

Thimble Collectors Club Thimbles



L>R: UK Club logo – USA club logo – German club logo



both sides of a TCC Membership card

The Thimble Collectors Club (TCC) came to my attention quite early on in my thimble collecting days - 1986. The glossy pamphlets that they issued promoted the idea of collecting "good" brands of china or porcelain from famous or often unheard-of thimble china manufacturers. The added appeal was that on joining the Club one would automatically receive/pay for a new thimble every month. What a selection of high-quality thimbles!! I lived in South Africa when I made my first enquiry about joining the Club, but I had no response to my application. I put this down to being where I lived. I have always enjoyed collecting Royal Doulton thimbles and once I knew that TCC had issued a thimble featuring Balloon Seller, I approached them again and was able to purchase this lovely thimble as a one-off, in October 1987.

I became interested in the scheme again in late 1989 when an English pen friend sent me two, she had bought for me - the uniqueness and quality of the thimbles really appealed, but I only joined the [English) Club in April 1993. At that time, the free gift on joining was Oakley's Little Owl but it had been around since May 1985 - whether as part of the original subscriptions, or as a free gift like mine.

An amazing facility was that one could return thimbles, if they were not suitable, within one week of receipt. Did these returns form the basis of the 'free joining gifts'? In September 1995, the Club switched from supplying thimbles each month, to sending out a batch of twelve at a time, for each year - though they were still paid for monthly. From 1996, the individual certificates stopped, in preference for one booklet brochure with all twelve thimble descriptions.

There were at least three Thimble Collectors Clubs - one in Chessington (Surrey, England - a division of MBI Inc, a company incorporated with limited liability in Delaware USA.); another in Norwalk (Connecticut, USA) and another in Germany (Der Fingerhut-Sammler-Club). The Club logos are different (see above). Which Club was established first and when? Rosie has now established "that the MBI Inc began business in 1969 under the name The Danbury Mint. Danbury Mint UK was founded in 1969 by Ted Stanley, in Connecticut, USA, to sell the best in fine collectables direct to the consumer and opened an office in London in 1976 and started to develop products especially for UK; products are usually created exclusively for them and sold only by them through their magazine advertising, mailings ... and the internet. In the US, the name Thimble Collector's Club and the logo is registered as a Trademark by the company MBI, Inc. This company is located on 47 Richards Avenue Norwalk, CT 06857. The Thimble Collectors Club sells goods and services of thimbles sold primarily as collectors' items. This logo and Trademark was filed on 11 April 1988 and was first used on 1 September 1984." As the UK concern is part of an International company it needs no separate registration.

There are around TCC **600** thimbles in this listing, so my theory is that different thimbles were made for the different Clubs - otherwise TCC would have been going for 36 years!! Were the same thimbles issued to all members worldwide at the same time? No. From information I have received, newer members got thimbles that had been issued in the past. I have included the earliest date of issue where known. If yours is earlier, please let me know. The USA Club closed in 1998, tho the registration is still active and was renewed in 2008. It seems that the English Club ceased to exist in 2003.

The earliest date I can find recorded in the A-Z listing of thimbles in this topic, is for the UK club in September 1984: there are so many that I do not have a date of issue recorded. Each thimble is boxed and has an accompanying leaflet/certificate giving a brief history of the china house and the name of each thimble and in the case of the US certificates, there is an illustration of the thimble's backstamp. The certificates are great to have and are even more important now that the Clubs no longer exist. Sadly, none of the pamphlets are dated. There is no way of linking the thimbles back to TCC or dating the thimbles once the certificate has become separated from the thimble. There are exceptions: where the thimbles have a "Thimble Collectors Club" backstamp as well as the maker's mark - eg Moriken, Oakley, Shibata, Sutherland, Kiyomasa. Now you will be able to link your thimbles to TCC, with the marvellous photos supplied by Cathy and Jenny.

Now that I have seen the certificates from both the USA and UK Clubs, it is easy to tell the difference between them. The USA Club certificates have the maker's backstamp on the certificate; the thimble information is on the other side. The English TCC certificates are all printed on one side and there is no illustration of the backstamp. The same thimbles have differing descriptions on the certificates (see Longton Hall's [Rustic Castle](#)). Both are included where possible. The German certificates follow the UK Club's style.

