

# Sterling silver scenic thimbles and needlework tools

My first English silver thimble with a wide scenic band in relief, was the one I bought for 'Windsor' and having done a bit of research, this seems to be the most popular design of this type of thimble, with many examples still in existence.

Recently I was a lucky girl when I received a thimble from a non-thimble friend (thanks Phil) - he found a treasure for me on a recent visit to South Africa. There is no lettering to identify the scene, but it shows a bridge scene on a very wide band, on a typical tall, narrow Victorian thimble. It turns out to be the Menai Bridge scene and in contrast to my first purchase, this is a rare example.

I think two of these wonderful old thimbles is enough for my collection, but it's been fun looking for what else was made and I hope you'll enjoy this small journey.

Once my interest had been aroused, the hunt was on for more photo examples of these thimbles. I have been amazed at the range of thimbles made of the same scene or pictorial of historical buildings. The scenes include stately homes, palaces, bridges, castles and exhibition buildings and the picture wraps right around the thimble. I love the British medieval cathedral thimbles, especially having just watched the awesome series of six television programmes on British cathedrals in May 2020.

I have included a photo of some of the actual buildings, so that this may help with identification of your thimble.

There are different widths in the bands and my guess is that the wider the band, the earlier the thimble. Some scenes are banded by a plain narrow groove on each side - some have no upper groove separating the scene from the indentations.

These British scenic thimbles pre-date the placename thimbles of the 1920s which only have the names lettered around the thimble with no actual scene - they all reflect the idea of taking a souvenir home, first made popular by the Victorians. The thimbles of this study would originate from around the 1840s onwards.

Some of these thimbles are lettered with the name of the scene around the rim or within the scene (e.g Windsor) and many have the date included in the lettering. This qualifies them as commemoratives as well.

There was no evidence as to the maker/s of these thimbles, when I started working on this topic - mostly they have no hallmarks nor any maker's marks. I wonder if there was more than one thimble manufacturer making these thimbles in Victorian England.

Slowly pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are emerging and many of the makers are now known - thanks to the excellent research by Norma Spicer and Diane Pelham Burn.

I had heard the names of Nathaniel Mills and Taylor & Perry from Birmingham associated with the English scenic thimbles but there is nothing in the thimble literature at this stage to confirm this. There are hallmarked thimbles with London assay office marks for Osborne House and Windsor Castle by Samuel Foskett. He would have been one of the later makers, as is George Unite.

Aldridge had a theory that the thimbles that contain trees in the all-round design of some of these thimbles, appear to have been used as a trademark of their thimbles.

The thimbles I have encountered seven here with trees are: Abbotsford House - Crystal Palace Great Exhibition - Lichfield Cathedral - Osborne House - Sydenham Crystal Palace - Windsor

On re-reading Spicer's book on British registered designs, it is interesting to note that some of these scenic thimbles have a diamond-shaped registration mark placed on the thimble. In England, between 1842 and 1883, registered designs carried a mark to denote the registration date of a design. As these had to be registered, the name of the thimble maker may be found.

Alfred Taylor registered the Exhibition of All Nations 1851 design and he also made the thimbles.

Henry Griffith registered his design for and made the thimbles for some of the International Exhibition 1862 thimbles (139132).

There are two designs for the 1862 exhibition and the second one - where the mark appears on the thimbles - was also registered. They were made by George Cartwright and Horace Woodward.

I have followed the lettering on the thimbles for the alphabetical listing, so the same building or scene may be in more than one place below - I have put in a cross-reference where applicable. The brief description of the building or place is not meant to be definitive, but I have added a date into the description where relevant in the 19th century.

Edwin Holmes indicates that there is a difference in the manufacture of the range of scenic thimbles. The earlier thimbles (cathedrals and buildings) were designed on a flat piece of silver, which were then rolled into a cylinder, seamed, with the apex added in last.

The later ones made towards the end of the 19th century are deep drawn and then the design is stamped on the thimble shape. These are shorter in height than the earlier thimbles and flatter at the apex, with the lettering around the band. As most of these were not hallmarked, they would probably have been made in the late 1870s and early 1880s (after which hallmarking for thimbles became obligatory in Britain).

