

# Royal Crown Derby thimbles

William Duesbury founded the Derby porcelain factory back around 1750 in the town of Derby in England. In 1770 and 1776 Duesbury expanded by buying up the Chelsea and Bow factories.

There were no thimbles produced by Royal Crown Derby [RCD] until the 20th century around 1983. They were taken over and owned by the Royal Doulton Group [of Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire] from 1985. The Doulton stable thru mergers included Minton, John Beswick, Caithness Glass, Royal Crown Derby and Royal Albert. From 2000 Royal Crown Derby is once again an independent company. This is the same company that took over the Stevenson and Hancock factory in 1935, which had been operational since 1848.

Well that opening statement was true when I first composed this page on RCD, but two recent treasures have turned up with thimbles with a 1936 and a 1940 date. The latter is an intriguing date as England was in the heart of World War II. Have you ever encountered another RCD with a date earlier than 1983? The Thimble Society of London in their spring 1985 issue, mentions an Imari patterned thimble that dates to 1920s-1930, but these two finds bear the modern red date maker's marks for Royal Crown Derby.

In 1981 when the Franklin Mint thimbles set of Porcelain Houses of the World was commissioned, Royal Doulton and Royal Albert thimbles were included in the set of 25, but no thimble by RCD. By 1985 when the Thimble Collectors Club commissioned the Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Great Porcelain Houses, Minton, Royal Doulton, Royal Albert and Royal Crown Derby thimbles were included in the set of 50.

In 1986, RCD began production of sets of fine bone china thimbles that reflect the patterns from the old Derby Porcelain pattern books of their dinnerware range.

Most of their thimbles are marked inside with a Roman numeral and this helps collectors identify matching sets. Or does it? A puzzle has arisen as some identical thimbles have a different Roman number. In 1937 Royal Crown Derby introduced a dating system for their products. In 1937 items were marked with the Roman numeral I and so on for each year. If an item is marked L [=50], add this to 1937 and the date of manufacture is 1987. This is a really unique feature, as one can now tell exactly when our thimbles were made - ie that it was part of the original issue or not.

In 2000 RCD changed their policy to one using the actual Roman numeral to correspond with the year of manufacture eg. MM for 2000.



L=1987



MM=2000

The first series of six was produced in 1986 and continued in manufacture until 1993, which explains the differing Roman numerals in identically patterned thimbles. The set was named **The Derby Collection**. This launch was so successful amongst thimble collectors, that another larger set was commissioned Lawleys by Post, the commercial arm of Royal Doulton, who promoted the second series of fifteen, produced in 1986. The collection is named **The Historical Thimble Collection**.

A booklet written by Betty Bailey [A collection of thimbles](#) accompanied this set. The book lists the thimbles with the name assigned and a brief description of the origins of the patterns. I have included the dates that Derby first introduced the original pattern. No pattern names are in the thimbles, so the names can only be found in Bailey's booklet or in the original advertisements from Lawleys by Post. Once separated, the naming becomes impossible. I have recorded them here for posterity.

It was lovely to be alerted by collectors to **The Chatsworth Collection** by RCD. This is a set of twelve thimbles - in more pastel shades than the earlier series. They were produced for Lawleys by Post in 1995 and designed by the RCD artist, Sue Rowe. They all are named but these names are again not marked inside the thimbles. Nor are they marked with a Roman numeral as are most of the other Royal Crown Derby thimbles, but they do have a second backstamp for Chatsworth House in the same colour as the RCD stamp. In addition, the word 'Chatsworth' appears under the RCD backstamp. These designs are all based on a flower and the motifs come from the interior of the mansion of the Duke and Duchess of Devon who own Chatsworth House in Derbyshire.

Then there is a **The Curator's Collection** of six thimbles. This set was issued in 1999, bearing the Roman numerals LXII.

The shape of the RCD thimbles conforms to the later thimbles made by Royal Doulton. These are squatter than the original Doulton thimbles produced in the early 1980s. These RCD thimbles are richly gilded with 22-carat gold and the colours reflect the rich colours one has come to associate with RCD merchandise.

The apexes have gilding of the indentations, making them quite distinctive. There is a slight variation between the first and subsequent sets, in the apex gilding. If you have several RCD thimbles, it will be worth your while to compare these gold-dotted apexes - they are different enough to be an identifying "tool" for you. If you have a photo of the apexes of other sets, please share.

The patterning goes around the thimble, usually repeating the design. Where this is not the case, I have shown the other side.

Does anyone know whether RCD are currently producing thimbles? We know from thimbles using the RCD dating system they were still producing thimbles in 2002 [MMII]. Aren't these Royal Crown Derby thimbles some of the 'richest' looking thimbles you have encountered, in all their deep jewel colours? In the collectables market, Royal Crown Derby are primarily associated with their range of animal paperweights in their rich colours and some of this uniqueness is reflected in their range of thimbles.

## 19th Century thimbles

It is extremely rare to find thimbles marked with the maker's mark for early Derby thimbles. Some of them have the red maker's marks for Stevenson and Hancock at the King Street, Derby factory (1848-1935).

