

# Steel-cored thimbles (Dorcas Dreema Doris Dura)

Following the topic on British Registered designs on thimbles, this topic is an attempt to update a well-loved booklet by Diane Pelham Burn entitled Identifying steel-cored thimbles. Published by The Dorset Thimble Society in 1993, with a supplement in 1997, it was the first publication to document the steel-cored thimbles produced from the 1880s. More than 30 years have elapsed since that publication and there have been new finds since then

The thimbles illustrated are in black and white. Where I have found no matching colour photo, I have used those of Pelham Burn's - which weren't of great quality for study purposes

I have followed the descriptions she used.

I have added new thimbles at the end of each section - marked in red, as are any additional information I have added



Diane Pelham Burn  
died 2012

## INTRODUCTION

In 1884 Charles Horner devised the Dorcas thimble. The idea of using steel to strengthen silver thimbles was not new. Silver thimbles with steel caps which reinforced the top of the thimble and protected the tip of the finger had been available for more than a century, but many needlewomen used the side of the thimble and suffered the piercing of the silver with damage to both the thimble and the finger

His invention was a thimble made of silver-coated steel which gave protection to the entire finger. The Dorcas had an outer silver shell which produced the appearance of the precious metal, a core of hardened steel which gave strength and durability, and an inner lining to prevent the feeling of steel against flesh. When assembled the steel was sandwiched between the silver shells ie in three parts

Clever advertising and astute merchandising enabled the Dorcas to dominate the market despite the challenge of other thimble makers. Presumably these competitors chose two-syllable names beginning with D



various Dorcas advertisements

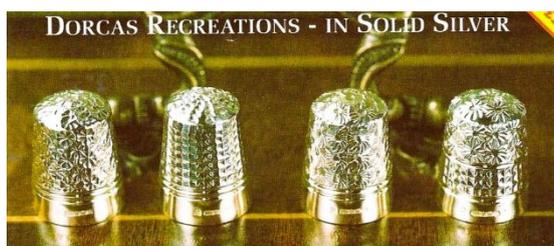
All the thimbles featured here attract a magnet. Even the Australian thimble ELFIN has a top that attracts a magnet



Elfin thimble



there was no quality control – how could this 1903 sterling Horner thimble be hallmarked when it attracts a magnet?



The Dorcas thimble was hailed as the greatest improvement since the invention of thimbles! Charles Horner patented the design in 1884 and the thimble was sold with a lifetime guarantee: "free exchange if rendered useless from any cause whatsoever". A Dorcas thimble was described as being three thimbles inside one another. The inner and outer surfaces were made of sterling silver and the middle layer was made of steel. In 1940 the last Dorcas was made. Swann's have recreated four of these original Dorcas designs but this time in solid hallmarked silver. You will find these particular designs illustrated in the Thimble Collector's Encyclopedia. All four are hallmarked with your own Guild hallmark, the usual silversmiths hallmarks and that of the makers S(T) for Swann's. You may acquire this stunning set for just £19.95 each (TC216). Simply send your first instalment now and we will invoice you or debit your credit card for the remaining three. Alternatively you may have all four now for £69.80 (TC217) saving you £10!

these sterling silver thimbles were released by The Thimble Guild with the maker's mark of Swann Thimbles. All are marked DORCAS

### Steel Cored Thimble Sizes

Thimble Size	Dorcas	London Dorcas	Dorcoid	Dreema	Doris	Dura & RP & Co	Steel Clad	ACE	ARG Pat
2	18.5 mm								
3	18.0 mm					17.5 mm			
4	17.5 mm					17.0 mm			
5	16.5-17 mm	17.5 mm				16.5 mm			
6	16.0 mm	17.0 mm	17.0 mm			16.0 mm			
7	15.5 mm	16.0 mm	16.0 mm		14.0 mm	15.5 mm			15.0 mm
8	15.0 mm	15.5 mm				15.0 mm			
9	14.5 mm	15.0 mm			14.5 mm	14.5 mm		14.0 mm	16.0 mm
10	14.0 mm	14.5 mm			15.0 mm	14.0 mm			
11	13.5 mm				15.5 mm	13.0 mm		15.5 mm	
12	13.0 mm				16.0 mm			16.0 mm	
13	12.5 mm			14.5 mm					
14	12.0 mm			15.0 mm			14.5 mm	17.0 mm	
15	11.5 mm			15.5 mm			15.0 mm		
16				16.0 mm			16.0 mm		
17				16.25 mm			16.5 mm		
18				16.5 mm			17.0 mm		
19				17.0 mm					



Ray Nimmo

**created in memory of my thimble friend Ray Nimmo who contributed significantly to more than 50 thimble topics. I miss you Ray**

see also

Australia's Elfin thimbles

Charles Horner's early Dorcas PAT. thimbles

Dorcas thimble boxes

Who made these thimbles AUSSIE COROZO INVICTA?