The thimbles are made of sterling silver unless stated otherwise. I have not been able to find any mention of English gold or brass scenic thimbles.

The commemorative thimbles for Victorian royalty are outside this study.

Some of the scenes and buildings are unknown/unidentifiable and I can find no help in the thimble literature. I have placed these under Unknown.

As time has gone on since this topic was first begun, it seems prudent to include sewing tools, so that they are not lost to posterity. Look for the Stourport beautifully created object – created in brass. It takes its place amongst the Victorian needlework tools, without apology.

## A Present from the Isle of Wight

the scene shows both sailing ships and the Ryde tramway, which was built in 1864 and pulled by horses  
the other shows buildings on the island



### medium band

lettering around the rim  
1880s



### medium band

lettering around the rim

## A View of the Tower Rosherville Gardens

opened in 1838, on the Thames, at Northfleet in Gravesend, Kent



### wide band

lettering around the rim  
1840s



# Abbotsford House

Sir Walter Scott's home in Melrose Scotland was completed in 1824

see also: Walr Scott

much confusion has arisen between these thimbles for Abbotsford Abbey and those of Newstead Abbey  
according to Aldridge there is the Alfred Taylor maker's mark on some of the Abbotsford House  
thimbles

there are trees incorporated in the design



**medium band**



**medium band**

unusual use of diamond pattering above scene



**medium band**



**medium band**

with faceted rim  
speckled ground  
child's size





**tape measures**

## Balmoral Castle Balmoral Castle The Queen's Highland Home in Scotland, purchased by Queen Victoria in 1848



**narrow band**  
shortened version of name



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim  
verso  
1860s?



**medium band**  
lettering around narrow rim  
finely indented



**medium band**  
Chester 1890



**medium band**  
clear lettering with interesting plane of buildings  
with seemingly smooth ground



**medium band**

Samuel Foskett London 1893

lettering around rim

## Birt nr Royal Arsenal Woolwich

jeweller on the River Thames at Woolwich, London from 1839

the only advertising scenic thimble known – about 1880

the business was still operating as jeweller and pawnbroker in 1990



**medium band**

lettering around rim

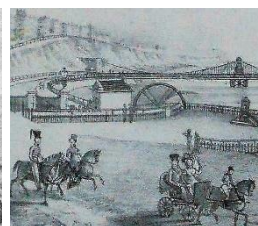
buildings and a walled garden

1880s

## Brighton (Royal Suspension) Chain Pier

the pier was built in 1823 – closed in 1892 as unsafe as a pier and destroyed by a storm in 1896

see also: Brighton Gift



**wide band**



**medium band**

patterned rim



**medium band**

Samuel Foskett

London 1896

lettering around rim



**medium band**

fingerguard





**medium band**  
showing seafront houses



**medium band**  
showing seafront houses  
slightly different images included:

sailing boats – original gates' entrance to waterwheel – a pedestrian - two people on horseback



**medium band**  
showing two scenes with seafront houses  
seems later than that above because of the domed apex and strongly defined indentations



**pinwheel**  
showing Brighton Pavilion on this side, Brighton Chain Pier "Pier in the storm" on the other  
"From Morris's Repository Brighton"

## Brighton Gift

see also: Brighton Pavilion  
and  
Brighton Chain Pier



**wide band**  
lettering around rim  
showing Brighton Pavilion



**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
showing Brighton Pavilion



**medium band**  
London 1896  
showing Brighton Chain Pier



**Waxer**  
"A trifle from Brighton"



# Brighton Pavilion

finished in 1822 for the Prince Regent who became George IV  
also known as the Royal Pavilion at Brighton  
see also: Brighton Gift



**narrow band**  
with steel top  
1840s



**wide band**



**medium band**



**medium band**  
with beaded edging



**medium band**  
finger guard



**medium band**  
scene is upside down



**medium band**



**pinwheel**  
showing Brighton Pavilion on this side, Brighton  
Chain Pier on the other



**Tunbridgeware sewing compendium**  
in shape of a Brighton Pavilion tower  
contains tape measure – needlecase – waxer  
thimble and reel

