

Australia's Elfin thimbles

This topic is going to be different from any of my others. We are still searching for the maker of this Australian thimble.

1. The first section is a copy from my original manuscript of *Thimbles of Australia* – pages 21-23 – published in 1998 by Simon & Schuster. I have brought all the advertisements together here from Appendix 5, pages 119-121.
2. There is a copy of a topic from 2012 which featured in my Learn More About...Who made these thimbles? There was nothing new in this topic, just a summary with a new appeal for information.
3. This is the current finding on Elfin thimbles.

1.

Although the Elfin silver thimbles are quite common in Australia, information on the Elfin is scarce. There are no maker's marks and no accompanying thimble boxes to identify the thimbles as Australian, but they are still likely to be Australian made thimbles. An exhaustive search of the two periodicals for the manufacturing jewellery trade from 1910 to 1970 has turned up no evidence of the manufacturer of the Elfin thimble. In von Hoelle (1986) the Elfin is incorrectly ascribed to Price & Jardine of Sydney who only made Nifty thimbles.

The first illustration of the Elfin thimble was traced to the July 1947 issue of *Commonwealth Jeweller and Watchmaker*. This periodical appeared monthly from 1916 to 1988 and was the official journal to the retail jewellery trade in Australia. The advertisement is for Roy A. Humphery, a "wholesale jeweller and importer" of 92 Pitt Street, Sydney. A similar advertisement appeared in November 1947 and this second one appeared every month until July 1948. The adverts show the thimble, that we now recognise as the Elfin, with no mention of the thimble by name. Instead, the ad reads "once more available after a long absence...for immediate delivery assorted sizes". Comparing the photographs of Elfin thimbles with the advertisements from 1947 there is no doubt they are the same thimbles. A search of earlier advertisements (during and pre-World War II) does not reveal any by Roy A. Humphery until June 1946. Why then "after a long absence"? One can speculate why no mention was made of the thimbles, by their name of Elfin, and why there was no reference to the manufacturer. Advertisements with illustrations of the Elfin thimble continued into the 1950s - in these ads the thimbles that we now know as the Elfin were one of Roy A. Humphery's "exclusive" lines. Could Humphery be the manufacturer of the Elfin? Being a wholesale jeweller, he may well have been but there is nothing to link him as the manufacturer from these or any other advertisements.

ROY A. HUMPHERY
Wholesale Jeweller and Importer
92 PITT STREET, SYDNEY

FOR IMMEDIATE
DELIVERY
ASSORTED
SIZES

ONCE MORE
AVAILABLE
AFTER A LONG
ABSENCE

STERLING SILVER THIMBLES
WITH STEEL REINFORCED ENDS

'Phone: BW8429 ——— Your Orders

July 10, 1947. THE COMMONWEALTH JEWELLER AND WATCHMAKER. Page Ninety-three

From the advertisement, we can see that Humphery was also an importer and one can speculate that the Elfin thimbles could have been imported. So far, they have never been linked to any other country and it is more than likely that Humphery was acting as a wholesaler in the sale of Elfin thimbles.

More important information follows in this advertisement: "sterling silver thimbles with steel reinforced ends". Having steel reinforced ends would make the Elfin a unique silver thimble worldwide. The Elfin thimbles are marked for sterling silver and thus one would not have contemplated testing them with a magnet for the presence of steel. Sadly, this advertising is misleading as the Elfin thimbles do not attract a magnet, as they would have if steel were present!

The Elfin's design has five to six rows of stylised half daisies or "emu footprints". This latter description first appeared in Woolley (1989) and was used again by Holmes in *Thimble Notes and Queries* (winter 1990). These daisy/prints are separated from the plain wide band by two grooves and there is no rolled rim. The centre of each daisy is off centre to the row above. Poorly struck Elfin thimbles have the daisy/print pattern "slipping down" into these grooves. The apex is indented. Elfins all have the same design.



Holmes, in his *History of thimbles*, mistakenly mentions the Elfin as "Elgin" in the paragraph on thimbles from Commonwealth countries. He suggests that these thimbles were made in imitation of English designs. This is not borne out with the Elfin design: it is peculiar to these Australian thimbles.

"Elfin" is stamped onto the wide band and "Stg. Sil" is in a lozenge on the opposite side. Elfins have only been found in five sizes, 2 to 6, with 6 being the smallest size. Size 2 is the most commonly found size in existence today. The size mark is pressed into the band and mainly found above the word "Elfin". Some Elfin thimbles have the size mark on the verso above "Stg Sil" and occasionally it appears on the side between "Elfin" and "Stg Sil".