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## CHARLES HORNER

### DORCAS thimbles

The history of the Dorcas thimbles is documented by the patents issued to Horner. His original Patent (8954) he received in 1884 produced the first thimbles. These were called Improved Dorcas, which was stamped on the thimble boxes but not on the thimbles. At this time the word PAT. with a steel core. These early thimbles were marked PAT on the rim, an abbreviation of the patent. There was an Rd. number for those designs which he had had registered and usually a number indicating the size. The largest thimble was a 1, the smallest a 15. Size 12 was known as a maid's thimble whilst sizes 13-15 were small enough to fit children. Horner also made some huge thimbles, said to be for arthritic or bandaged fingers. These had no size number. The size was also omitted on some thimbles where the word PATENT was spelled out. There were no trademark or maker's initials on these rather tall, round-topped early Dorcas thimbles

In 1905 Horner was granted a new patent for a different method of construction. Instead of drawing out each silver and steel piece separately and then assembling them, the new process bonded the silver to both sides of the steel, enabling the thimble to be made in one piece. At this time the word PAT. Was replaced by DORCAS and the initial CD and the Rd, numbers were omitted. The whole design was simplified by reducing the number of designs used, Somewhat later the basic shape was altered by making them shorter with flattened tops

Manufacture of the Dorcas thimble was discontinued about 1948, but the thimbles have endured and many are still being used today



Dorcas window – St Andrews Church Newcastle NSW 1959

**DORCAS thimbles marked PAT.**



I have interspersed the numbering used in the supplement (1997) with those in the original booklet

to date **54** different PAT. designs have been recorded

**1** Daisy  
curved petals on flowers – dot centre



**1a** large Daisy  
fewer petals – circle centres



**1b** Daisy  
shorter petals – large dot centres



**1c** daisy with finely engraved leaves around rim



**2** Diamond  
grid with faceted centres



**3 Flora**  
daisy sides and top – diamond pattern band



**4 Louise**  
interlocking asterisks



**4a small Louise**



**4b interlocking Louise**



**5 Persian**  
six-point star-shaped – indentations closely spaced – tiered top



**6 Plain**  
octagonal indentations



**6a** Plain tiny, raised flowers above rim



**6b** Plain marked SILLVR



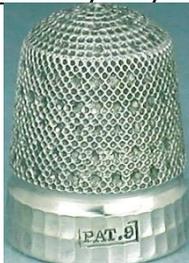
**7** Princess May  
flowers with straight petals – dot centres



**8** Shell  
pattern of fan shapes



**9** Star  
star-shaped depressions surrounded by tiny dots – two rows of facets on band



**9a** Star  
with two rows on two-tiered band



**9b** Star  
with daisy top



**10** Engraved bands

All have cartouches and fine octagonal indentations on the sides and top  
It is often difficult to match Pelham burn's descriptions with thimbles

**10a** scallops with alternating clusters of dots and vertical slashes



**10b** tiny dot triangles with slash/dot trios



**10c** five-petalled flowers and foliage



**10d** long dotted ovals around horizontal fern leaves



**10e** small interlocking triangles of arrow-shaped slashes



**10f** horizontal ivy leaves



**10g** dot swags with large fans-shaped slashes



**10h** simple scrolls



**10i** rococo scrolls



**10j** dot ovals around two different flowers – circle of dots around centres – five slash petals



**10k** alternating diagonal fern leaves



**10l** horizontal heart-shaped leaves



**10m** large flowers alternating with circular dots and five slash petals



**10n** dot ovals small horizontal five slash leaves



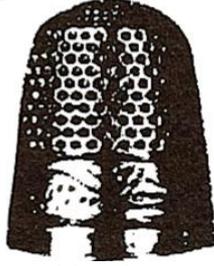
**10o** ovals of joined zigzags enclosing "x" crosses with four clustered dots



