

# Charles Horner's early Dorcas PAT. thimbles

When I attended my first thimble meeting as a very new collector in Johannesburg in 1985, there was so much to learn. The excitement felt when I first heard the name Dorcas as something very desirable, took me home to check my small holding of thimbles. No Dorcas! Little did I know that lurking there was an example of an early Dorcas thimble. I learnt that they are simply lettered PAT.

It is still a common error that new collectors and ebay sellers make – not recognising these thimbles as the forerunner of the Horner-named DORCAS thimbles. The main reason for this is that the early thimbles by Horner, did not have his maker's mark of CH. This mark only appeared on his thimbles marked DORCAS.

Charles Horner of Halifax, Yorkshire in England, is the best-known name in British thimble history, known for their DORCAS steel-lined sterling thimbles.

Sterling silver thimbles go to holes even with moderate use, so Horner discovered a new way of making a thimble to last. He looked to strengthen his sterling thimbles with steel. Horner took out a patent (No. 8954 of 1884) for his steel-lined thimbles and they were only lettered PAT. (being the abbreviation for patent) with a size number alongside, on the right. This enabled him to provide thimbles with the beauty of sterling silver and the strength of steel- with that layer of steel sandwiched between two layers of silver.

In some of his early advertising Horner uses the term "armour plating" to describe these thimbles.

To distinguish his designs from his competitors, Horner then registered his thimble designs (R<sup>D</sup>) and even named some of them.

These registered design numbers are:

R<sup>D</sup>127211 of 1889, known as **Louise**  
R<sup>D</sup>73624 (always incorrectly lettered R<sup>D</sup>73626) of 1887, known as **Diamond**  
R<sup>D</sup>210799 of 1893, known as **Shell**  
R<sup>D</sup>210800 of 1893, known as **Princess May**  
**Flora, Persian** and **star** are unregistered designs.  
Lovely feminine names for utilitarian thimbles!

Early DORCAS thimbles often included the Registered design [R<sup>D</sup>] number as well as the PAT. marking. Horner promoted his thimbles with these specifically named patterns, but these names were never lettered on his thimbles.

PAT. thimbles usually include the R<sup>D</sup> number lettered to the left - before the word PAT. Naturally some have be found with the R<sup>D</sup> above PAT.

You may have noticed that the lettering of the size 6 Pat. thimbles isn't well formed – it can be confused with the letter 'G'.

There are rare examples of the word PATENT written out in full. Are these the earliest known Horner thimbles?

He captured the market from then on and his steel-lined sterling silver thimbles were produced from 1884 to 1947. In Australia, as late as the 1970s, one could still purchase new DORCAS thimbles from haberdashers.

There is another form of Horner's steel-cored sterling silver thimbles: those neither marked Pat. nor Dorcas: rather just CH with a size number. These are not found often and may even pre-date Dorcas mark thimbles.

After around 1890, all Horner's steel-cored thimbles were marked with DORCAS with CH and the size number.

Why did Horner name and market these revolutionary designed thimbles Dorcas? Dorcas is named in the Bible in Acts 9:49 as a woman of means who served the poor and known for her sewing. In Victorian times this was a term used for sewing circles for the poor. Using a well-recognised word associated with sewing is a stroke of marketing "genius".

Having a core of steel, all PAT. and DORCAS thimbles will attract a magnet.

In 1905 Horner introduced his "Improved Dorcas", where the steel and silver were fused together and from this date the apexes of all his steel-cored thimbles are flatter and the thimbles are lighter in weight.

It is not possible to date DORCAS thimbles any closer than this, as they are not only made of sterling silver and thus cannot be hallmarked.

The thimbles lettered with PAT. only were only produced between 1884 and 1905.

Horner's DORCAS and PAT. size numbers are 0 for the largest down to the smallest at size 15. The sizes at either end of this spectrum, are extremely rare. I have only had those from size 3-12 for sale in over 200 examples, which bears this out.

Note that Dorcas thimbles don't have the rolled rim of his sterling silver thimbles. Having a core of steel, especially for thimbles produced before 1905, they are heavy. They are pleasingly domed or round topped.

Summary of PAT. sizes - below are the average mean size for each

size 1 - 18.8mm  
size 2 - 18.5mm  
size 4 - 17.5mm  
size 5 - 17.5mm  
size 6 - 15.mcm  
size 7 - 15.8mm  
size 8 - 15mm  
size 9 - 14.5mm  
size 10 - 14.1mm  
size 11 - 13.7mm  
size 12 - 13.2mm

(maid's size, which today would be for a teenager)

What is my purpose for compiling this topic only on the Horner PAT. thimbles? It is to establish what sizes of PAT. thimbles have survived in the various single patterns. Does each design exist in all the sizes? By showing as many sizes as possible it also shows how the design has to be adapted on the smaller sizes. The larger the size the more stretched the design appears?

