

Horn and bone thimbles

This is another thematic topic, this time bringing together the makers of horn and bone thimbles and various types of each used.

Edwin Holmes owned a 19th century Indian-made horn thimble. From these early examples below I was able to straighten out in my mind what horn thimbles should look like. They are of a dark mottled colour.



L: 19th century Indian ox horn

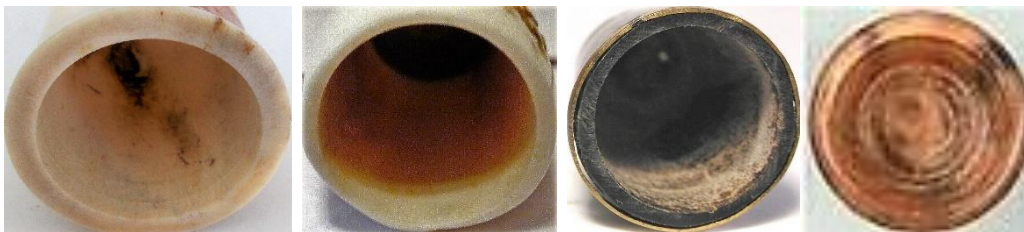
In the 21st century there have been many cow bone or bovine thimbles made of a very pale colour, almost resembling ivory (and can be mistaken for ivory once their labels have been lost).

In the 1990s, thimbles of synthetic material replacing real ivory appeared on the market. I have seen them advertised as horn. Examples are included here as a buyer beware.



synthetic ivory – polymer or synthetic material Melissa Hookway (MH)

The inside of a horn and bone thimble will be darker or have a chalk-like appearance.



elk – red deer – buffalo - reindeer

Horn and bone thimbles are made of animal material from the horn, antler or hoof.

water buffalo – cow or cattle – buffalo – yak, are composed of keratin (horn) – the term bovine covers all these animals

red deer stag - elk- moose – any of the African buck, have antlers (bone)

Thimbles can be left natural or be scrimshawed, etched, handpainted. Some makers combine horn and bone in their thimbles.

Like all natural materials used for thimbles, the material will always reveal a hidden colour awaiting polishing to bring out the natural beauty.



showing natural reindeer rim

No two horn or bone thimbles are ever the same.

Horn and bone is naturally hollow with only the tip having a closed end. This means that other than a thimble made from the tip, all will have to be filled with a different material to create a thimble apex or a separate piece of bone. One thimble in a Gimbels catalogue inadvertently stated "... Thompson can only make one thimble from one antler."

Most are made in two parts, which is the only practical way to use horn and bone to make thimbles. I have been surprised by the variety of the apex materials that these thimble makers have used.

Thimbles made of animal tooth or tusk, which include elephant and whale ivory, hippo etc - none are included in this topic.

HORN AND BONE THIMBLE MAKERS

Most horn makers do not mark their thimbles. Where only the initials of the maker is shown, these are found on the thimbles. Handling a variety of horn and bone thimbles will make a collector familiar with traits of the horn and bone thimble maker. I have added dates where thimbles first offered for sale by mail-order catalogues.

BA

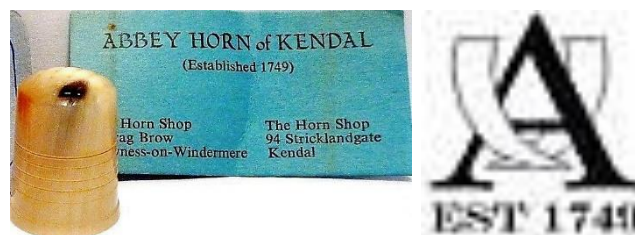


bovine
probably Chinese

Abbey Horn of Kendal Lake District UK

Abbey Horn thimbles are made of cow horn. The thimbles have a criss-crossed apex where the apex is of the same material. The shape is roughly square with incised rings and a finely stepped rim. They were issued with a 'Real Horn' sticker around the rim.

www.abbeyhorn.co.uk



range of colour in natural horn



smooth apex



original labels



created for Woodsetton Peeps, West Midlands UK

Richard Carpenter



deer antler
parrot

CB



cow horn
duck

Dovea USA

This painter may be one of Thompson's painters. Signed and dated.
wholesaler: Heirloom Editions



elk antler and buffalo horn
panda
1991

Dykehead Horncraft Irvine North Ayrshire Scotland

no longer in business



label in thimble boxes



range of colours in natural antler – the apex is made from the same material

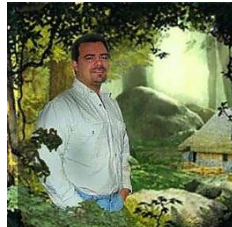
BRAD ELFRINK

Elvenkrafte Studios, Missouri, USA
made from fossil bone from Siberia

most designs feature nursery rhymes - mainly one-off creations
the thimbles are signed on the inside and dated with day month and year
elvenkrafte.com for commissions