**10p** alternating horizontal wheat heads and flowers



**10q** wavy line slender foliage and clusters of dots

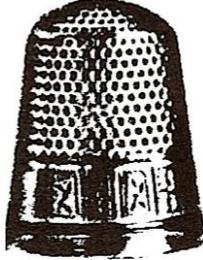


b&w photo

**10r** double zigzags crossing thin "x" over thicker cross in each diamond



**10s** rectangular boxes each enclosing simple slash – shape of x or cross



b&w photo

**10t** over and under narrow bands enclosing vertically striped ellipses



**10u** dotted diamonds with engraved triangles



**10v** inverted scallops alternating three dots/slashes



**10w** xxs and dots inside curvy box



b&w photo

**10x** up and down dot triangles



b&w photo

**10y** diamond small scrolls



b&w photo

**10z** Greek key pattern



top outer sterling silver layer has been removed because of damage

**10aa** Tudor rose



**10bb** sycamore leaves



**10cc** crosses over circles



**10dd** solid leaves



**10ee** horizontal flowers with dots over striations



**10ff** wavy leaf lines with narrow diagonal pattern



**10gg** tear drop shapes with three leaf



**10hh** berries with small leaves



**10ii** vertical arrows under swag lines



**10jj** alternating wider fans



**DORCAS thimbles marked PATENT**

**1** flowers leaves berries



**2** Star pattern



**3** foliage and flowers  
stylised shapes interwoven with scrolling



b&w photo

**4** partial open cup  
for longer fingernails



b&w photo

**1a** five-petalled flowers and foliage



**1b** leaves



**1c** feathery horizontal leaves



**5** Plain



**6** Daisy



**7** Flora



**8** Louise



**9** non-repeating pattern of interwoven shapes



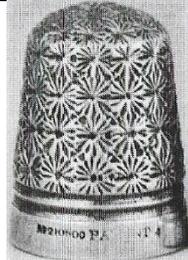
**10** Diamond



**11** Persian



**12** Princess May



## Unmarked thimbles

### 1. tailor's thimble



b&w photo

## DORCAS CH thimbles



to date there are **20** different designs, down from 54 PAT. designs

### 1 Daisy



### 1a large Daisy



### 2 Diamond



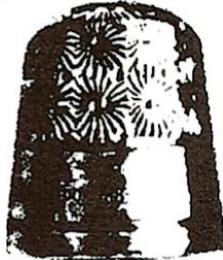
### 2a Diamond large daisy band



**3 Flora**



**3a** Flora with wide plain band



b&w photo

**4 Louise**



**4a** Louise with large daisy band



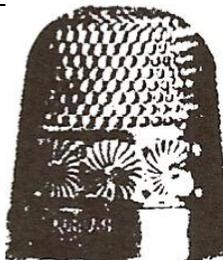
b&w photo

**5 Plain**



**6** Plain with decorated bands

**6a** large daisies in a single row



b&w photo

**6b** engraved flowers



**6b1** engraved flowers narrow band



**6c** engraved scrolls



**6d** engraved ivy leaves



b&w photo

**6e** inverted stylised fans



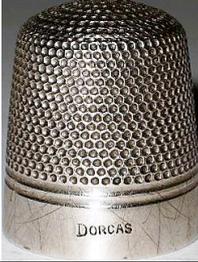
**7** Shell



**8** Princess May



**9** Plain - no other lettering except DORCAS



**10.** Dorcas with stone top



**11** Plain - indentations right to rim with Dorcas at rim



## DORCAS made in the United States

Horner applied for and received a United States patent in 1889; In about 1910 a Dorcas thimble was produced in America. These thimbles are marked 'DORCAS, the size number and PAT. June 11 '89' inside the top. There are no external marks to distinguish them from ordinary thimbles  
The US patent number is 404910



1 Greek key



b&w photo

2 horizontal 'S' scrolls with enamel band



2a. horizontal 'S' scrolls



b&w photo

3. turquoise stones around rim

no photo

## DORCAS gold

These thimbles are inscribed 9ct. GOLD STEEL LINED in addition to the CH mark and DORCAS and the size number



### 1 Daisy



b&w photo

### 2 Plain



### 3 Shell



b&w photo

### 4 Diamond



### 5 Flora



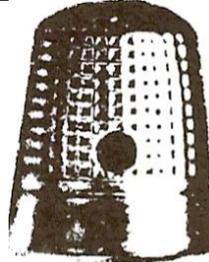
## DORCAS with 4mm. hole in one side

No explanation has been found for these thimbles, each of which has an identical machine-made hole halfway down the side of the thimble opposite the DORCAS and CH marks. All of those noted are a size 7

