

Charles May (CM) sterling silver and gold thimbles

1860-1929

I have had a few Charles May's silver thimbles in my collection for a long time - and as they are all fairly similar in design an abstract feathery pattern (also known as wriggle-work) - it came as a surprise to find he'd made other thimble designs. Reading thru back copies of The Thimble Society (of London) catalogues, I noticed that though the feathery patterned bands that I'd always associated with Charles May, there was a wonderful range new to me. I thought I'd share these findings with you. I have noticed that May uses large cartouches on his wriggle work bands and often the hallmarks have been placed here.



Charles May was not one of the most prolific Victorian silver thimble makers; Charles Horner of Halifax and the Birmingham silver thimble makers (Henry Griffith, James Fenton and James Swann) were much bigger thimble producers. Because of this, Charles May thimbles make a niche collection to collect. He was different from most of the English Victorian thimble silversmiths: in that, he didn't work in Birmingham.

May was London-based and he registered his maker's mark at the London assay office. The firm had two primary places of manufacture in London: Shoreditch, and later in Hackney. Gold and silver thimble making was their primary manufacture.



R: it's unusual to find a size mark on such an early hallmark=London 1868

Charles May also registered his maker's mark at the Birmingham assay office in February 1876. All thimbles below were made registered in London, unless stated otherwise.



Von Hoelle describes May as "an English goldsmith in London who made exquisite gold thimbles during the second half of the 19th century". In her 'Letts Guide...' McConnel has that Charles May firm existed from 1805 to 1929.

Holmes attests that by 1900 Charles May concentrated more on making gold thimbles.

There is a time-line for the firm of Charles May as silversmiths, in Culme as follows:

Charles May c.1821-c.1851

Charles Croxton May c.1851-c.1880

C.C. May & Sons c.1880-1907

C.C. May & Sons Ltd 1907-after 1923

It's so good to have had contact with descendants of Charles May- from here in Queensland! This family is in the line of Charles Croxton May.

The thimbles are arranged by date, giving the assay office and date. You can see the similarity of his designs in his later period. The earliest dated hallmarked thimble for Charles May, illustrated here, is for 1860 and the last in 1929. From observation, Charles May may have used size numbers from 1895 and size 2 is larger in diameter than the size 7.

If you study the feathery, stylised leaf (or wriggle-work) patterned band thimbles you will see that each one is different and most have a faceted rim. Another distinctive trait I've noticed from this small selection is the daisy patterns he uses - they are larger and more defined than those used by silver thimble makers in England of the same era.

Scroll down to the foot of this page to see the gorgeous, highly chased silver thimbles that screw into a smooth glass container, forming a compendium, and other delights. Examples illustrated have corks in the mouth of the glass phial. What was this glass container to hold? With a cork stopper, it has to be something liquid? Both are now empty. The hallmarks are both for Birmingham and the hallmark dates are from 1876 and 1886.



1860

flared rim in bell shape with a beautifully finely engraved leaves band



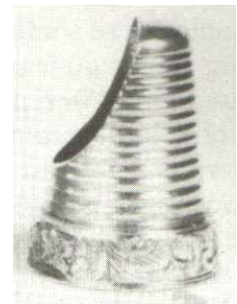
1864

four colours of 15ct gold
raised band of fruit and leaves



1867

15ct gold thimbles
with turquoise
b&w photo



1868

fingerguard
narrow engraved band



1868



1868
band of wavy lines



1869
narrow patterned band



1878
Birmingham
part of a compendium
see below



1880
wriggle-work band



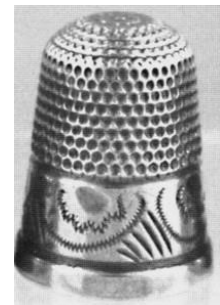
1881
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1883 1887
a classic thimble



1883 1896



1884
wriggle-work band



1886
Birmingham
wonderful floral pattern



1886
Birmingham
part of a compendium
see below



1886
Birmingham
wriggle-work band



1887
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1887
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1887
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1887
Birmingham
well defined floral pattern



1887
Birmingham
Jubilee V.R.I 1887
well defined floral pattern



1887
Birmingham
strong floral pattern



1888
Birmingham
wriggle-work band



1888
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1888
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1888
Birmingham
floral pattern



1888
well defined floral pattern



1889
Birmingham



1888
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1889
Birmingham
floral band



1889
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1890
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1890
Birmingham
wriggle-work band



1890
Birmingham
heavier floral pattern



1890
Birmingham
wriggle-work band



1890 1891 1894 1896 1914
Birmingham London
fine floral pattern
galleried rim over wriggle-work band
1887 thimble with **H&T** mark has identical patterning



1890
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1890
wriggle-work band



1891
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



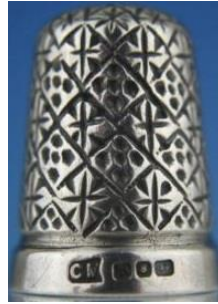
1891
Birmingham
heavy floral pattern



1892
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1892
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1892
Birmingham
geometric at its best