R: date 8.23.13





corgis with a bone



fairy



Hey diddle diddle



Goldilocks and the three bears



Hansel and Gretel



Jack and Jill moving parts



kittens chasing



kittens playing



Little Boy Blue



mice in corn



lion and mouse
8.23.13



nativity



Night before Christmas



Red Riding Hood



Rub a dub dub



Scottie dog
black and red enamel



sea creatures - fish starfish seahorse
shell



SINGER sewing machine
moving parts
black enamel



squirrel



squirrels



steam train



three monkeys

Heathergems Pitlochry Scotland

According to the information on their thimble boxes, Heathergems took out Patent 1143252. This would protect their unique creation of using dyed, dried and pressed heather roots and stems, which was incorporated into the natural antler hollow.

Opened in 1950s, the firm is still in existence but no longer produce thimbles.



box lid

TTG August 1983 – Gimbels 1996 – Thimbles Only winter 1983



stag antler and heather

Horncraft Argyllshire Scottish Borders

They began their horn business in 1959 and are still in operation but no longer making thimbles.



Gimbels 1981 - TTG March 1983



red deer antler with harder cow horn, flat apex
lower: apex not indented

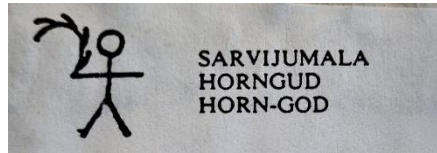
HL



reindeer
very skilful pierced carving

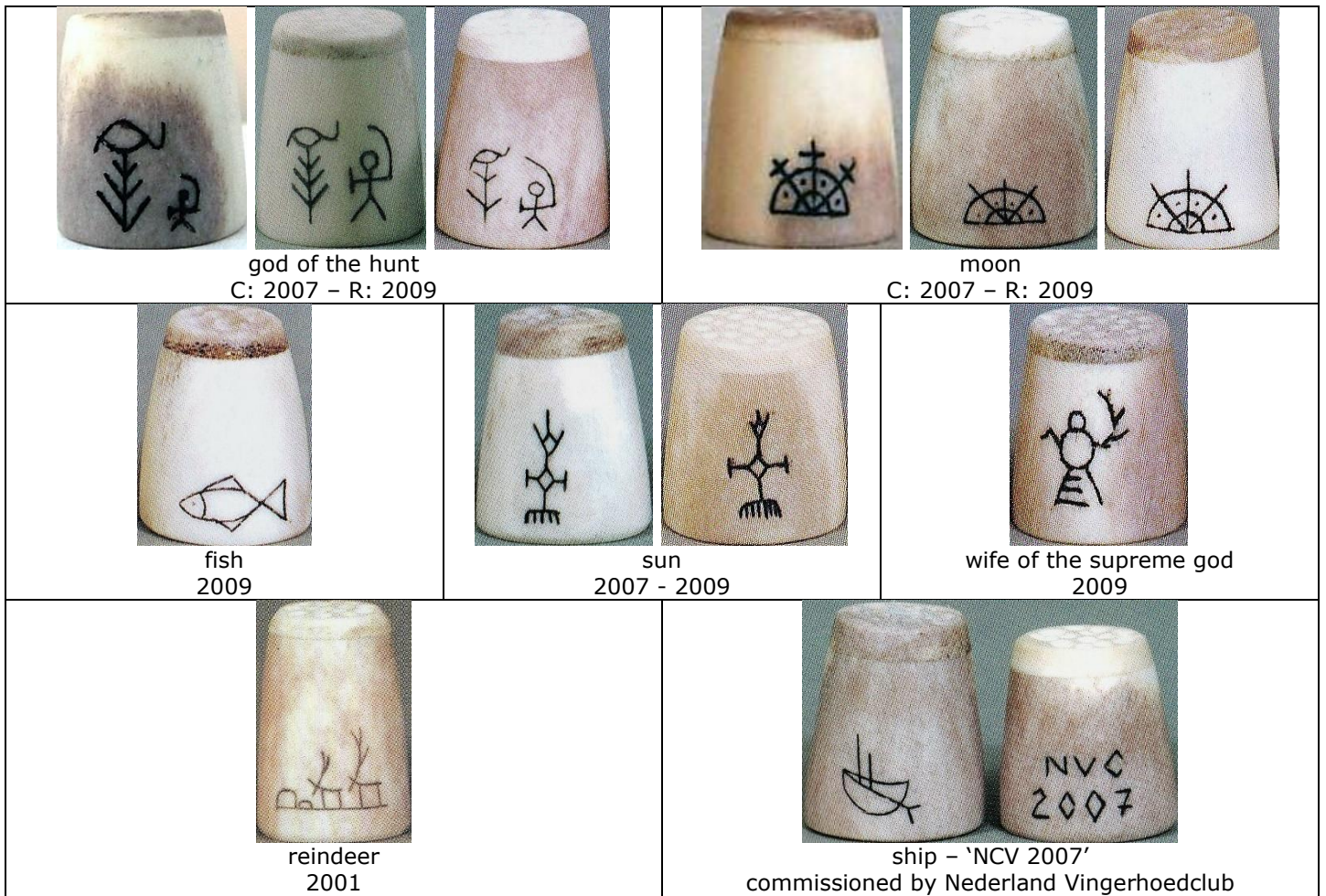
Tuotteet Oy Lauri Rovaniemi Lapland Finland

