

Thimble Craft by Shirley porcelain thimbles

My mail-order thimble business, Thimbleselect was 'born' in May 1987 and shortly afterwards I was contacted by Shirley Hewett to ask if I would be her South African thimble agent. As I knew we would be migrating to Australia later that year, I had to decline. By sheer serendipity I was visiting England shortly afterwards and was able to talk to Shirley and Martin – sadly, there was no time for a visit to Ilford in Essex to meet them in person. Martin had joined Shirley in the business, and he registered their business name of Thimble Craft.

By the time I had settled in Australia, there was another thimble agent for Shirley's thimbles in Australia.

I was familiar with the porcelain thimbles from Thimble Craft by Shirley. Her thimbles were featured on a regular basis in *The Thimble Collectors Guild* - later known as *The Thimble Guild* - catalogues from Biggar in Scotland. My copies of the Guild's catalogues date back to 1983 with the first issue, but a recent check of their catalogues from 1983, Shirley's thimbles were not being promoted by the Guild in 1983, 1984 or 1985, so around July 1986 has to be her starting date? By August 1993 thimbles from Shirley seemed to have ceased, as they were no longer appearing for sale monthly in The Guild catalogues - was that the end of her thimble production?

I am now finding that The Guild still commissioned special commemoratives from Shirley – ie 95th birthday of the Queen Mother in August 1995 and then they continued appearing for sale again in late 1996: again with innovations that Shirley thrived on creating for collectors.

Shirley and Martin Hewett were familiar faces to English thimble collectors, as Shirley's thimbles were also sold by them at fairs around England.

Reading back thru old issues of *The Thimble Exchange Circle* I found a story by Shirley from April 1987. About a year before that date (which confirms the dates above) she decided to start a craft of her own, moving from being 'a bored housewife'. Once her husband Martin began creating thimble moulds for her, Shirley the thimble creator was off! Their most popular thimbles were the ones with jewels in the apex.

I have tried to feature thimbles from Thimble Craft in the order they were issued ie by following the order from The Guild's newsletters and any errors are mine alone. Shirley's output was original, and she never stopped experimenting and I know that I have only touched the tip of the iceberg!! Her thimbles appeared in The Guild catalogues for sale monthly during 1989, so that year would have been the zenith of production from this talented maker of thimbles for the collectables market. After that they were featured sporadically until November 1996.

Since creating this topic, I have just added any new thimble finds by collectors in the order that they have been sent to me – apologies, as this is a very random order. No official names exist to alphabetise the names and with no date of manufacture, I am still searching for a better system.

I have used the thimble names used in the mail order catalogues and those Dutch or German titles found in *Vingerhoed Nieuws* - whether these were Shirley's or from marketers, who knows?

Vingerhoed Nieuws was run by Friedy and Gerard Kamp in the Netherlands and they commissioned thimbles from Shirley with Dutch lettering.

For most of the time that The Guild promoted Thimble Craft thimbles, they spelled her surname 'Hewitt'. It was only from June 1990 that her correctly-spelled name of **Hewett** was used! This has led to many errors by collectors over the years.

Shirley also produced thimble holders and the most commonly found shape is a shoe - this sometimes combined a pincushion into the heel of the shoe.

Shirley's thimbles have sometimes been described as handpainted, but as far as I can ascertain, most of her designs were commercially available decals.

As her expertise grew, Shirley created many novelty - fun - thimbles.

A Google search reveals that Shirley and Martin Hewett now produce cufflinks and spoons using coins and operate under the name Coin Jewellers. They have been doing this for the past 15 years (in 2013).

If you have photos in colour to replace the black and white ones, I'd love to hear from you - or if you know the dates they were made - or any other info - please share!

I had no idea that Shirley produced so many commemoratives - did you? Most have surfaced since I created this topic!!

Does anyone know what the coloured stones in the apexes of Shirley's thimbles are made of - are they crystals by Swarovski?

If you are a member of **Thimble Collectors International**, please be sure to re-read Mave Wiskin's excellent article in the Spring 2009 issue of the **TCI Bulletin**.



Some of Shirley's thimbles are dependent on batteries to perform as planned. These include musical or clock thimbles. Being made largely over 30 years ago, the thimble will long out last the battery.