1893
Birmingham
diamond band



1893 Birmingham
heavier floral pattern
galleried rim over wriggle-work band



1893
Birmingham



1893
Birmingham
Atlantic Cable pattern
over wriggle-work band



1893
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1893
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1894 Birmingham
flowers within circles



1894
Birmingham
strong floral pattern



1894
Birmingham



1895
Birmingham
fleur-de-lis scalloped rim
over wriggle-work band
size 3



1895
Birmingham
daisy pattern
size 6



1895
combination pattern of daisy band,
diamond pattern with daisy apex
size 5



1895
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1895
Birmingham
strong diamond patterned band
size 5



1895
large flower on apex
faceted diamond pattern
one of May's prettiest designs
size 6



1896
daisy within a circle pattern



1896
daisy pattern
size 4



1896
Atlantic Cable pattern
over wriggle-work band
size 5



1896
unusual blackberry pattern



1896
strong diamond patterned band
size 6



1896
long wriggle work cartouche
size 2



1897
wriggle-work band
size 7



1897
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1897
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1897
well-defined fan pattern
exquisite faceting on apex
size 6



1897
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1897
Birmingham
Atlantic Cable pattern
over wriggle-work band



1897
daisy pattern



1897
narrow band



1898
Birmingham
Atlantic Cable pattern
over wriggle-work band
size 6



1898
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1898
Birmingham
dots and diamond patterned band
size 3



1899
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim
size 6



1899 1909
Birmingham
daisy band
size 2 4



1899
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



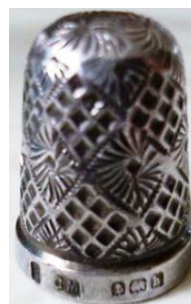
1900
Birmingham
stippled pattern
size 5



1900
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
size 7



1900
Birmingham
daisy band with diamond pattern
size 4



1901
Birmingham
diamond within diamond pattern
interspersed with daisy pattern



1901



1901
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1901
Birmingham
floral pattern
galleried rim over wriggle-work band
size 4



1901
London Birmingham
strong diamond patterned band with
daisy pattern
size 3



1901
Birmingham
daisy band
size 5



1902
Birmingham
vertical bands of daisy and
diamond pattern
size 2



1902
Birmingham
daisy pattern
size 2



1902
Birmingham
combination pattern of daisy band, diamond pattern with
daisy apex



1903
Birmingham
strong diamond patterned band with daisy pattern



1903
Birmingham
mixed horizontal patterns
size 4



1905
Birmingham
vertical bands of daisy and strong diamond pattern
size 4



1905
well-defined wriggle-work band



1905
Birmingham
horizontal rows of diamond and
defined circles
size 5



1905
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
wide cartouche
faceted rim



1907 1910
Birmingham
size 4
strong diamond patterned band with
daisy pattern



1907
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim
size 3



1909
Birmingham
well-defined wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1910
Birmingham
Zipper-type wriggle-work band
faceted rim
size 4



1911
Birmingham
swirled wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1911
Birmingham
diamond patterned band with
daisy pattern
size 5



1912
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1915
combination pattern of daisy band,
diamond pattern with daisy apex
size 5



1916
daisy pattern with defined centre



1916
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1917
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1917
strong diamond patterned band with
daisy pattern
size 8



1917
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1918
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



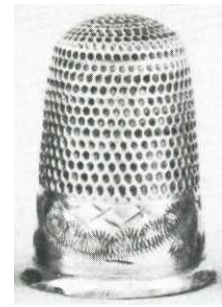
1918
diamond patterned band with daisy
pattern
size 7



1918
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1918 1919
strong diamond patterned band with
daisy pattern
sizes 6/9



1919
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



1919
wriggle-work band



1920
vertical daisy pattern with bands of
defined circles



1920
strong diamond patterned band with
daisy pattern



1920
daisy pattern with bands of defined circles



1920



1926
15ct gold
finely engraved narrow band



1929
Birmingham
wriggle-work band
faceted rim
size 3



1929
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



Birmingham
date unknown
strong diamond patterned band with
daisy pattern



Birmingham
date unknown
daisy pattern



Birmingham
date unknown
wriggle-work band
faceted rim



assay office and date unknown
daisy within circle pattern



assay office and date unknown
wriggle-work band

Compendiums and thimble holders



1876
Birmingham
red glass



1886
Birmingham
white glass



1889
Birmingham
ornately chased with a pierced top thimble holder which has a face as part of patterning
hanging chatelaine loop

Charles May didn't only make thimbles. Collectors have let me know of a faceted scent bottle with hallmarked CM silver top with a Birmingham assay mark.

References

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Contributors

Anne Arkle | Pam Chappell | Colin Coles | Helen Colling | Linda Heggs | Margaret Hendriksen | Susan Herbert
Amanda Jayne | Jonathan May | Carolyn Meacham-Elegant Arts | Ray Nimmo | Ian Robinson | David Sentinella
Ann Thompson | Barbra Wallace

This listing of Charles May 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.

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