Lauri Products Ltd's thimbles are made from reindeer antler. They are pyrographed with Lapland motifs, created in 1980s with 25 different motifs: for the tourist market. Most have a different part of antler as apex.



accompanying paper with name of Lap god portrayed – in Lap, Finnish and English

'1997'	'Arctic'	hunter	goddess of thunder
shaman with drum R: 2009	walking cat 2007 - 2009	walking cat 2007 - 2009	own seta (god) R: 2009
reindeer	snow crystal 2009	god of thunder 2001	birds of happiness
witchsnake R: 2009	god of fertility 2007 - 2009	god of fertility 2007 - 2009	horngod 2007

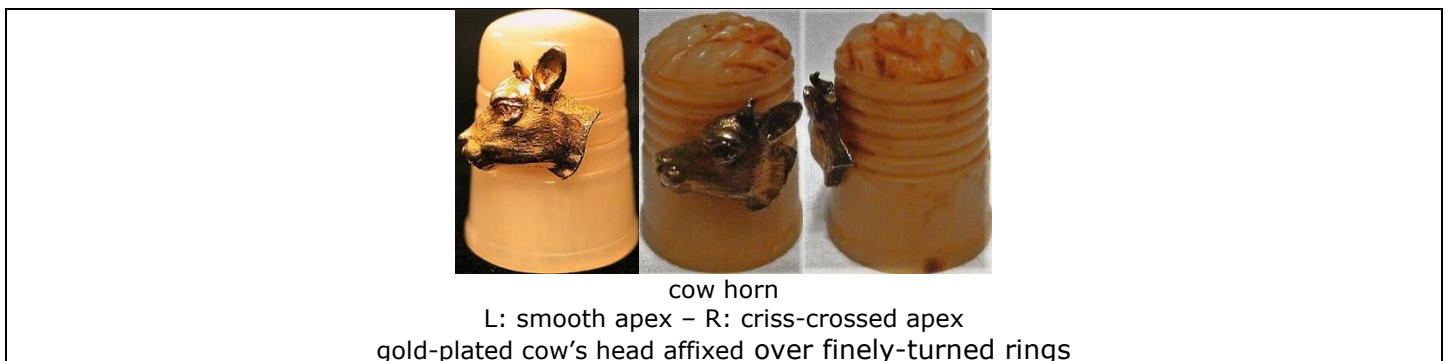


L'Etacq Jersey

This maker was inspired by the island's Jersey cows. Using their horn, these thimbles are creamy-orange colour. L'Etacq, the name of a village on Jersey, also turn wooden thimbles. The apex is of the same material as the thimble.

No longer in business.

TTG February 1985





deer antler with abalone



deer antler with glass millefiori

MD USA

This unidentified bone thimble maker uses elk antler and buffalo horn. Signed on verso.
This painter may be one of Thompson's painters.
wholesaler: Heirloom Editions



cougar

thimble needed no buffalo horn apex - one piece of antler



horse in desert scene



racoon



owl



panda



siamese

thimble needed no buffalo horn apex as from one piece of antler

MG USA

this unidentified painter may be one of Thompson's painters



elk and buffalo

N.P.M. Bophuthatswana South Africa

marketed by Tswana Crafts Industries



buck
rhino
made from one piece of horn

T Seeley Banff Alberta Canada

Moose antler. It seems whiter than elk. Thimbles made from one piece of bone.



flower



moose

Janet Thompson Montana South Dakota USA

Thompson's thimbles are made of elk antler, with buffalo horn forming a contrast on the apex. Her thimbles are dated and signed **JT** on the verso.