**1** Daisy



**2a** Diamond



b&w photo

**2b** Diamond with brass-coloured top



**3** Plain



## LITTLE DORCAS



This line was initiated as a less expensive version of the IMPROVED DORCAS. They weighed less but Horner claimed that this did not affect its durability

**1. Louise, plain band**



**2. Diamond, plain band**



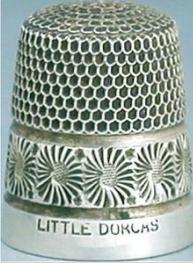
**3. Plain, Louise band**



**4. Plain, diamond band**



**5. Plain, daisy band**



**6. Daisy, plain band**



**DORCAS JUNIOR**



The DORCAS JUNIOR thimbles were another of Horner's efforts to appeal to the lower end of the market:  
**lighter and shorter**

**1. Plain**



**2. Daisy**



**3. Daisy with diamond band ie Flora**



**4. Louise**

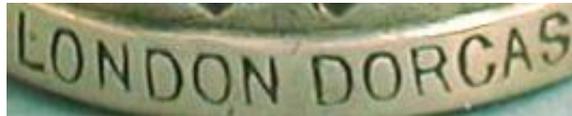


**5. Diamond**



**LONDON DORCAS**

This was probably another variant of the IMPROVED DORCAS. Evidently the venture was not a success and was soon abandoned because very few were made and they are now extremely rare



**1. Plain**



**2. Plain, unusual diamond band**



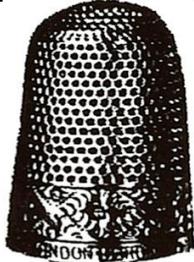
**2a Plain, unusual diamond narrow band**



**3. large asterisks**



**4** band pattern of diamonds with indented centres



b&w photo

**5** Daisy



**6** mixed pattern of Louise with circles in between



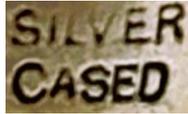
**7** stipple



**8** plain with band of squared diamonds with diagonal lines



## SILVER CASED



### 1. Plain



### 2. Daisy



### 3 Diamond



b&w photo

## THE "DORCOID"

It is uncertain whether these thimbles represent a further diversification of the Dorcas line by an unidentified competitor to share in Charles Horner's Dorcas success, The former is probably the case Each of the thimbles has a dark coating inside which is possibly a celluloid compound. The contrived word 'Dorcoid' looks like a coupling of the first half of Dorcas with the end of a word like celluloid which suggests that this is a Horner production. Evidentially it was not a commercial success, and examples are very rare indeed



