

Bog oak sewing tools

I was very much a thimble beginner when we visited Ireland in 1986. In my naivety I thought I'd be able to pop into an antique store and buy a bog oak thimble. To this day I don't own a 19th century bog oak thimble. I have to be content with a modern bog oak thimble bought thru a mail-order catalogue in Melbourne in 1986.

Bog oak, which covers other types of trees not only oaks (like bog yew), is a semi-petrified wood and is also known as bog wood. Trees, which fell into the peat bogs in Ireland, were buried in the acidic water associated with the bogs. This could be up to forty feet. It took hundreds or even thousands of years being buried in mud with an absence of oxygen to achieve this fossilised state. It is a very hard material. Divers are required to bring these rare finds to the surface.

I have always known this material as bog oak – current searches also name it bog wood.



expensive slabs of bog oak

Bog oak a very smooth, black (as ebony) material and items produced for the jewellery trade or as souvenirs were made between 1840s thru to 1930. Bog yew can be a browner shade.

The hand carving on bog oak features the shamrock and often the Irish harp as well. Bog oak requires special tools to carve it – whether it be the shape or the intricate Celtic patterns. You will notice that there is additional stippled patterning to complete the carved tool.

Bog oak thimbles are rare: even other sewing tools like pincushions and thimble holders are seldom seen. This is because of the high price of the original material.

I have only been able to locate one or two photos of the rarer sewing tools.

See the Guinness souvenir pincushion, which was never advertised as bog oak. Fakes of bog oak are known.



three groups of bog oak sewing items

L: pincushion and three thimble holders in the shape of owls from Killarney

C: four pincushions

R: group of four sewing tools including two needleholders

Geoffrey Manley of Lyme Regis was a carver of exotic materials in the 1980s – these included bog oak, ivory and mammoth teeth. Another maker is from Shropshire. One of the antique makers is known.

I have included a date, where supplied by the seller or author.

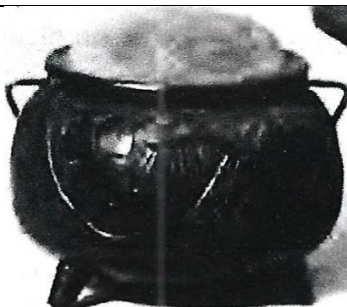
For other Irish thimbles topics see
 Belleek thimbles
 Irish Dresden thimbles
 Royal Tara thimbles

Pincushions

The principal shape of bog oak pincushions is a pot – whether it is a saucepan or cauldron. In the latter case there may be metal handles. Some have feet or three legs. Owls are another shape.



cauldron
 bun feet
 red cushion is a replacement
 1880s from Killarney
 shamrocks Irish harp
 83x60mm



cauldron
 three legs with tiny handles
 KILLARNEY impressed on base
 b&w photo



cauldron
 three legs with tiny handles
 shamrocks Irish harp
 45mm



cauldron
 three legs
 metal handle
 b&w photo



cauldron
 three legs with tiny handles



cauldron
 three legs
 metal handle
 'From Ireland' sticker



owl
 with glass eyes



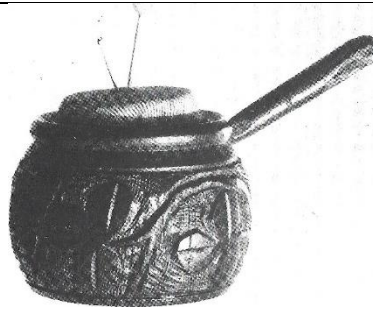
owl
 with glass eyes
 1900s



owl
 with glass eyes



pot
shamrocks Irish harp
CORK lettered on base
1890s



saucepan
shamrocks
b&w photo



saucepan
shamrocks and harp
CORK impressed on base
b&w photo



saucepan
there in no pattern round the pan



saucepan
shamrocks



pincushion
stained wood beer barrel
advertising Guinness Ireland



throne or chair

Thimble holders

Thimble holders in various shapes are the most prolific bog oak sewing tool. Sometimes the holder may contain a brass thimble and the fit suggests it is original. The piece de resistance is to find a bog oak thimble inside.