The apex of these older thimbles is not glazed, and the indentations are plainly visible.

 <p><b>handpainted</b></p>	 <p><b>handpainted</b> flowers with insects **</p>
 <p><b>Stevenson &amp; Hancock</b> mauve maker's marks indentations unglazed</p>	 <p><b>Stevenson &amp; Hancock</b> from 19th century one with and one without upper gold line</p>



**Stevenson & Hancock**

handpainted flowers with insects c.1900  
 (\*\* is this the same thimble from 1810 as featured below in the Mary Hoppin collection?)



**Derby Stevenson & Hancock**

handpainted roses  
 mauve maker's marks



violas with insects  
 unglazed apex



**Stevenson & Hancock**  
 handpainted pansy  
 red maker's marks 1900s  
 (in Derby Museum)



handpainted pansy floral border



**Stevenson & Hancock**  
 handpainted  
 red maker's marks  
 indentations unglazed



**Stevenson & Hancock** handpainted  
 red maker's marks 1900s



**Stevenson & Hancock**  
 handpainted  
 red maker's marks  
 unglazed apex

During this Covid19 lockdown, there has been heaps of time to work on thimble topics. I am blessed to have accumulated the old thimble catalogues from the 1970s, from friends who began collecting thimbles before I did, in the 1970s. I have always "known" that there were two thimble collectors in New York in the 1920s.

I was delighted to find that the *Collector Circle Gazette* devoted several issues to featuring the collection of **Mrs Mary Gallatin Hoppin**. Sadly, I don't have all the issues of this period where Roz Belford, a thimble dealer, also of New York, featured Mary's collection. My eyes were drawn to her large collection of early Derby thimbles. Tho the images are all in black and white, I want to save them for posterity, by including them here. Maybe they will surface again, and we will have the pleasure of seeing the colours of these amazing old thimbles. The images are over 40 years old, so please forgive me. I have included any descriptions Mary left which include dates. There are no details of the Derby marks.

Who was the second thimble collector of New York in 1920s?

**The Mrs Mary Gallatin Hoppin collection of early Derby Thimbles**



Copyright  
Alamy  
Mrs. Hoppin with her knitting cabinet bearing the thimbles of which she was the only collector in the American household of 1920s.

1903-1972

<p><b>1730</b> Chinese motif pale green edge</p>	<p><b>1730</b> tiny flowers</p>	<p><b>1750</b> sea scene purple and tan edge</p>	<p><b>1790</b> flowers</p>	<p><b>1800</b> finch</p>
<p><b>1800</b> flowers and insects **</p>	<p><b>1800 **</b></p>	<p><b>1810</b> flowers and dots</p>	<p><b>1810</b> bird</p>	<p><b>1810</b> finch</p>
<p><b>1810</b> flower</p>	<p><b>1810</b> flowers gold tip</p>	<p><b>1810</b> pale pink</p>	<p><b>1810</b> red lines</p>	<p><b>1810</b> rose</p>
<p><b>1815</b> forget-me-nots around top pink rim at bottom</p>	<p><b>1825</b> A present from Carnaevon in gold</p>		<p><b>1840</b> pink with flowers</p>	

## Early 20th Century thimbles

1937 - 1982

at this stage only two pre-1983 thimbles have emerged with the distinctive red RCD backstamp with date lettering



**1936**

indentations unglazed



**1940**

handpainted  
apex unglazed

## 1983

XLVI

This thimble marks the earliest of the modern era thimbles. All modern RCD have their indentations glazed and the gold-painted dot indentations are painted under this glaze.

There is no gold handpainted rim.



Is this a Christmas thimble?

# 1983

XLVI

These 1983 handpainted thimbles which have only come to light in 2017, are handpainted.

The pastel colours don't scream Royal Crown Derby, do they?

They have the usual gold dots on the apex under the glaze but no gold handpainted rims