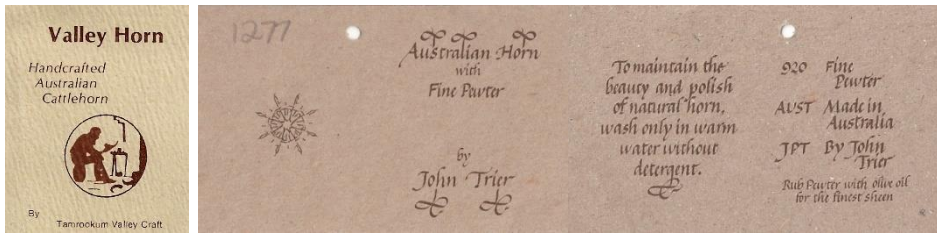
Other animals: ram – pheasant – robin – peacock – swan – American eagle – mustang – mallard antelope – otter – loon – cardinal

see also: Dovea, MD and MG – where some of these animals appear
Thimbles Only winter 1983 – Gimbels 1991a

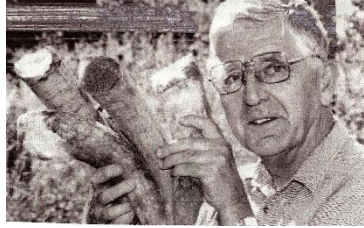


John Trier Beaudesert Queensland Australia

Trier began working with horn from his cattle on his farm in 1977. Largely self-taught he began making thimbles in 1979. His business name is Tamrookum Valley Crafts. His natural horn thimbles have a criss-crossed pattern on the apex. In 1980 he introduced scrimshaw of native animals to his popular range. By 1995 he was using pewter as the apex as this soft metal is sympathetic to the burnished finish of horn.



L: first thimbles vertificate – R: pewter and horn certificate



Trier 2007



criss-crossed apex

tailor's



horn and pewter
1995-



pyrographed set
kangaroo – platypus – echidna - koala – hopping mouse – possum
thimbles made from one piece of horn with no joined apex
criss-crossed apex
1980 – first set created

John van der Westhuizen Phalaborwa South Africa

John specialised in turning wooden thimbles. He tried kudu horn and achieved a translucency not found in many other thimbles. A small sticker for **JJ K** is in the apex.



JJ K sticker in apex












kudu
one piece of horn

HORN AND BONE THIMBLES BY COUNTRY

Country of origin is known - the maker is not.

China

 <p>water buffalo with mother-of-pearl owl Thimbles Only winter 1983</p>	 <p>water buffalo with mother-of-pearl flower</p>	 <p>water buffalo with pewter yacht</p>
 <p>birds in tree*</p>	 <p>bovine elephant and calf*</p>	 <p>Mermaid*</p>
 <p>monkey*</p>	 <p>cow rooster*</p>	 <p>rose</p>



bovine
tiger*



bone
cat*



bovine



lighthouse and sailing ship*



bone
200 purchased by Christina Bertrand for sale at 2004
TCI Convention
later seen for sale as 19th century scrimshaw



mountains



women



bird and leaves*



leaf band*
scalloped rim



bone
dragon - horse - monkey - pig - tiger
set of 5: TTG February 1995

*these bovine thimbles may be described as ivory on 2nd hand market

Egypt



bone
Christmas tree
limited to 24
TTG November 2011



bone
hieroglyphic patterning
TTG June 2011



bone
inset brass rings
TTG August 2011

Finland



reindeer with gold apex
b&w photo



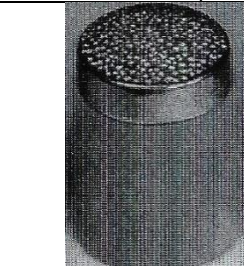
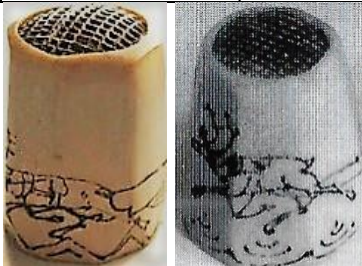
reindeer with Lap symbol
b&w photo



moose
b&w photo



reindeer hexagon shape with steel apex
1920s



reindeer with gold apex
b&w photo



reindeer with steel apex
late 19th century
b&w photo



reindeer



reindeer



reindeer

Great Britain (excluding Scotland)