**1. Daisy**



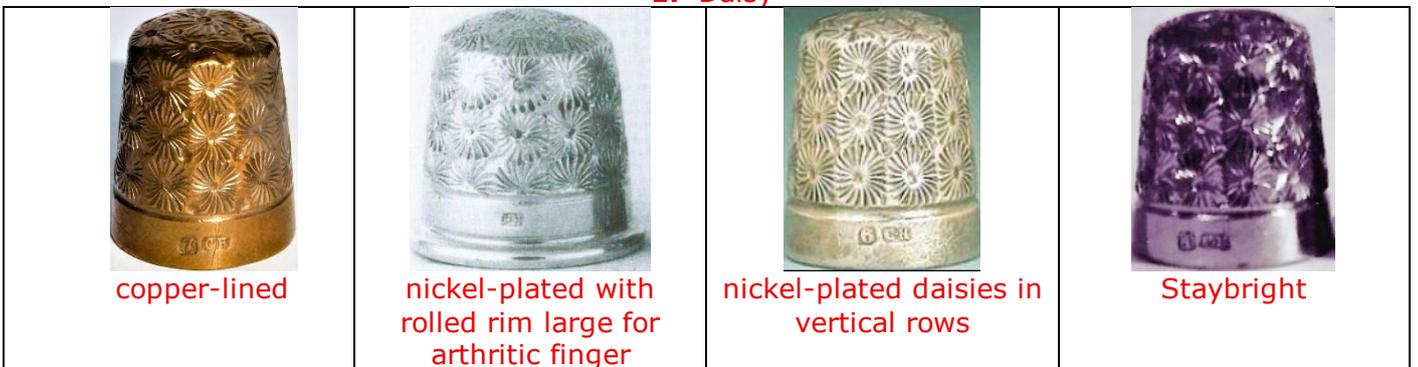
**2. Plain**



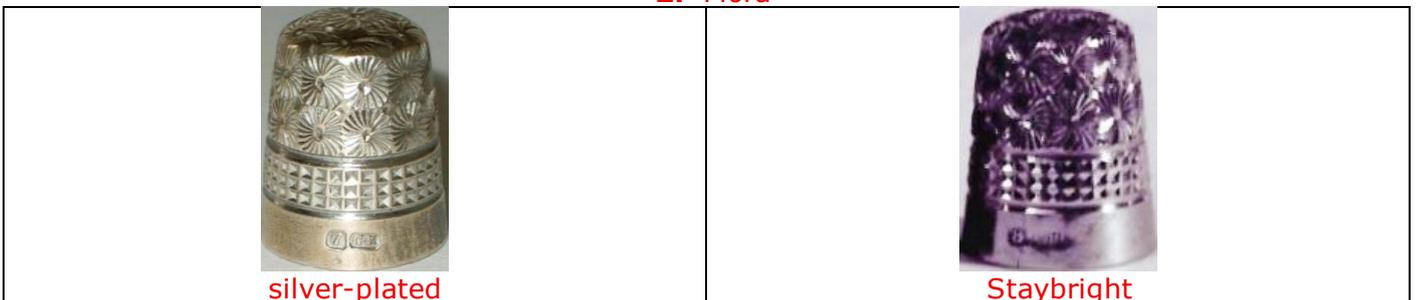
## CH marked thimbles

The only marks this batch of Horner thimbles are CH and size number. The 20mm diameter thimbles don't have a size - probably made for use by sewers with badly swollen fingers There are no DORCAS thimbles here - rather they are made of nickel silver, silver plated, chrome plated, copper plated, and a metal known as Staybright (a proprietary material)

**1. Daisy**



**2. Flora**



3. Louise



chrome-plated



copper-plated lined with silver



lined Staybright

4. Persian lace



stone top

5. Plain



copper-plated



copper-plated with rolled rim



copper-plated rolled rim large for arthritic finger 20mm



nickel-plated rolled rim large for arthritic finger 20mm



silver-plated

# CHARLES ILES

## DORIS



1. Plain



2. Daisy



3. Daisy with grid band **ie Flora**



4. grid (Diamond)



4a. irregular grid (diamond)  
allowing for distortions caused by wear, the pattern is less symmetrical than 4



**5. large shell**



b&w photo

**6. vertical rows of daisies alternating panels of indented diamonds, daisy top**



b&w photo

**7. Star**



# HENRY GRIFFITH & SONS

## DREEMA

There is significant variation in the way the patterns were placed on the thimbles. In some cases, there is a single line between the pattern and the rim, in others there is a double line, and some designs were made both ways. The amount of space allocated to the rim is also inconsistent. It is not possible to illustrate all of these variations, although they make a considerable difference to the appearance of the thimbles

The size of Dreema thimbles is different from the Horner sizing. The larger the number indicates a larger size. Sizes appear from 10 to 24