# Clifton Suspension Bridge 1864

see also: Menai Bridge



**wide band**

lettering around rim

Isbister: this thimble is incorrectly named and lettered  
this is in fact the image of the Menai Bridge

## Crystal Palace

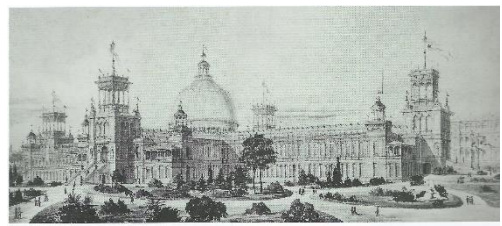
designed by Sir Joseph Paxton and built in Hyde Park, London in 1851

see also: Exhibition of All Nations ...;

and

Great Exhibition ...

and Sydenham Crystal Palace



**wide band**

trees in scene  
faceted rim



**sewing kit**

Mauchline ware  
*Terrace, Crystal Palace*



**narrow band**

shows flags  
patterned band at rim



**pinwheels & tape measure**

top left reverse glass: *Crystal Palace*  
top right reverse glass: *Crystal Palace Sydenham*  
bottom: sepia view





**sycamore Mauchline ware cotton reel box**  
*Horticultural Hall*



**bone basket pincushion**  
 with colour print  
*The Chrystal (sic) Palace, 1851*



**celluloid thimble case**  
*A present from The Crystal Palace*  
Charles Iles

R: different lettering  
 these would have been issued for subsequent  
 exhibitions as celluloid wasn't around until much later  
 in the century



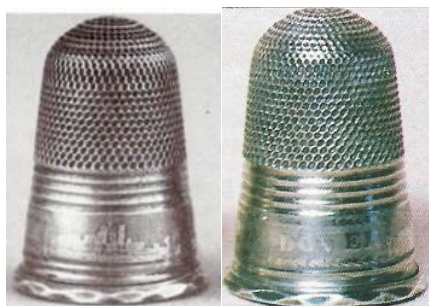
**brass-bound black leather thimble case**  
*Crystal Palace*  
*Souvenir lettered on the verso*  
 b&w photo



**sewing kit**  
*A Present from The Crystal Palace*

# Dover Castle

Holmes, in his *Thimble Notes and Queries* 1990, advises that some examples have the maker's marks in smaller letters James Woodhill for James and Josiah Cox Woodhill – they registered their mark June 1836



**very narrow band**  
lettering on back  
faceted rim



**very wide band**  
lettering above scene



**very wide band**  
lettering above scene



**very wide band**  
lettering above scene  
faceted rim



**very wide band**  
lettering above scene  
textured background to the scene



**very wide band**  
lettering above scene  
cartouche has been applied within the scene



## Dublin Exhibition 1853

also known as the Great Industrial Exhibition



**medium band**  
lettering around rim

## Exeter Cathedral

in Devon



**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
additional lettering – *Combe Martin silver*

according to Edwin Holmes: the lead/silver mines existed since Roman times at Combe Martin  
they were closed in 1848  
articles were occasionally marked in this way

# Exhibition of All Nations 1851

held in Hyde Park, London

the thimble design was registered by Alfred Taylor (Registered Design No 73871 of 1850)  
(this number was never lettered on his thimbles – they only contained his unique 1851 Diamond  
Registration Mark)

he also **made** the thimbles

see also: Crystal Palace  
and  
Great Exhibition ...



## **wide band**

lettering above scene  
showing his Diamond  
Registration Mark



## **wide band**

lettering above scene  
faceted rim



## **wide band**

lettering above scene  
rolled rim



## **wide band**

lettering above scene  
flags seem more  
prominent



## **wide band**

lettering above scene  
showing his Diamond Registration Mark



## **medium band**

lettering at rim

recently found by metal detectors  
at the Burnt Creek Diggings  
Sydenham Hill – Shire of Bromley  
in central Victoria Australia

these goldfields date from 1852  
if only it could tell us how it got to Australia  
it is dullish having lost its sheen after a long burial





