledge. My thanks to the contributors.

EMAIL thimbleselect@bigpond.com TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

© Sue Gowan
March 2024