Arranged in the date order they were offered for sale by the TCG/TTG

I have used the thimble names used in the TCG/TTG catalogues
1986-1996



Jewelled Bouquet

blue porcelain
seven stones set into the apex
July 1986



Black Bouquet

black and silver-grey porcelain
seven stones set into the apex
September 1986



Christmas 1986

mistletoe & holly
seven red stones set into the apex
December 1986
with & without gold rim



Shades of Blue

blue porcelain
seven sapphire blue stones set into the apex
February 1987



clog thimble holders with floral pattern
also available with turquoise ground
date of manufacture unknown



Pretty in Pink

seven pink crystals with pink roses and leaves of gold and silver
May 1987



Thimble Whistle

a whistle incorporated into apex
small size
July 1987



Amber Rose

orange roses
seven amber stones set into the apex
22ct gold band
August 1987



Last Rose of Summer

hexagonal-shaped porcelain
seven pink crystals set into the apex
October 1987



Perfumed Thimble

fine bone china
some designs named Oriental Rose
the porous top within the apex
making the thimble very shallow
scented rose oil
22ct gold band
January 1988



Finger Guard

porcelain with lilac flowers
cutaway for longer nails
22ct gold bands
February 1988



Green Crystal Rose

porcelain
seven green crystals set into the apex
22ct gold band
March 1988



Floral Magnetic Thimble

pale pink porcelain
concealed magnet in apex
22ct gold bands
April 1988
also sold by Feldmann no.15, 1991



Green and White porcelain Frog

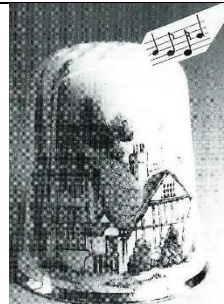
two colour porcelain - matt apex
22ct gold bands
April 1988



Little Dutch Thimble Girl
porcelain with two thimble pails
one with a pincushion
pins taped to her back
22ct gold bands
3 inches high
June 1988
also sold by Feldmann no.7 1988
R photo: B Kelly



Butterfly on Rose
pink porcelain and bone china
gold bands
July 1988



Musical
plays *No place like home*
when opening on apex
is exposed to light
large size = 42mm
August 1988

R: b&w photo Feldmann no. 8 1988



Digitabulist at Night
black porcelain
22ct gold band
available in two sizes
1450 made
October 1988



Thimble Shoe with buckle
brown/black porcelain thimble holder
includes pincushion in heel
22ct gold decoration
the thimble is smaller than usual
495 made
December 1988



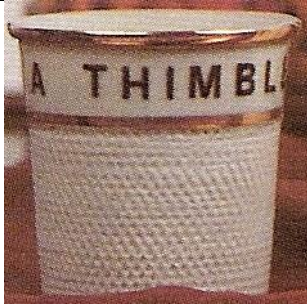
Thimble Fairy
porcelain
3 22ct gold bands
1/2 inch/14mm high
January 1989
see also: Klein Duimje and Elfe
Vingerhut
also sold by Feldmann No 10, 1989



'Cat' Thimble Holder
porcelain
22ct gold decoration
950 made
February 1989
thimbles fit in either way



For a Good Girl
porcelain
January 1989



Just a Thimbleful

grey porcelain
22ct gold bands
33mm high
March 1989

see Dutch version: Een Vingerhoed Vol



Thimble Ring

porcelain tailor's thimble
indented on the reverse
22ct gold bands
1000 made

also available with maroon flowers
April 1989



Festival of Food & Farming 1989

commemorative
porcelain
22ct gold decoration
Shirley attended this festival, held in Hyde Park
taller shape
May 1989



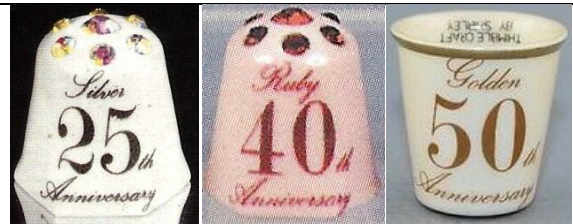
Yellowhammer

2 forms of porcelain - matt apex
22ct gold bands
June 1989



Hedgehog

2 forms of porcelain - black matt apex
22ct gold bands
July 1989



Silver, Ruby or Gold Anniversary

hexagonal cream porcelain for silver
seven crystals set into the apex
the ground and crystal colour match lettering
silver (25th) - ruby (40th) - gold (50th)
the gold one has also been made with no crystals
and lettered upside down
October 1989



Home Sweet Home

porcelain
C: pale pink apex
available in two colourways
October 1989
see also: Oost west thuis best (Dutch)



Merry Xmas 1989

porcelain



Thimble Clock

pewter

cogs, sprigs, cogs and sprockets
in relief with names of famous horologists
open lid to reveal working digital clock
when Shirley sent my digital thimble clock, she
had set it to Australian time!!