1. Plain



2. daisy pattern with dot centres – sides and top

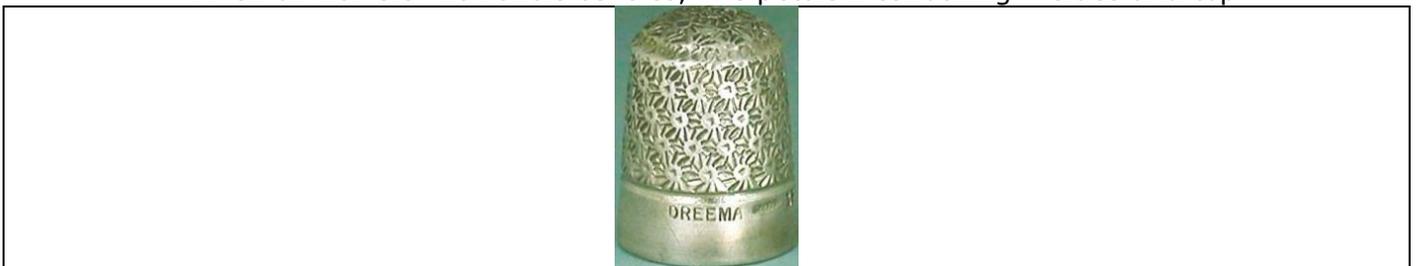


3. daisy pattern simplified – sides and top



b&w photo

4. small flowers with circle centres, line petals interlocking – sides and top



**5.** flower heads in horizontal rows with horizontal row of dots – top flower heads



**5a.** simplified flower heads in horizontal rows with horizontal row of dots – top flower heads



**6** plain – sides and top - band rows daisies



**7** plain – sides and top – band small flowers with circle centres



**8** grid (diamond) sides – top daisy pattern



**9** grid (diamond) sides – band single daisies – top daisy pattern



**10** alternating diamonds of grid outlined and single daisies – sides – top daisy pattern



**11** alternating squares (no outlines) of grid and single daisies – top daisy pattern



**12** asterisks (Louise) – sides and top



**13** plain – sides and top – band two rows interlocking asterisks



**13a.** 4mm band one and a half rows interlocking asterisks



b&w photo

**13b.** 8mm band three rows interlocking asterisks



b&w photo

**14**

**15** plain – sides and tops – band of two rows of encircled asterisks



b&w photo

**16** encircled asterisks – sides and tops



b&w photo

**17** plain – sides and top – band of one row of encircled asterisks on fine diagonal lines



**18** band of alternating diamonds and single daisies



**18.** plain – stone apex



**19.** band of asterisks



**20 large asterisks**



**21 diamond band**



**22 Louise band**



**STEEL-CLAD**

Although made by Henry Griffith and Sons, only the name STEEL-CLAD and JWLtd for James Walker Limited are on the rim



**1. Plain**



**2. large asterisks**



3. plain, asterisk band ie Louise



**WALKER AND HALL**

**DURA**



The DURA was made by Walker and Hall. Their trademark of W&H enclosed by a pennant, the name DURA, the size number and the word PAT, with a letter within a circle appear on the rim. The letters R, D, M, and G.

1. Daisy



2. Louise



2a Louise with single scalloped line above band



2b Louise with double scalloped line above band



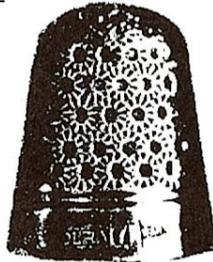
**3** large asterisks with daisy apex



**3a.** large asterisks with double scalloped line above band



**4** rows of deep circles surrounded by fan-shaped petals



b&w photo

**4a.** rows of deep circles surrounded by fan-shaped petals with double scalloped line above band



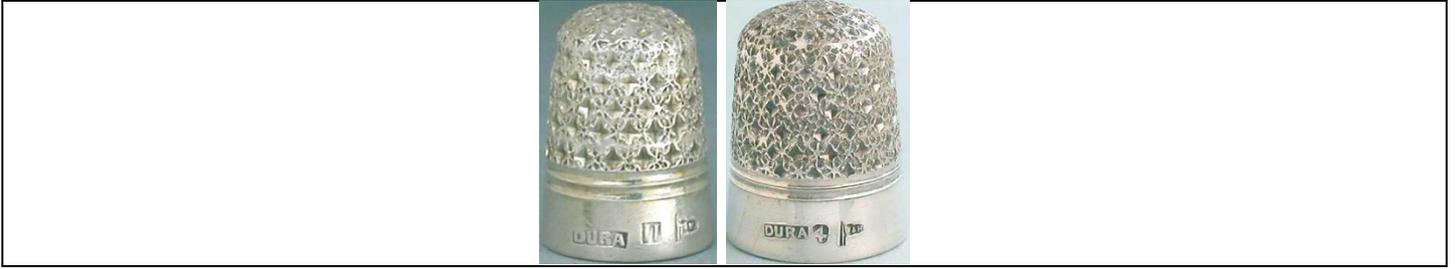
**5** rows of triangles making a zigzag pattern