early 1900s
lovely patina



reindeer
1987



sterling silver apex
1820s

India



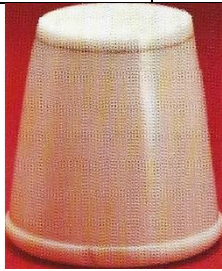
water buffalo
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - TTG
October 1986



buffalo with wood apex and
rim
TTG August 1997



water buffalo
Kay Sullivan March 1987



camel bone



camel bone

Malaysia



buffalo
Feldmann 17-1991

Nepal



water buffalo and bone
ying yang apex design
C: silver rim – R: brass rim

Thimbles Only 1996 - TTG October 1986 (R: limited to 40)



frog
eyes: goat's horn from Himalayas
TTG April 1998



gog – owl – rabbit
set of three
TTG August 1999

Paraguay



horn

Philippines



water buffalo (Caraboa)
TTG February 2008

Russia



deer hoof
R: Cyrillic lettering хибинь (Khibiny)



ducks

Scotland



showing the ridged natural surface of stag antler – from the antler tip
wholesaled by Charles Buyers, Scotland

they currently specialise selling products that keep alive traditional skills using natural materials
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - Feldmann 8/1989 - TTG February 1996 – Gimbels 1996



reindeer
made from one piece of horn



reindeer
thistle-shape
L: Thimbles Only spring 1987 – VN December
2001



reindeer
made from one piece of horn
VN December 2001

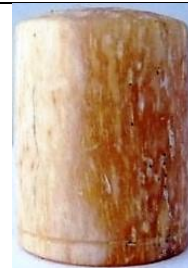
South Africa



buffalo
made in Natal
1992



hippo bone
frogs



bone



African ox
Feldmann 6-1988
b&w photo



Wildebeest
VN July 2001

Spain



bone
Antoni Gaudi church Barcelona

Sweden



reindeer
Swedish Lapland with steel apex
18th century

Thailand

Thai horn used is water buffalo, unless as listed differently below. Most thimbles are figural.



bird
inlaid eyes
JHB 1998-2002



cat
inlaid eyes



eagle
inlaid eyes



yak
elephant
inlaid eyes



owl
'THAILAND'
inlaid eyes



elephant
ivory eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



frog
inlaid ivory



frog
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes

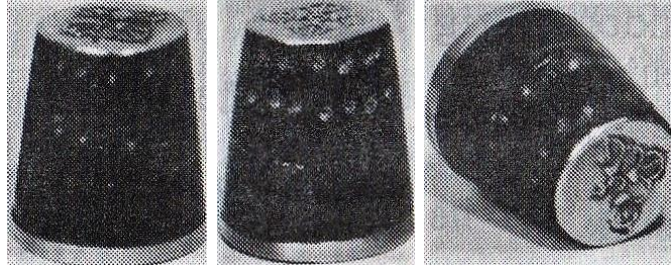


owl
inlaid eyes
TTG April 2003



penguin
inlaid eyes

Tibet



yak horn
brass rim
Buddhist drawings on apex
VN March 1988

Turkiye



camel bone
'Kuradasi'



camel bone
'Turleyi'

United States



American eagle



malachite
flat stone apex



sugalite
flat stone apex
thimble is oval



turquoise
flat stone apex

Uruguay

Uruguayan thimbles are made of cow horn



Zimbabwe

Wild animal horn is used – buck, buffalo or cow horn. Other carved animals: buffalo, elephant, rhino



wildebeest
elephant – giraffe
made in two parts
1987

OTHER HORN AND BONE THIMBLES

 <p>buffalo</p>		 <p>cow 19th century</p>
 <p>cow</p>	 <p>cow cross-hatched apex</p>	
 <p>flowers</p>	 <p>mid 20th century gilt metal on apex</p>	 <p>elk tailor's</p>
 <p>handpainted bone</p>	 <p>bone</p>	

HORN SEWING TOOLS



buttonhole cutter
1790s



sewing kit
18th century



tape measure
1880s



stiletto
1880s

References

- Jenny Scharff Bockel *Thimbles of Southern Africa*. 2004
Susan Dempster *An Abbeyhorn thimble*. *TCI Bulletin* summer 2019
Susan Jean Gowan *Thimbles of Australia*. 1988
Irja Helsila *Thimbles in Lapland*. *Thimble Society of London* autumn 1998
Irene Schwall & Christina Bertrand *The whale thimble saga*. *TCI Bulletin* summer 2015

Contributors

Pawel Brzyski | Linda Heggs | Irja Helsila | Caroline Meacham-Elegant Arts | Wanda Ralston | Linda Samaripa
Jean Taylor | Erin Titmus

This listing of Horn 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 TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

© Sue Gowan
March 2024