March 1990

see also porcelain version: Vingerhoed met
urewerkje (Dutch)

also sold by Feldmann no 14, 1990



Imagination

bowed and fluted hexagonal porcelain

22ct gold band

small size

May 1990



Meissen

porcelain

hand indented

22ct gold bands - different patterns on band

950 made

June 1990



90th Birthday Queen Mother

with slipper thimble holder

cobalt porcelain

August 1990



Hampton Court Palace Flower Festival 1993

golden rose

cobalt porcelain

August 1990



"Tulips from Amsterdam" Musical

windmills - different styles

porcelain

plays the above tune

when opening on apex

is exposed to light

large size = 42mm

backstamp on verso

October 1991

the plastic base protects the battery mechanism



Sweetheart

orange rose
yellow porcelain
seven orange crystals set into apex
slight variations, including hexagonal
September 1993



Floral Finger

porcelain
July 1995



95th Birthday Queen Mother

cobalt porcelain
August 1995
same image as 1990 – different lettering on verso



Miracle Thimble 1

white flower
black porcelain
the innovative miracle – in direct sunlight the
flower changes colour and reverts to white when
removed from light
no stones in apex as July 1986 version
October 1996



Miracle Thimble 2/Chameleon

blue flower on black ground
the miracle – hold it to the light or warm it and the
flower changes colour!
large size
November 1996
(clever German title indicates the colour changes)



Musical

Snowman
tunes play: Jingle bells – Santa Claus is coming to
town – We wish you're a Merry Christmas
porcelain
with instructions for use
large size
limited to 400
November 1996

This is the end of thimbles offered monthly in The Thimble Guild catalogues

Arranged in commemorative date order



Dickens Festival 1990



Merry Christmas 1991

with poinsettia

porcelain

made exclusively for the Thimble Society of London

see also ... 1992 for similar design

and 1991 German: Frohe Weihnachten 1991 –

Dutch: Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991



Frohe Weihnachten 1991 (German)

porcelain

see also English: Merry Christmas 1991 and Dutch
Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991



Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991 (Dutch)

porcelain



Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991 (Dutch)

with poinsettia

porcelain

see also English: Merry Christmas 1991 and
German: Frohe Weihnachten 1991

b&w photo



Beatrix & Klaus 1966-1991

silver lettering with a crown over verso lettering

'10 Maart'

porcelain

b&w photo



Hampton Ct Palace Flower Show 1991

porcelain



The ASDA Festival of Food & Farming 1992

porcelain



The ASDA Festival of Food & Farming 1992

porcelain



Hampton Ct Palace Flower Show 1992

porcelain



Frohe Weihnachten 1992 (German)
porcelain



Merry Christmas 1992
porcelain

similar pattern to 1991 thimbles-different date



Queen Elizabeth II
40th Anniversary of Coronation 1953-1993
cobalt porcelain
May 1993

Unknown date of manufacture – with lettering

if your thimble here shows a date – please share



Dickens Festival
porcelain



Een Vingerhoed Vol (Dutch)
grey porcelain
22ct gold bands
33mm high
see also: Just A Thimble full



Elfe Vingerhut (German)
porcelain
3 22ct gold bands
1/2 inch/14mm high
see also: Klein Duimje and Thimble Fairy



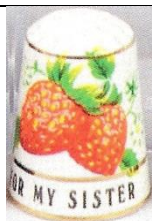
Elke Dag een Draadje
(Dutch: A thread every day/A stitch in time saves nine)
pink porcelain



For my Friend
porcelain



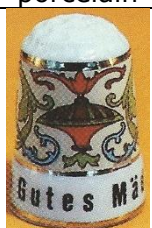
For my Sister
floral posy
porcelain



For my Sister
strawberries
porcelain



Fur's Paw
porcelain in a cobalt blue glass German clog
thimble holder



Gutes Mädchen (German: Good Girl)
porcelain



Home Sweet Home
porcelain
presumably when made the battery operated
thimble 'sang' like a bird