### pinwheel

a raised/pressed paper picture in self-green of the wheel showing the Crystal Palace  
*Exhibition of All Nations 1851* lettered in raised letters in a circle  
*Peace on Earth and Good Will to Men* lettered around one of the circles  
*Peyton and Iles London and Birm. Iles's Patent'*

## Free Trade



### medium band

lettering above scene  
 with three-masted ship

## Great Exhibition Hyde Park 1851

London  
Peyton & Iles  
 see also: Crystal Palace  
 and  
 Exhibition of All Nations



### wide band

lettering around rim



### medium band

lettering around rim  
 horses in the scene



### narrow band

lettering around rim



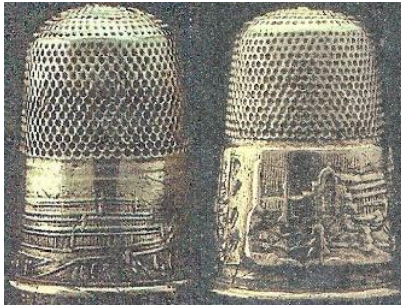
**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
showing the long building  
& some trees



**wide band**  
lettering around rim  
horses in the scene



**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
showing trees



**medium band**  
view showing a seated boy on the lawns and a  
walking girl



**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
showing the long building & trees



**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
small figures and animals all round above the lettering



**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
small figures and animals in relief all round above the lettering  
nickel silver





'Great Exhibition 1851 Silver Thimble' box  
with scene of the building

## International Exhibition 1862

held in South Kensington, London

George Cartwright and Horace Woodward of Birmingham registered the design (143397) of this thimble with 1862 Diamond Registration Mark

According to Aldridge the thimble was supplied in a red leather covered jeweller's box, with the jeweller's name on the outside 'By Appointment to the Queen Bennett Watchmaker and Goldsmith



**medium band**

lettering above scene  
with Diamond Registration mark



**medium band**

lettering around rim



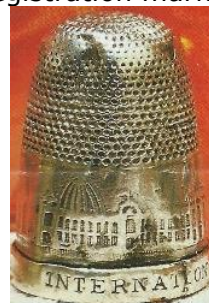
**medium band**

lettering around rim



**medium band**

lettering around rim  
with Diamond Registration mark – March 26 1861



**medium band**

lettering around rim



**box with two thimbles**

Charles Iles

produced for the 1862 Exhibition

George Henry Griffiths registered the design of this thimble #139132 on 26 March 1861 - the Registration Design mark never appeared on his thimbles



**narrow band**

lettering on verso

patterned rim

## Kenilworth Castle

in Warwickshire



**medium band**

lettering around rim





**tape measures**



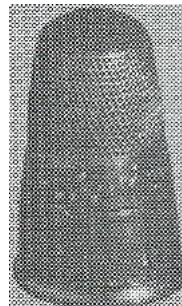
**tape measures**  
showing the Gatehouse

## [Killarney Castle]

in the winter 1979 issue of *Collector Circle Gazette*, I found this image from the New York 1920s collection of Mrs Mary Gallatin Hoppin  
it was described as Killarney Castle

I have no way of confirming the accuracy of this information, forty years on and the photo is VERY poor. Mary did leave a catalogue of her collection on her death in 1972

I can find no trace of a castle in Ireland of this name and with this blurry image ... there is however **Ross Castle** in the Killarney National Park, but it doesn't fit the image on the thimble.



**wide band**

# Lichfield Cathedral

in Staffordshire – well known for its three spires



## wide band

with pine trees completing the scene  
1840-1850



## medium band

lettering around rim  
includes two figures in the scene



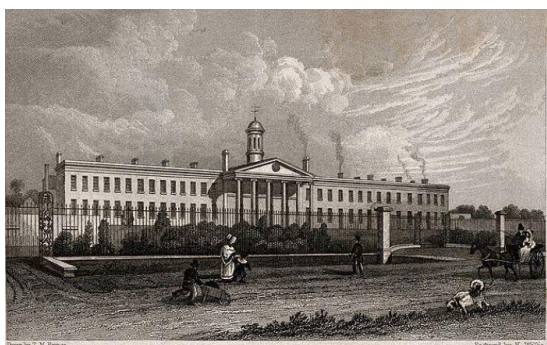
## Lincoln Cathedral



**wide band**

## L.V Asylum

Licensed Victuallers' Asylum, Kent Road  
the building is still in existence in 2017, in Old Kent Road Peckham in London