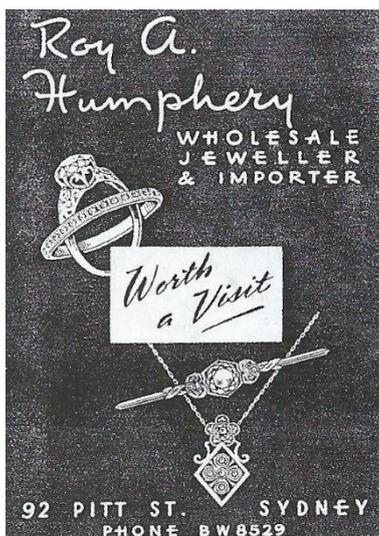
On a few of these thimbles, the word "Elfin" was poorly struck, and it would appear to read "Elein".



From the advertisements previously mentioned and the existence of Elfin thimbles with engravings for a wedding anniversary ("Mum and Dad 1948") and a birthday ("To Daphne with love Grandma 1949") on the bands, one can assume the Elfin thimbles were only made during the 1940s.



The trademark for "Elfin" has never been registered in Australia for a thimble. Around forty Elfin thimbles exist in collections in Australia and nowhere else. Until proof of its manufacture is uncovered, we must presume the Elfin thimbles to be Australian.



First Roy Humphery advertisement (Commonwealth Jeweller and Watchmaker June 1946)

ROY A. HUMPHERY
Wholesale Jeweller and Importer
 92 PITT STREET, SYDNEY



Ring Clips for quick sizing of rings — in White or Yellow Gold.

IMMEDIATE
 DELIVERY
 FOR
 BOTH LINES



Sterling Silver Thimbles with Steel Reinforced Ends — attractively boxed in one dozen lots. Assorted sizes.

'Phone: BW 8429 ————— Your Orders

This advertisement ran monthly till July 1948

November 10, 1937.

THE COMMONWEALTH JEWELLER AND WATCHMAKER.

Page Ninety-seven

A general advertisement from Roy Humphery in which the illustration of the Elfin thimble appeared regularly until April 1950



The Stars
OF THE
JEWELLERY
FIRMAMENT

1. Matching Set Ladies' and Gent's Wedding Rings. All sizes both lines.

2. Gent's 9-ct. Gold Heavy Claw Ring. White Zircons or Reconstructed Rubies.

3. 7-stone White or Yellow Gold Eternity Rings. White Sapphires, also Blue and White, Red and White Combinations. Fully Engraved Shanks.

4. Sterling Silver Thimbles. Reinforced Ends. Attractively Boxed—Dozens or Singly. Assorted Sizes.

5. Ring Clips—White or Yellow Gold—for quick sizing of rings. (New improved model.)

6. Photo Locket Key in 1/10th 9-ct. Gold. Ideal 21st Birthday Present.

Obtainable from
ROY A. HUMPHERY
Wholesale Jeweller
and Importer
92 PITT STREET
SYDNEY
(One Door from Martin Place)
Phone: BW8429 — Your Orders

EXCLUSIVE LINES

All Leading Lines of Jewellery in Stock. N.S.W. Agent for Veglia Alarm Clocks.

ELFIN

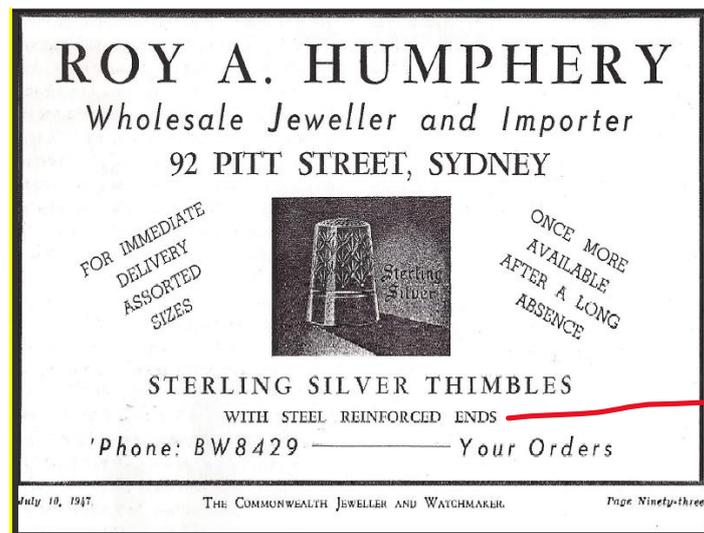
For those of you who collect Australian silver thimbles, this Australian thimble is also an enigma as to the maker. Featured in my *Thimbles of Australia*, published in 1998, on pages 21-23, the maker still remains unknown 14 years after publication.