**6** faceted small diamonds on textured surface



**7** star-shaped indentations on textured ground



**7a** star-shaped indentations on textured ground with double scalloped line above band



**8.** plain with double scalloped line above band



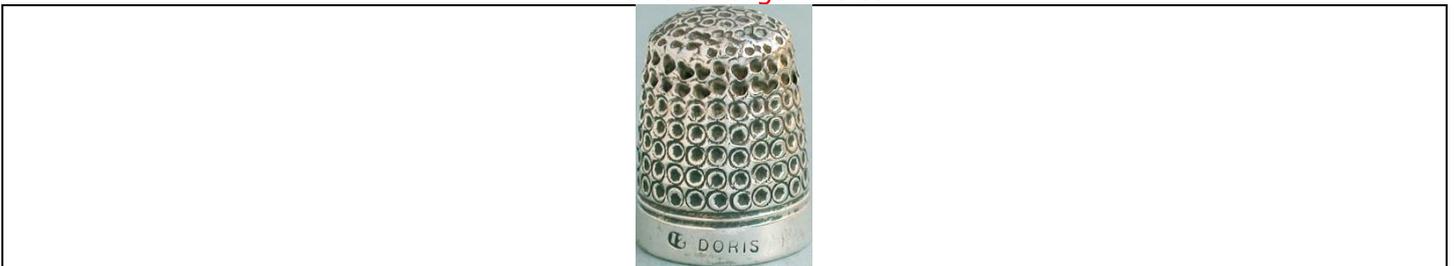
**9** asterisks with dotted diamond shapes with daisy top



**10** asterisks with dotted diamond shapes on textured surface



**11** rows of large circles



# Robert Pringle & Co

## MATT



1. plain, octagonal indentations



2. Flora



3. asterisk within a circle





**1.** rows of triangles making a zigzag pattern



**8** asterisks all over



**9** Daisy



**3.** Louise



## SIDNEY & Co



There are two different marks for these thimbles – one of which also includes the name DURA

### 1. Louise



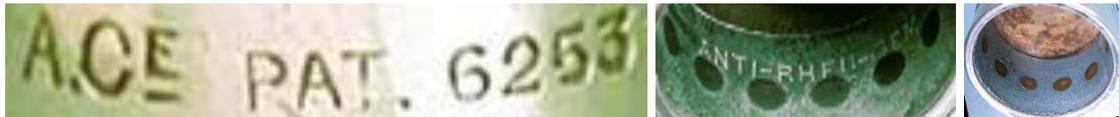
## ARTHRITIS THIMBLES

Steel-cored thimbles were made for sufferers of arthritis. These thimbles have an inner band with small circles of copper let into it. (Copper was thought to alleviate the symptoms of arthritis). Only large sizes appear to have been made

### Alfred Constantine (A. C<sup>E</sup>)

These thimbles are marked on the rim A.C<sup>E</sup> and PAT 6253 for a fingerguard with lining comprising galvanic and magnetic elements let into it. A United States patent was also granted/ It is not known whether Constantine formed his company to produce this thimble, or used the service of another manufacturer

ANTI-RHEUM is lettered on the inside rim, just above the holes



### 1. plain (fine indentations)



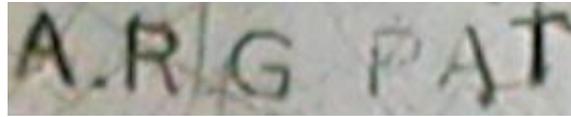
### 2. plain (fine indentations) with wide band of alternating diamonds enclosing grid pattern with half daisies above and below



**3 large grid pattern (Diamond)**



**A.R.G. PAT**



The abbreviation PAT appears with the trademark A.R.G. on the rim, but no patent number follows. Nothing is known about this maker. **The shape and patterns are those of Henry Griffith & Sons**

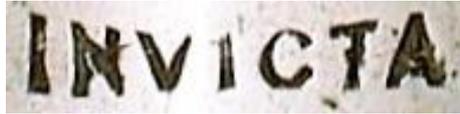
**1. alternating diamonds of grid and daisy. Daisy top**



**2. daisy sides and top grid band**



## INVICTA



Marked SILVER on band. Inner band of copper and steel

### 1. plain (fine indentations)



### 2. plain (fine indentations) with daisy band



### 3. daisy



## References

Diane Pelham Burn *Another fabulous Dorcas find. At your fingertips* May 2007  
Diane Pelham Burn *Identifying steel-cored thimbles. 1993 Supplement 1997 + At your fingertips* Jan 1994  
Tom Lawson *Charles Horner of Halifax: a celebration of his life & work.* 2002

## Contributors

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Julie Hollick | Carolyn Meacham-Elegant Arts | William Isbister | Wynneth Mullins | Ray Nimmo | Wolf-Dieter Scholz  
Svetlana

This listing of Steel-cored 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](mailto:thimbleselect@bigpond.com) TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

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