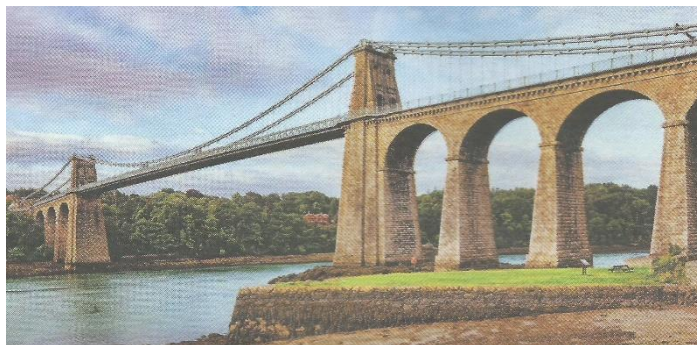
engraved by H Wallis 1830



**medium band**  
lettering around rim

## Menai Bridge

opened in 1825 the bridge links Anglesey to the Welsh mainland



**wide band**

## Newstead Abbey

founded as a monastery in the late twelfth century, Newstead became the Byron family seat in 1540 its most famous owner, the poet Lord Byron, sold the property in 1818. "Currently in the care of Nottingham Council, this impressive house retains the splendor of an important ancestral home, the mystique of an ancient monastery, and a vibrant sense of adventure left by its diversity of occupants - not forgetting the legendary 'White Lady', whose spirit still patrols the grounds!" so much confusion has arisen between thimbles for Abbotsford Abbey and these of Newstead Abbey, so only named thimbles are featured here.

Aldridge mentions a thimble lettered 'Newstead Aby the Reside of Lord Byron' but there is no accompanying photo



**wide band**

lettered above scene



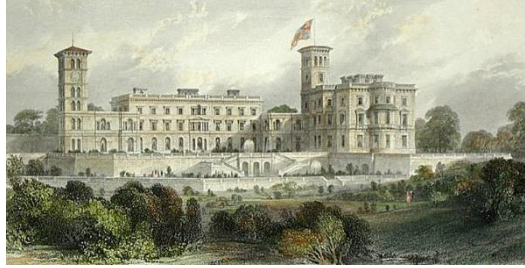
**medium band**

lettering above scene



# Osborne House Isle of Wight

Queen Victoria's home was completed in 1851



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim



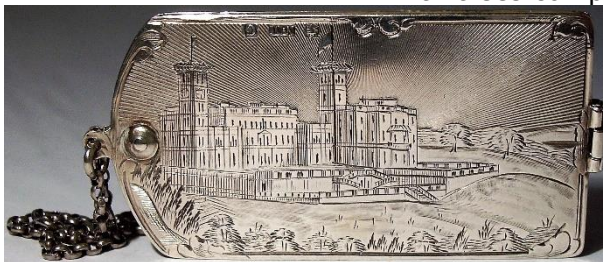
**narrow band**  
lettering around rim  
Samuel Foskett London 1901



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim  
with trees completing scene



**aide memoire**  
for attachment on chatelaine  
Nathaniel Mills Birmingham 1851



**card case**  
exquisitely detailed by George Unite  
1863  
is too lovely not to include

## Peterborough Cathedral



**medium band**  
lettering around rim

## Ramsgate Harbour

no photo

thimble is supposed to have bridge and sailboats in scene  
has anyone more knowledge on this thimble?  
In 1998, a poor image showed one for sale