I find in my own collection that the PAT. thimbles outnumber the Dorcas thimbles 2:1. This is only possible as Horner was experimenting with engraved bands in this early PAT. period and as they are many and varied, I have been more interested in finding examples of the engraved bands.

By comparison there are very few DORCAS thimbles with engraved bands.

Additionally, I realised that only the PAT. thimbles with engraved bands were provided with a blank cartouche.

As I looked further, I noticed that the word PAT. with the size number alongside, as the norm, is not enclosed within a rectangle. A rare few began to appear with the word PAT. within a rectangle. I have separated these out as Anomalies. Other anomalies are described where pertinent. They don't make the thimble more valuable - they are simply different.

I hope that this small selection of thimbles illustrated here, will make you look at your collection of early Dorcas PAT. thimbles with fresh eyes. They do deserve it!

There are thimble collectors who specialise in collecting Dorcas thimbles and societies exist to study them.

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### Other Charles Horner thimble topics

Charles Horner Ltd sterling silver thimbles with other sponsor's marks  
Dorcas thimble boxes  
Horner and hearts

## PAT. single designs

All PAT. thimbles have their primary design separated by two grooves (or hollows the term used by Horner in his 1900 catalogue) from the narrow plain band where the lettering is placed. Rarely are these grooves less pronounced. The exception is the star design, where the rim is patterned with the Hardwood rim noted for the two rows of shallow indentations. This replaces the grooves. There are ten single designs in total

## PAT. daisy design

Though Horner designed the Dorcas thimbles to be indestructible, they can still show signs of wear. This is particularly evident in the daisy designs, where the centre of the daisy may be worn down to the steel with heavy use or wear just making the daisy centre appear deeper



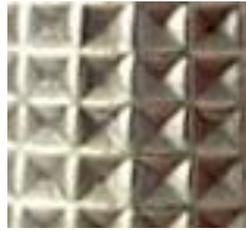
## PAT. daisy design - ANOMALIES

some with lettering within a rectangle



**PAT. diamond design (R<sup>D</sup>73626 - 11 May 1887)**

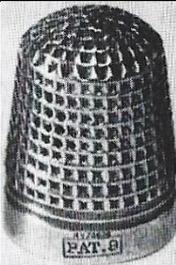
the diamond pattern is so named as under magnification, these squares disappear into a point.  
Pelham Burn also uses the terms faceted and grid



no photo  PAT.4	no photo  PAT.5	 PAT.6	 PAT.7	 PAT.8
 PAT.9	 PAT.10	 PAT.11	no photo  PAT.12	

**PAT. diamond design (R<sup>D</sup>73626) - ANOMALIES**

lettering within a rectangle  
R<sup>D</sup>73626 lettered above PAT.

 PAT.6	 PAT.9	 PAT.10
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**PAT. flora design**

the flora design is a combination design, with the daisy patterning at the top, separated usually by one but mainly two grooves and then three rows of diamond.

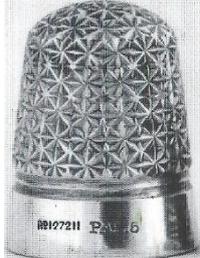
A rare example of a PAT.10 has three grooves.

I have seen a PAT. thimble in a Sydney Australia collection that has the patterning in the reverse order – a sure candidate for an anomaly

 PAT.4	 PAT.5	 PAT.6	no photo PAT.7	 PAT.8
 PAT.9	 PAT.10	 PAT.10	 PAT.11	no photo PAT.12
				no photo PAT.13

**PAT. Louise design (R<sup>D</sup>127211 - 18 June 1889)**

described by Pelham Burn as interlocking asterisks

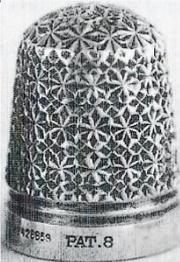
no photo PAT.4	 PAT.5	 PAT.6	 PAT.7	 PAT.8
 PAT.9	 PAT.10	 PAT.11	no photo PAT.12	

**PAT. Louise design (R<sup>D</sup>127211) - ANOMALIES**  
 some lettering within a rectangle

 <p>PAT.6 daisy pattern on apex</p>	  <p>PAT.7 PAT. is partially underlined</p>	 <p>PAT.9</p>
 <p>PAT.10</p>		

**PAT. interlocking-Louise design (R<sup>D</sup>426659 - 14 February 1904)**

This R<sup>D</sup> is much later than the rest by Horner. It was taken out for the new pattern of the indents. This makes these PAT. thimbles appear far later than the other designs, which ended when the use of the name DORCAS appeared on thimbles in 1890. The name is purely a descriptive term used by modern thimble collectors, not given by the Horner factory. Pelham Burn described this design as small Louise asterisks