In compiling these pages, I have followed the name of the thimble design as mentioned in bold lettering on each certificate - and done the same for each china house. Where there are discrepancies, there will be linked cross-references. I have ignored the text on each certificate (except the thimble patterns descriptions) as it often has conflicting information.

As well as offering thimbles by the month, TCC also offered sets for sale.

China and porcelain thimble collecting came to its zenith during the 1980s and there were hundreds of different maker's marks or backstamps to collect. The Thimble Collectors Club fostered this passion and found many new "thimbles makers" for their Club members. In 1986 Royal Worcester stopped making thimbles to be followed by Wedgwood (1991 though this was revived in 2000 when their thimbles were produced at their Visitors Centre), Spode (1992) and Caverswall (1993).

Anyone who has tried to follow the takeovers and amalgamations of china manufacturers in the 1980s, in the wider field outside thimbles, will know that this is a vast field even for the experts. Royal Doulton has a huge list of 'brands' in their stable, but they have never been prolific thimble makers. For thimbles, shape is predominant, and the dominant makers have specific thimble shapes that identify them immediately.

It must have been difficult for the Club to continue to find new sources with this trend of closures. Was this when the practice began, of one thimble manufacturer using new backstamps other than their own, to inflate the number of new makers? MAYBE they were even buying backstamps, where the previous owner was no longer interested or able of making thimbles themselves? It is perfectly legal in Britain when a business or company closes or goes bankrupt, liquidated stock can be sold off and can include Intellectual Property rights such as designs, copyright, and trademarks.

Welsh thimbles, made by **Heritage Coast China** (originally founded by Mr Clarke & Co in 1986 as Westbury), include the following backstamps:
Afan Valley | Ammonite Studio | Avonvale | Celtic Cross | Green Isaf Farm Pottery | Kingfisher Pottery | Kingston Pottery | Platypus Gallery | Principality | St Donats | St Illtyd | Vale Westbury Studio | Wyeside | Yr Felin Wynt

Some of their patterns - Blue Satsuma, Welsh Poppy, Brambles/Blackberry Bush, Old Mill, Hazelnut - even appear with the differing backstamps of Avonvale / Heritage Coast, St Donats / Glyn-Coch, Afan Valley / Wyeside, Heart of England Westbury and Celtic Cross / Wyeside respectively.

I imagine that the decals created were jealously guarded by their creators, but some are in the public domain.

I presume that Gien first made the design Lilypad, and that this was purchased by Vale?
What about the identical Songbird produced by both Revol and Carl Schumann?

Blue Floral by Bordeaux - the same decal as Revol's Blue Onion

Birds of Paradise by Scherzer and Schumann's Parrots

Harcourt and Brimstone use the same Dolphin decals

Chelsea and Britannia have the same Unicorn thimble decal

there is an identical decal and shape in the Tropical Fish by Sutherland and Whielden
Ospag and Lilien have identical Viennese scenes (they just have slightly different names)
all identical thimbles with differing backstamps/names!

'Strange' isn't it that many of these names are replicated within the Sutherland stable list below?

Sutherland China can be identified by thimbles with crystals, or their thimbles made in distinctive shapes, or shaped apexes. They have used these additional maker's marks:

Accorn | Bell & Co | Bell Vue | Blossom China | Blyth Works | Bow | Branksome Ceramics
Brimstone Fine China | Britannia China Company | Brown-Westhead Moore & Co
Campbellfield Castle Pottery | Ceramart | Chelsea | Davenport | Don Pottery | Dorset
Dublin Pottery | Empress Porcelain | Fenton | Francesca China | George Jones
Hanbridge Fine Ceramics | Herculaneum Ceramics | Hilditch & Son | Ironstone China
Isle of Wight | John and Richard Riley | Lockhart | Longton Hall | Mercia Crown
Nautilus Pottery | Nouveau Pottery | Northfield Hawley Oak Tree China Orb Pottery
Ralph Stevenson | Rockingham | Rose China | Royal Westminster | Seacombe
Thomas Greene | Tulip Fine China | Whieldon Ware

Bow and Chelsea both have Fluted Floral thimbles, though the flowers depicted are different;
Davenport / Sutherland have Playing Cards

Sutherland/Rockingham's Still Life are the same decal

Crysglass/Krister both use the same blue flower decal Flower and Nouvelles.