## Royal Exchange

London



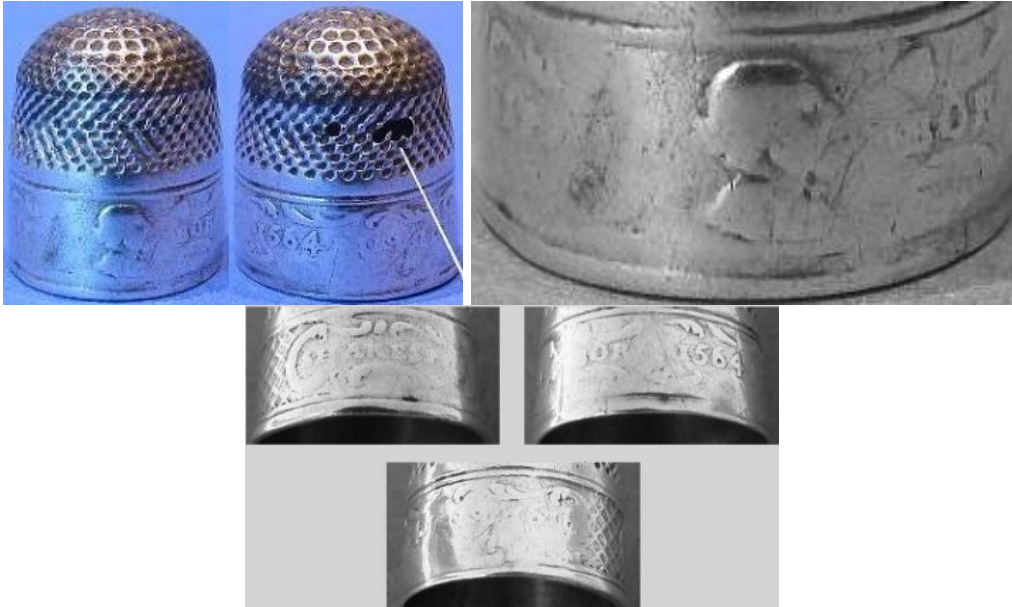
**medium band**  
1842

this was created for its opening  
is Wellington shown opening the Royal Exchange as described  
by Edwin Holmes in his *Thimble Notes and Queries* 1990



## Shakespeare Born 1564 Died 1616

RARE

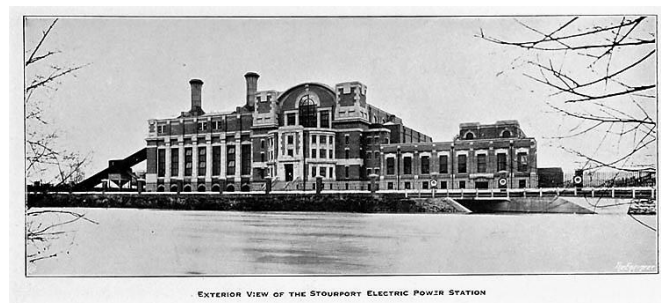


### medium band

lettering around rim the bust of Shakespeare in relief  
18<sup>th</sup> century steel-topped silver  
c. 1776 (not marked)  
height 2cm – weight 3 grams

## Stourport [Power Station]

situated on River Severn  
built in 1927 and demolished in 1980s



### Stourbridge oval brass needlecase

slim container with two turquoise plush lower compartments, with a padded insert for extra storage,  
for needles and pins  
a mirror in upper lid

# Sydenham Crystal Palace

the Crystal Palace was moved to Sydenham in London, for the 1854 Exhibition  
It remained there until 1936 when it was destroyed by fire on November 30<sup>th</sup>  
from recent research in 2020 it seems that items marked "A present from ..." were not from the original 1851 exhibition – I have placed them there until further information comes to hand

Birmingham silversmith Alfred Taylor of Great Howard Street, Birmingham registered the design for this thimble - Design #86699 dated September 18, 1852.