A few are lidded; many with similar themes as bog oak pincushions.



acorn
screw-on lid
no carving



pot
shamrocks Irish harp
this could contain a bog oak
thimble



barrel
Irish harp shamrocks



Blarney Castle
lidded
1840s



bucket
child's size brass thimble
geometric pattern
metal handles
1890s
22mm



cat
child's size brass thimble
glass eyes



cat
glass eyes



cauldron
metal handles
three legs
shamrocks
1900s



cauldron
lidded with metal handle
three legs



cauldron
lidded with knob in shape of a **pig**
three legs



cauldron
small handles
three legs
bog oak thimble



pot
geometric pattern



owl
glass eyes
removable head
bog oak thimble



owl
with hinged lid
Cornelius Goggin
large glass eyes
1860s



owl
finely feathered
glass eyes



owl
glass eyes
removable head



owls
glass eyes



owl
blue glass eyes



owl
brass-lined container for thimble

Brown  75 mark
b&w photo



owl on plinth
removable head

Brown  75 mark
glass eyes
brass=covered beak and claws
4.5 ins
b&w photo



owl
removable head
yellow glass eyes
b&w photo



owl
removable head
yellow glass eyes



owl on plinth
glass eyes



owl



saucepan
lidded
there is no pattern round the pan



saucepan
shamrocks



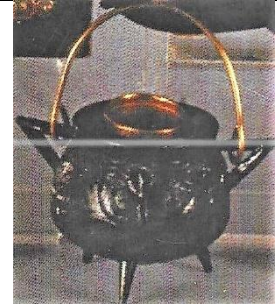
top hat
shamrocks continue on brim
lidded



top hat
shamrocks continue on brim



tubular
abstract pattern
shamrock carved in relief on lid



cauldron
velvet-lined thimble recess
brass handle
shamrocks

Thimbles

Antique bog oak thimbles are rare. Modern thimbles of 1980s and 2010s are the antiques of the future.



abstract pattern
1930s



ATORA
1890s



band of shamrocks
with ERIN carved upside down
diamond pattern above
1800s



ERIN
carved upside down



bog wood from Glencoe



KILLARNEY carved on band
abstract vertical lines above
1800s



crafted from this piece of Bog-wood
Andrew Langford
Ayrshire Scotland
2009
limited to **10**



KILLARNEY carved upside down on band
shamrocks



band of shamrocks



band of shamrocks
abstract vertical lines above



Geoffrey Manley
Lyme Regis 1980s
plainly turned



Liam O'Neill
Shannon Ireland



band of shamrocks
with CORK carved upside down



absract pattern on band
abstract vertical lines above



Gordon E P ...
Shropshire
2010s



BLARNEY carved upside down
band of shamrocks
diamond pattern above
1800s

Other sewing tools

These bog oak tools are the rarest of all.

It is recorded in Cummins and Taunton's book on chatelaines that a bog oak chatelaine exists. The attachments listed are scissors in a scabbard – a horn-shaped container with harp on the lid – a bucket thimble holder – a needlecase in the shape of a tower – barrel for tape measure.



crochet hook
1890s
cow bone finial
shamrocks



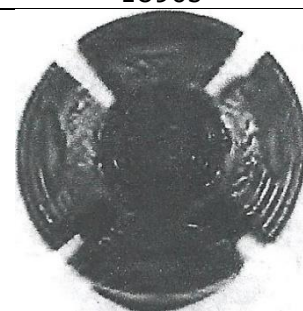
needlecase
shamrocks
1890s



needlecase - narrow
shamrocks
BRAY lettered on lower part
1890s



tape measure
bone finial
silk measure
abstract pattern



pinwheel
carved on both sides
rosette in centre



and something for the pipe-smokers

References

- Elizabeth Aldridge *Thoughts on thimbles. Part VII Other materials*. 1984
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Eleanor Johnson *Thimbles and thimble cases*. 2004
Gay Ann Rogers *An illustrated history of needlework tools*. 1983
Jenny Scharff *Irish bog oak thimbles & other sewing tools*. TCI Bulletin, fall 2000

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This listing of Bog oak sewing tools does not purport to be complete or accurate in all aspects.
Rather it invites comment and contribution to add to our knowledge. My thanks to the contributors.

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