<p>no photo</p> <p>PAT.4</p>	<p>no photo</p> <p>PAT.5</p>	 <p>PAT.6</p>	 <p>PAT.7</p>	 <p>PAT.8</p>
 <p>PAT.9</p>	 <p>PAT.10</p>	 <p>PAT.11</p>	<p>no photo</p> <p>PAT.12</p>	

**PAT. Persian design**

this design is mainly found on PAT. thimbles, making it RARE as s Horner sterling silver thimble. Pelham Burn describes the pattern shape as a 6-point star

no photo	no photo	no photo	no photo	no photo
PAT.4	PAT.5	PAT.6	PAT.7	PAT.8
no photo			no photo	
PAT.9 see anomalies	PAT.10	PAT.11	PAT.12	

**PAT. Persian design - ANOMALIES**

lettering within a rectangle



**PAT. plain design (Patent No.8954 - 14 June 1884)**

this Patent number never appeared on any of Horner's thimbles. Pelham Burn described the indentations as octagonal

no photo  PAT.4	 PAT.5	 PAT.6	 PAT.7	 PAT.8
 PAT.9	 PAT.10	 PAT.11	no photo  PAT.12	

**PAT. plain design - ANOMALIES**  
lettering within a rectangle and others

 PAT.6	 PAT.8 narrow band
	 PAT.6 

this thimble has been tampered with – by adding two stamps to the band – 'SILVER' to the left and to the left stamped upside down is the same word over two lines

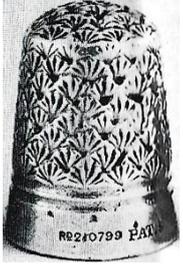
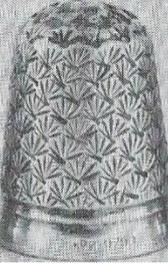
**PAT. Princess May design (R<sup>D</sup>210800 - 18 April 1893)**

Princess Veronica Mary of Teck (known as Princess May) was married to the Duke of York on 6 July 1893. This design was registered when a thimble was created by the Horner factory to gift to the bride on the occasion of her wedding

no photo  PAT.4	 PAT.5	no photo  PAT.6	 PAT.7	 PAT.8
no photo  PAT.9	 PAT.10	 PAT.11	no photo  PAT.12	

**PAT. shell design (R<sup>D</sup>210799 - 18 April 1893)**

often erroneously described as fan design

no photo  PAT.4	 PAT.5	 PAT.6	 PAT.7	 PAT.8
 PAT.9	 PAT.10	 PAT.11	no photo  PAT.12	

## PAT. star design

this design is often confused with the rarer Persian design. It is different from the other Dorcas designs as it has a band of Hardwood patterning (registered in 1904) around the rim. It also has a ring of deep indents on the apex, often mistaken for holes. This is how the thimble was designed. Pelham Burn described the apex of these thimbles as 'tiered'

This design would have only appeared on PAT. thimbles in 1904

no photo	 PAT. 5	 PAT. 6	 PAT. 7	 PAT. 8
 PAT. 9	 PAT. 10	 PAT. 11	no photo	

## PAT. star design - ANOMALIES

lettering within a rectangle

 PAT. 5	 PAT. 6	 PAT. 8 with a non-matching daisy apex
 PAT. 8 with two bands of small circles Pelham Burn includes this extra embellishing as one of the standard PAT. designs	 PAT. 10 with a non-matching daisy apex	 PAT. 10 - PAT. 11

## PAT. engraved bands

The engraved bands on PAT. thimbles are principally found on these thimbles, rarely on DORCAS thimbles. It gave the Horner engravers scope to experiment with different designs – as varied as those with flower, geometric design, those with leaves and the distinctive acanthus scrolls. Often, they contain blank cartouches within the engraving. This space could have a name engraved by a jeweller, especially if it were to be a gift.

The majority of the engraved band PAT. thimbles have the word lettered within a rectangle, which is the opposite to the single design thimbles. This highlights the name and size amongst the busy patterning of the band's engraving.

The bands are usually 5mm wide, topped with **plain** indentations, which allows the engraving to stand out. Pelham Burn lists 26 different PAT. engraved bands (to 1997). I have reduced this to four main categories.