## narrower band

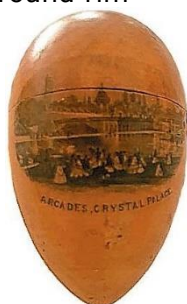
with 1852 Diamond Registration  
the registration mark appears above E of Palace  
lettering around rim



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim



**medium band**  
child's size



**Arcades, Crystal Palace**  
Mauchline egg-shaped thimble holder



**A Present from the Crystal Palace**  
pinwheel



**A Present from the Crystal Palace**  
Thomas Stevens Coventry velvet needlebook



## Thames Tunnel Opened Mar 25 1843

commemorates the first tunnel by Brunel – ever to go under a river – from Rotherhithe to Wapping, London

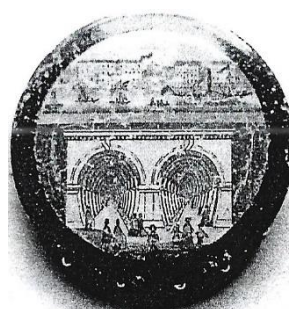
The tools – in black and white – are from *At Your Fingertips* – details from their owner



**very wide band**  
lettering on verso



**A present from the Thames Tunnel**  
beadwork on punched card pincushion



**pinwheel**  
showing shipping on Thames at top  
Tunbridgeware mosaic on verso



**From the Thames Tunnel**  
Rosewood needlecase  
also available in vegetable ivory



**Present the Thames Tunnel**  
Rosewood thimble case  
also available in vegetable ivory

# Thames Waterloo Bridge Blackfriars Southwark London Bridges

with the London city skyline in the background, showing four bridges and several recognisable buildings viz Somerset House and St Pauls Cathedral

old Waterloo Bridge opened on 18 June 1817 – Blackfriars Bridge of 1769 – Southwark Bridge of 1819 – old London Bridge which was replaced in 1830 so this thimble pre-dates 1830



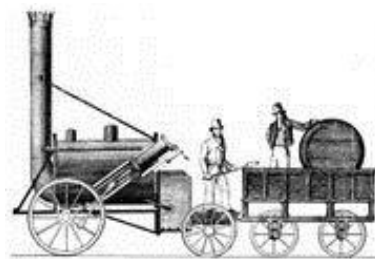
**medium band**

## The Rocket

thimbles show George & Robert Stephenson's Rocket - a locomotive steam engine - hauling the first train for the Liverpool & Manchester Railway -from 1829

all thimbles have the scene patterned over striations

According to Aldridge, there was an accompanying thimble box for one of these thimbles, there is an engraving of the train on the lid which is inscribed The Railway Thimble



**narrow band**

faceted rim

extra bands above and below scene



**narrow band**

patterned rim

extra bands above scene



**medium band**

patterned rim





**narrow band**  
extra bands above and below scene (train + 5 coaches)



**narrow band**  
child's size



**narrow band**  
faceted rim



**narrow band**  
extra rings above scene





**narrow band**  
child's size  
faceted rim



**very narrow band**  
faceted rim

## Tintern Abbey

in Monmouthshire



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim

## Victoria Fountain Brighton



**medium band**

lettering around rim

Samuel Foskett Chester 1890

## Victoria and Albert 1

first royal steam yacht – launched in 1843



**medium band**



**medium band**



**medium band**

## Visited the Double Tunnel 26 July 1843

this commemorates the visit by Queen Victoria to the new Brunel tunnel under the Thames, London



**medium band**

profile of Queen Victoria  
used as well as the wording



**medium band**

profile of Queen Victoria  
used as well as the wording  
with unusual rim

## Walr Scott

see also: Abbotsford House



**medium band**  
lettering around rim

## Waterloo

no photo

According to Aldridge this thimble has a bust of Wellington with Waterloo lettered on verso



## Wellington Born May 1 1769 Died Sep<sup>r</sup> 14 1852

commemorating Arthur Wellesley, the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Wellington featuring battle scenes with army formations