The painter's initials - SK - are included alongside the RCD mark



three flowers all round



three similar bouquets around this design

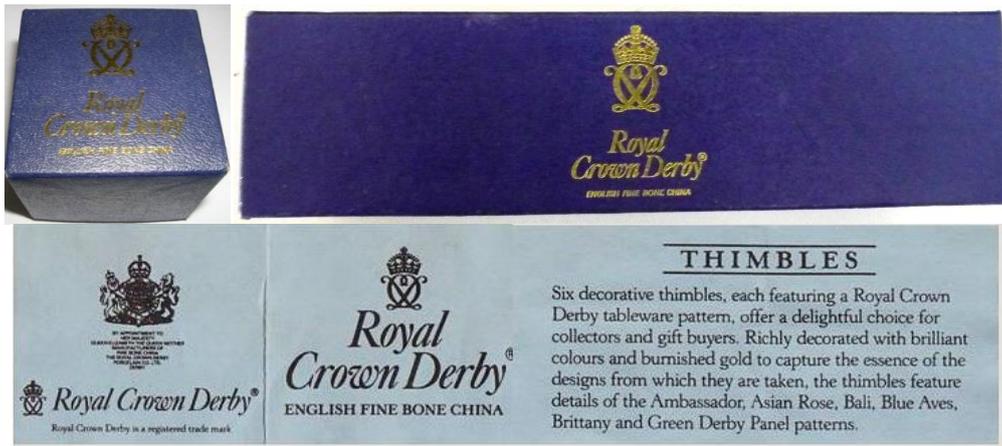


# The Derby Collection

1986 - 1999

XLIX - LXII

the set was produced over 14 years, with variations



 <p><b>Ambassador</b></p>	 <p><b>Asian Rose</b></p>	 <p><b>Bali</b></p>	
 <p><b>Blue Aves</b></p>	 <p><b>Brittany</b></p>	 <p><b>Derby Panel Green</b></p>	

A second set of The Derby Collection with a different gold apex has been recorded.

The designs are similar to those above. Some dates for this set range from 1993-1995 [LVI-LVIII].  
The second set – shown at rear below – Ambassador is the most different with the flower being a deeper red.



**Two versions of The Derby Collection set – original at front**

## **The Historical Thimble Collection**

**1985 - 1993**

XLVIII - LVI

The booklet that accompanied this set of 15, was printed in 1986, but I have found thimbles in this set with an earlier date 1985 [The Moth].

The set was commissioned and marketed by Lawleys by Post in England.

Each boxed thimble is supplied with an explanatory leaflet about the design.  
Quaintly, the name of each design is prefixed by 'The'!

The dates included with each photo are those of the date Derby first introduced that pattern to their range of fine dinnerware.

This covers 250 years of patterns.

The set was supplied with a wooden stand in the shape of a reel stand with a pincushion at the top, the other sets had individual thimble boxes.



Historical Thimble Collection boxes



**The Art Deco**  
1900



**The Art Nouveau**  
1890



**The Billingsley Roses**  
1790



**The Blue and Chinoiserie**  
1765



**The Diamond**



**The Flower Sprig**  
1752



**The Golden Flower**  
1795



**The Imari Scroll**  
1880



**The Moses Webster**  
1825



**The Moth**  
1760



**The Old Imari**  
1880



**The Purple Scroll**  
1947



**The Spiral Stripe**  
1890



**The Traditional Imari**  
1889



**The Victorian Persian**  
1888

# The Chatsworth Collection

1995

with no Roman numeral



 <p><b>American Cowslip</b></p>	 <p><b>Anemone</b></p>	 <p><b>Azalea</b></p>
 <p><b>Camellia</b></p>	 <p><b>Crocus</b></p>	 <p><b>Daffodil</b></p>
 <p><b>Honeysuckle</b></p>	 <p><b>Michaelmas Daisies</b></p>	 <p><b>Orchid</b></p>
 <p><b>Pansy</b></p>	 <p><b>Water Lily</b></p>	 <p><b>Weymouth Pine</b></p>

## The Curator's Collection

1996 - 2002

LIX - MMII



**Acanthus**



**Derby Garden**



**Derby Old Japan**



**Pardoe**



**Rich Japan**



**Tree of Life**

## Others

1983 - 2000

XLIII - MM



**Thimble Collectors Club**

**Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Great Porcelain Houses**

1985 [with no Roman numeral]



**Do you recognise these thimbles? Where do they fit in – one of the sets?**

1985 [XLVIII] - 1986 [LV]



**Thimble Collectors Club**

XLIX [1986]



**Pair commemorating Marriage  
Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson**  
the centre view is on the verso of both thimbles  
1986 (with no Roman numeral)



**Pair**  
**Queen Victoria and Prince Albert**  
Queen Victoria accession 20th June 1837  
Prince Albert Consort to Queen Victoria 1840-1861  
with gold George crosses on apex  
limited to 5000 sets  
L [1987]



**Posies**

LIV - LXI [1991-1998]  
 where do these fit in?



with RCD thimbles coming from one stable  
 which includes Minton and Royal Doulton thimbles  
 this thimble is incorrectly marked - poor quality control!!  
 the design of the thimble is the Quinquifolium one of Minton's Pugin set  
 it has the RCD backstamp and it is dated LVIII [1995]  
 does this make it a second?



**Fern**



**Tree Peony**

**Pair**

commissioned by **Times Past**  
 LIX [1996]



**Pair**

**Queen Elizabeth II Golden Wedding Anniversary**  
 1947 1997  
 limited to 950 sets  
 LX [1997]



MM [2000]

### Yorkshire Rose

commissioned by Peter Jones China of Yorkshire to commemorate the Millennium  
a similar design to the Old Imari design but the Yorkshire Rose replaces the red solid rose in the earlier set from 1985

no photo

Christmas 1979 with holly  
can this be a correct date?



this is a very interesting and gorgeous find  
there is a puce backstamp with crossed swords  
the gold lettering is  
Derby Feb. 20th 1928  
it's not a Royal Crown Derby thimble but what a treasure!

## References

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This listing of Royal Crown Derby 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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