Whilst researching Elfin thimbles, I was able to access every issue of the Australian jewellery trade magazine *Commonwealth Jeweller and Watchmaker* from 1916 to 1970, the only reference I found was the advertisement for Roy A. Humphery of Sydney for July 1947. He was featured as a "Wholesale Jeweller and Importer" and there is a photo of the Elfin thimble with its distinctive emu footprint type of patterning. The thimble is not named in the advertisement. This identical ad appeared monthly until July 1948. His different ads continued to 1950 but these thimbles were never named Elfin in the ads.

The adverts do mention that they were "sterling silver thimbles with steel reinforced ends". Examples of the Elfin do not have any steel in them! Was he referring to the Elfin, when making this claim or was he referring to another thimble?

In John von Hoelle (1986) the Elfin is incorrectly ascribed to Price & Jardine of Sydney. They only made the Australian Nifty thimbles.

Edwin Holmes (1985) erroneously mentions the Elfin thimbles as Elgin. It's time to put those errors to bed!



There are five to six rows of half daisies - or emu footprints - which form the main pattern. The centre of each daisy is off-centre to the one above. This is the only patterning ever found on Elfin thimbles. The apex is plainly indented.

ELFIN is lettered on the narrow band with **STG.SIL** in a lozenge. The five sizes range from 2 to 6, with 6 being the smallest. There are no maker's marks.

Two examples of Elfin thimbles have been noted with inscriptions and dates - for 1948 and 1949. This establishes the decade in which they were made but sadly the definitive maker's name has proved elusive. Maybe these thimbles were wholesaled by Humphery from overseas?

If you can shed any light on this mystery, please share!



Elfin thimbles showing different markings



name is poorly struck to appear as Elein



Elfin half daisy pattern equated to an emu footprint



emu foot

3.

I talked by phone with Bruce Humphery in 1999 in Sydney, who is the third generation of Sydney jewellers, whose late father and grandfather may have held the key, but no records now exist. He told me that they did produce thimbles, but he would have to see an example to know if it was their work. Sadly, I never followed up on this lead and the contact is no longer available in Sydney.

In March 2014 I had an email enquiry from a German thimble collector, Wolf-Dieter Scholz. He had recently purchased an Elfin thimble and thinking he had a 'Little Dorcas', he tested his new thimble and found that **his thimble's apex attracted a magnet** – but not the sides. Consulting my book, he knew that this may be new information to share with me.

I had tested my own Elfin in 1997 against a magnet, when I found the advert mentioning "with steel reinforced ends", with negative results. I had kept names on file during my research in 1997 (many of these thimbles had changed hands by 2016) so I contacted as many of the original Elfin owners as possible amongst Australian thimble collectors and the resounding response was positive.

The Elfin **apex** does attract a magnet. Several collectors now have multiple examples in varying sizes. Some of the replies mentioned a weaker magnetism, but most of their Elfin thimbles had magnetism.



examples of different Elfin thimbles attracting a magnet, showing their "with steel reinforced ends"

Interestingly the original Humphery advertisement mentioned "with steel reinforced ends". No-one has found this to be true: the open end does not attract a magnet. I obtained a more powerful magnet myself and yes, my Elfin's apex does attract a magnet. We obtained several photos which shows the attraction. If yours tested negative, please try a stronger magnet. I would love to know whether your Elfin attracts a magnet. I will keep good records to update this site.

The thimbles all bear the mark for 'STG.SIL.' so the amount of steel used in the apex would have to be included in the .075 parts that are not sterling silver. Maybe this is why the magnetism to the steel reinforced end is so weak?

I have also now seen an Elfin thimble with a name engraved but the date is interesting. Was this engraved date of '1935' added later or could Elfin thimbles have been made as early as 1935? All part of the mystery that surrounds these thimbles.

I let the research lie for two years until now. I still can't prove that Roy A Humphery had made the Elfin thimble. It bothers me tho that the Humphery adverts in the 1940s are still the only link we have to these distinctive thimbles. How would Humphery have known of the magnetism/steel reinforced ends (which we know now is weak) if he hadn't been the manufacturer? But all his advertisements mention that he was a "wholesaler jeweller & importer" – never a manufacturing jeweller!

Since the publication of *Thimbles of Australia*, reproductions have emerged – luckily not marking them with the name of Elfin. The design is the same, but the thimbles are poorly struck and of a thin quality silver. They are probably being made in Thailand. The only marking is '.925' and the join seam is clearly visible. I do not have a photo yet to share with you.

References

Susan Jean Gowan - *Thimbles of Australia*. 1998

Contributors

Lee Bateman | Sue Christensen | Margaret Hendriksen | Margaret Hickling | Wendy Ritchie
Wolf-Dieter Scholz

This listing of Australian Elfin thimbles does not purport to be complete or accurate in all aspects.

It should be read in conjunction with the relevant section in *Thimbles of Australia*.

Rather it invites comment and contribution to add to our knowledge. My thanks to the contributors.

EMAIL thimbleselect@bigpond.com TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

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