**medium band**  
lettering around rim



**narrow band**  
Duke of Wellington's funeral  
1852

# Westminster Abbey

seat of British coronations, London



**wide band**



**raised band**

James Swann & Son Birmingham 1970s-1990s  
with Westminster Abbey coat-of-arms



**wide band**



## Winchester Cathedral



**wide band**  
1830s

## Windsor/Windsor Castle

one of the homes of British monarchs, to the west of London



**wide band**  
lettering above scene 'Windsor'



**wide band**  
surrounded by trees





**wide band**  
lettering above scene  
'Windsor'  
faceted rim



**wide band**  
lettering above scene  
'Windsor'



**wide band**



**medium band**  
lettering above scene  
'Windsor'



**wide band**  
lettering above scene 'Windsor'



**medium band**  
lettering around rim  
Chester 1889



**medium band**  
lettering around rim 'Windsor'  
fingerguard



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim



**narrow band**  
lettering around rim  
Samuel Foskett London 1894/1898



**narrow band**  
with large tree  
lettering around rim



**very wide band**



**medium band**  
lettering around rim





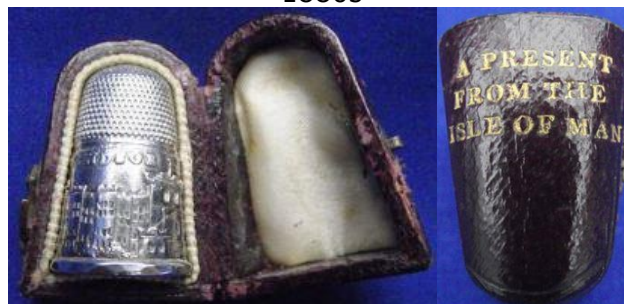
no ring above scene  
 Samuel Foscett London 1898



**wide band**  
 P&P Pope & Phelps  
 1880s



**medium band**  
 P&P Pope & Phelps  
 1880s



**wide band**  
 lettering above scene 'Windsor'  
 boxed version  
 box lettered  
*A Present from the Isle of Man*



**medium band**  
 lettering above scene 'Windsor'  
 with the scenic band being raised  
 S(T) TCG Swann Thimbles for Thimble Collectors Guild Birmingham 1996-1998



**narrow band**  
lettering above scene 'Windsor'  
Louise patterning



**very wide band**

## York Minster



**tape measure**

## York Destroyed Feb<sup>ry</sup>. 2nd 1829

York Minster was destroyed by fire



**medium band**





## Whitby Abbey



Ralph Weston Edinburgh 1999  
with jet stone apex

## Unknown scenes and buildings

Are they just generic scenes?

### boat on river



**medium band**

### breakwater

it's like one of the Brighton Chain Pier scenes?



**medium band**

bridge – buoy – tower two figures in a rowing boat – three-  
masted ship



**medium band**

## buildings

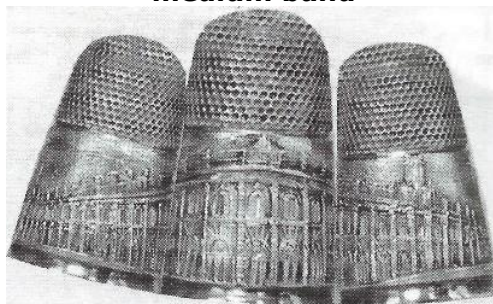
which castle or building are these?



**wide band**



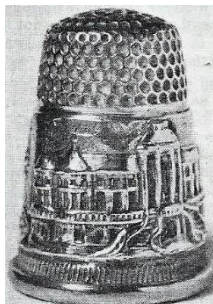
**medium band**



**wide band**

it is possible that this building no longer exists?

In 2019 there has been suggestion that this is the 19<sup>th</sup> century Harrods building in London  
If so, this would be a very stylised scene, as the Harrods building has many more floors than shown on  
this mystery thimble



this is a thimble made in Germany

## train on bridge



**medium band**  
George Unite  
silver-gilt

## wave-lashed seawall with steamship and rowboat

it's like one of the Brighton Chain Pier scenes?



**medium band**



## windmill with church and watermill and tree



medium band  
1850s

### References

Norma Spicer & Diane Pelham Burn *British registered design thimbles*. 2003

### Contributors

Bleasdales Ltd | Susan Dempster | Ewan | Kit Froebel | Julie Hollick | William Isbister | Gail and Grahame Jago  
Mildred Jarvis | Caroline Meacham-Elegant Arts | Ray Nimmo | Molly Pearce | Judy Pollitt  
Wolf-Dieter Scholz | Helen Shyers | Norma Spicer | Barbra Wallace | Cathy Wood

This listing of Sterling silver scenic 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.

EMAIL [thimbleselect@bigpond.com](mailto:thimbleselect@bigpond.com) TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

© Sue Gowan  
January 2008