Another clue to this practice is the wording "produced in homage ..." - "a thimble in tribute ..." - "in the style of ..." etc. on the certificates.

In the 1998 and 2002 range Sutherland would also have made the following "European" thimbles with the backstamps for: Charmaine (France) | Empress (Czech Republic) | Fleur (France) Katerina (Russia) | Tulip (Holland) | Wiener-Kirsch (Vienna)

How is this for coincidence? Three separate thimble 'manufacturers' creating unusual identically shaped thimbles. Look for yourself - Blyth Farm animals - Branksome Giraffe - Kingston Cats. The apex of these thimble is white and well hollowed out.

I am sure there are more of this type for other years too!!

I am more familiar with the English brands on china and porcelain thimbles, but if this practice was encouraged/abetted by TCC, what was to stop the prolific German and Japanese thimble makers, from doing the same? Check some of the German thimbles for yourself: Lindner - Eminence Ludwig - Gossel - Reutter.

Then there are the Czechoslovakian Bohemia and Thun with identical decals for the Entertainers/Court Figures!!

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Stoke-on-Trent's equivalent in Japan is Seto, where most of Japanese porcelain is made. Iwasa in Tajimi (close to Seto) made thimbles for TCC probably with the additional backstamps of Koyomi, Shibata, Marutoyo and Yamasan.

Japanese thimbles traditionally were not backstamped. This was a request by TCC that the thimbles from Japan have the thimbles for TCC backstamped.

Did Sutherland China make these some of their thimbles with Japanese backstamps as well?

Another theory is that these thimbles, that were initially made for TCC, reached a wider market after their contract with TCC ceased. If the decals remained in their possession, there was nothing to stop them marketing them after TCC's closure, with whichever maker's mark they chose! Some of these designs are still being made today, even tho TCC has long gone.

Thimble boxes for the TCC thimbles are another clue to their origins and date. In the 1980s and into the mid-1990s, the thimble boxes supplied with the thimbles were the same brand as the thimble. Later boxes from 1996 were the generic blue thimble boxes lettered with 'Thimble Collectors Club' and the numbering as laid out above. Was this because there was no longer a thimble manufacturer with the thimble brand's name?



There is no further information on this composite *Thimble Collectors Club* box. It holds fifty thimbles. There is a pouch in the inner lid for the TCC certificates.



5-6th October 1985 magazine advertisements



the free thimble being offered as an incentive for membership was Royal Albert's Old Country Roses

I am no longer missing TCC thimble photos (June 2020). What I need are copies of missing certificates please. Only five are still to be found and their names may be little more than a description

no certificates:

Brimstone Penguin | Hakutoh Blue floral | Haviland Empress Eugenia violets | Kingston Cats
Sutherland Christmas 1984

Since the beginning of 2009 I have been sent many photos of thimbles for inclusion in these pages that have previously been unrecorded. Most are in the blue TCC thimble boxes. Maybe both versions came out of the same manufacturing house but at different times - one for the UK market and one for the US market? So far this has been noticed in similar but different versions - Akemi | Gossel | Jaeger | Lin | Pickard | Schwarzenhammer | Thun

In 2019 I have generously received two books from a Russian Thimble Collectors group in Moscow, for their members. They have published two volumes to date on TCC thimbles (A-E; F-K). I don't have a word of Russian, so I am not able to read the Russian text, but the photos are wonderful and shown in great detail. It seems that TCC certificates have been translated from English to Russian. At this stage that is purely my speculation.

++ Symbol used to indicate that for the TCC thimbles featured, there are corresponding certificates shown on separate pages - with the UK or the US certificates - or both.

References

Thimble Collectors Club *The joy of thimble collecting*. n.d

Contributors

Cathy Pezzotta and Jenny Yuhas with their passion for these thimbles.

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This listing of Thimble Collectors Club thimbles 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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