Klein Duimje (Dutch: Tom Thumb)
porcelain
see also: Thimble fairy



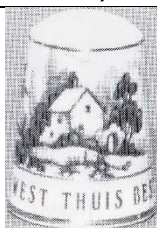
Mozart
porcelain



Mum
porcelain with red crystal set into apex



Mums Thimble
porcelain



Oost West Thuis Best (Dutch: East west home
is best)
Porcelain
see also: Home Sweet Home
b&w photo



Stitch in Time
porcelain



TEC - Thimble Exchange Circle
cobalt porcelain



Veel Geluk (Dutch Good luck)
lucky shamrocks
porcelain

Unknown date of manufacture – no lettering
roughly grouped by SHAPE

ROUND SHAPE



bird
porcelain



orange roses
yellow porcelain



floral
porcelain



white flower
cobalt blue porcelain
no stones in apex
like 1986 version



floral
pink porcelain



floral
porcelain
large size



orange rose
green porcelain
seven green crystals set
into apex



gold rose
black porcelain
no gold rim
gold crystal set into
apex



large white flower
pale green porcelain
no gold trim



thimble ring
cobalt porcelain



holly and mistletoe
no stones like Christmas
1986



shamrocks



red flower
porcelain



Ebony Rose
pink porcelain
seven purple crystals set
into apex



white flowers & leaves
green porcelain
L: gold solid painted rim



bird



blue rose



mini
yellow porcelain

light blue porcelain		1/2 inch / 14mm high	
	applied yellow rose cobalt porcelain		cat porcelain topaz-coloured crystal set into apex
	Fragonard scene yellow porcelain		Fragonard scene porous apex
	Fragonard scene glass funny that Shirley still kept her porcelain backstamp!!	no photo	Siamese cat two forms of porcelain - black matt apex
	poodles porcelain		applied butterfly pink porcelain
 <p>finger-shaped green porcelain – and yellow primrose, pink rose, blue forget-me-nots, white snowdrops different flower decals</p>			
	months of the year May yellow porcelain		signs of the zodiac Aries/Leo different porcelain colours some with clear crystal set into apex porcelain
 <p>salt (S) and pepper (P) cruet set porcelain</p>			
	gold rings green porcelain		beehive ridged yellow porcelain
 <p>letters of the alphabet set porcelain A – astronaut B – balloons X - xylophone</p>			



Scottish piper
porcelain with porous apex



flowers all round
pink crystal set into apex
porcelain



clog thimble holder with bird
porcelain
thimble stands on closed end



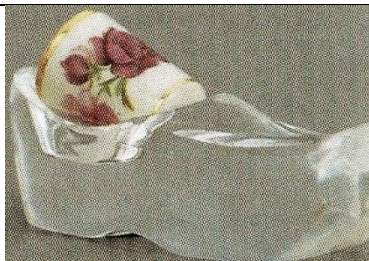
nursery rhymes
Humpty Dumpty – Old Mother Hubbard –
Tom Tom the Piper's son
larger size 40mm
backstamp on outside of thimble



decal advertising
Crescent Cycles
all round
porcelain



unknown gold symbol
black porcelain



German crystal clog thimble holder with a mini
roses thimble



Vingerhoed met urewerkje (Dutch)
cogs, sprigs, cogs and sprockets
in relief with names of famous horologists
open lid to reveal working digital clock
see also pewter version: Thimble Clock
b&w photo



seven blue crystals
white flower on pale ground
black trim rim
slightly fluted

HEXAGONAL SHAPE (six sides)



lily of the valley
porcelain



primroses
yellow porcelain
heavy rim



white flower
turquoise porcelain/no gold trim



floral – different posies
pink porcelain / white porcelain
three-ridges rim



red flowers all round
green porcelain with rim



holly and mistletoe
white porcelain
no stones like Christmas 1986



Celtic design
green porcelain



narrow band of roses
three-ridges rim



peony
seven multicoloured crystals set
in apex
porcelain



harebells
pink porcelain



posies



green rose
seven green crystals set into
apex
porcelain



bold coloured flowers
blue porcelain



violets
seven purple crystals into
apex
porcelain



holly and mistletoe
green porcelain

References

Feldmann *Die Fingerhut Post/The Thimble Mail* 1988-
Know your thimble suppliers Shirley Hewett. The Thimble Exchange Circle April 1987
The Thimble Guild *catalogues*
Mave Wiskin *A passion for Shirley Thimbles! TCI Bulletin* spring 2009

Contributors

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This listing of Thimble Craft by Shirley porcelain 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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