### PAT. band ACANTHUS designs

 <p style="text-align: center;">PAT.1</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PAT.7 shield cartouche</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PAT.8 concave rectangular cartouche</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">PAT.8 very narrow band – 3mm small parallelogram cartouche</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PAT.9</p>	
 <p style="text-align: center;">PAT.10 very narrow band – 3mm small parallelogram cartouche</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PAT.11</p>	

**PAT. band FLOWER designs**



**PAT.5**

uneven sides rectangular cartouche  
stylised flowers



**PAT.5**



**PAT.6**

long oval cartouche  
lettering below band  
stylised flowers



**PAT.7**

stylised flowers



**PAT.7**

small concave square cartouche



**PAT.7**

small parallelogram cartouche



**PAT.7**



**PAT.8**



**PAT.8**

flowers have stamens  
long square cartouche



**PAT.8**

long oval cartouche  
lettering below band  
stylised flowers



PAT.9



PAT.9

flowers have stamens  
long square cartouche



PAT.10



PAT.10

long square cartouche  
stylised flowers



PAT.11

stylised flowers

### PAT. band GEOMETRIC designs



PAT.6



PAT.6

stippled rectangular cartouche



PAT.7  
oval cartouche



PAT.7

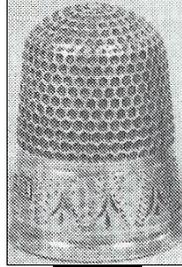
parallelogram cartouche  
similar to PAT.11



PAT. 8  
long cartouche



PAT. 8



PAT. 11

### PAT. band LEAVES designs



PAT. 5  
ivy



PAT. 6  
long oval cartouche



PAT. 6



PAT. 7  
ivy



PAT. 7



PAT. 7  
sycamore leaves  
concave rectangular cartouche



**PAT.7**  
feathery leaf  
irregular cartouche



**PAT.7**  
ivy  
narrow band - 3mm  
small concave square cartouche



**PAT.8**  
long oval cartouche



**PAT.8**  
wide band  
worn to bare steel



**PAT.8**  
long oval cartouche  
fernlike leaves



**PAT.10**



**PAT.10**  
Ivy  
narrow band - 3mm  
small concave square cartouche



**PAT.10**  
ivy  
concave rectangular cartouche



**PAT.11**  
feathery leaf

**PAT. band with RARE designs**

It has taken until October 2023 for the Tudor rose thimble design to surface. None of these were recorded by Pelham Burn including in her Supplement. All three patterns are found on Horner's later DORCAS thimbles



PAT.9

**Greek key**

on plain thimble  
long squared cartouche  
apex outer sterling silver layer has been removed because of damage



Chester 1896 #10  
sterling silver version – still as RARE  
the Greek patterning has improved



PAT.8

**Louise rim**

on plain thimble  
Pelham Burn includes this extra embellishing as one of the standard PAT. designs



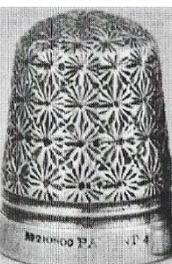
PAT.7

**Tudor rose**

on plain thimble  
Horner names it Stamped pattern found on his sterling thimbles

## PATENT single designs

It is only on the PATENT marked thimbles that we encounter the exceedingly RARE sizes of PAT. thimbles. Examples of a huge size 1 and a child's size 15 occur. Was Horner experimenting with his thimble sizing at this early stage of production?

 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 3 daisy</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 4 daisy</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 4 Diamond R<sup>D</sup>73626</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 2 Flora</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 4 Flora</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 4 Louise R<sup>D</sup>127211</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 4 Persian</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT Plain unsized</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 3 Princess May R<sup>D</sup>210800</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 4 Princess May R<sup>D</sup>210800</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT 15 plain child's size 12mm</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">PATENT Star unsized child's size 12mm</p>

# PATENT engraved bands

Pelham Burn found that some of the Patent thimbles weren't sized

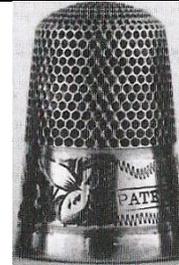


PATENT 4 - PATENT 4  
flower

L: concave rectangular cartouche



PATENT 1  
geometric



PATENT ?  
leaves



PATENT 1  
leaves  
oval cartouche



PATENT  
unsized  
wide flower band  
squarish cartouche

## Other CH marked thimbles

these thimbles do not attract a magnet, so they are not unmarked Little Dorcas thimbles.

Lawson mentions these under his Experimental thimbles section and names them as chromium-plated. They have a blueish tinge.

 <p style="text-align: center;">CH diameter 20mm his biggest size</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">5CH chromium-plated</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">5CH SILVER CASED</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">6CH chromium-plated</p>
 <p style="text-align: center;">6CH casing has worn off</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">6CH</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">CH7 DOES attract a magnet</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">8CH SILVER CASED</p>

## References

Tom Lawson *Charles Horner of Halifax*. 2002  
Diane Pelham Burn *Identifying steel-cored thimbles*. 1993 + Supplement. 1997

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This listing of Charles Horner's PAT. thimbles does not purport to be complete or accurate in all aspects.  
Rather it invites comments and contributions to add to our knowledge. My thanks to the contributors.

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

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