

Royal Doulton thimbles

I was a collector of Royal Doulton china handpainted figurines before I began collecting thimbles of any kind. These figurines are their most recognisable and collectable item, though there is not anything that can be made of china or stoneware that hasn't been made by Royal Doulton!!

I joined the Royal Doulton International Collectors Club, based in London, in 1983 and remained a member for 15 years. Once I became a thimble collector, I scoured the pages of their quarterly magazine for any mention or article on thimbles - in vain!!

My interest in Royal Doulton in all its forms - our dinner service is made by Royal Doulton (in the era when it was still manufactured in Burslem in the English Potteries, and not in Indonesia), stood me in good stead to appreciate the qualities of good English bone china. My children grew up using their Royal Doulton Bunnykins plates.

Who can forget the TV character Hyacinth Bucket extolling the virtues of Royal "Doolton" in *Keeping Up Appearances*?

Royal Doulton didn't only produce bone china items for the dining-room or to grace the china cabinet - they were famous for their toilets, their stoneware pipes, the gloriously glazed tile panels made for Britain's Children's Hospitals, featuring nursery rhymes - floor and fireplace tiles = all from the Royal Doulton factory in Lambeth London. There is a highly collectable range of Royal Doulton Australiana - produced from 1879 thru to the 1980s.

The vast Toby Jug range, available in three sizes - collectors' plates - down to china brooches - the list is endless - all originate from the Lambeth and Burslem factories. The mini toby jugs are thimble-sized - they are NOT thimbles as the opening is at the top.



This porcelain company was founded in 1815 by John Doulton and John Watts in Lambeth, London, but it was during Henry Doulton's lifetime that Royal Doulton became the famous company, with its royal warrant, tho most of their products are made offshore in Thailand and not in Britain. The company still has its headquarters in The Potteries, at Stoke-on-Trent but there is no Royal Doulton factory in England.

Royal Doulton thimbles continued to be elusive, as my thimble collection grew and their output was minimal, compared to other equally well-known English china manufacturers - like Royal Worcester, Coalport, Royal Crown Derby, Spode and Wedgwood. The most well-known Royal Doulton thimbles are those featuring Jill Barklem's Brambly Hedge, which were produced in two sets - in 1982 and 1983. Their production of thimbles ended with two larger sets in 1994 and 1995, tho you should look at the thimbles below, from 2004. In between 1983 and 1994, there were only six thimble designs produced!!

Prior to the issue of the 1994 and 1995 sets, Royal Doulton issued 3 sets of Minton thimbles. These are out of the scope of this thimble topic as the main backstamp is for Minton, with a © mark for Royal Doulton. I class these as Minton thimbles, tho they are the same shape as the RD 1994 and 1995 sets.

For the **Minton** thimble sets, see "Learn More About A Miscellany of Thimbles"

You will notice a distinct change in shape from the thimbles made by RD in the 1980s and early 1990s to those made from 1994 onwards. The earlier ones are tall and distinctive, and the same shape as used for the Royal Albert thimble range. The RD moulds must have been replaced, as I have not seen the earlier shaped RD thimbles after 1991. The later [1994-] Royal Doulton thimbles are the same shape as the Royal Crown Derby thimbles which were made from 1986- shorter with a more pronounced apex. They were part of the same group at that stage. Was it just economics that made RD change to using the same

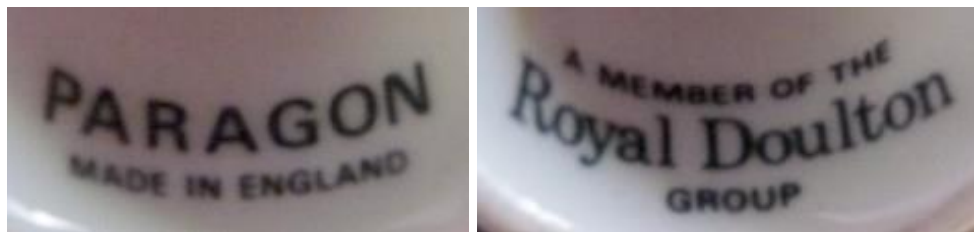
thimble mould as RCD? Or changing tastes? Yet Royal Albert continued with the identical older shaped thimbles throughout. That is the vagary of thimble manufacturing and thimble production, which would have formed a miniscule part of Royal Doulton, Royal Albert and Royal Crown Derby wares.

The RD thimble range is only made from bone china (tho not always backstamped as such) - as against fine bone china - there is also a highly collectable range of Royal Doulton crystal thimbles. I know that there are only around fifty different RD china thimble designs, plus twelve crystal - that is easily attainable to collectors, isn't it?

Royal Doulton purchased Minton in 1968. In 1972 there was a merger which included Ridgway | Royal Adderley

Royal Crown Derby | Royal Albert | Paragon. Now who knows who owns who, after the Wedgwood Waterford group went into receivership in January 2009 - Royal Doulton was part of that Waterford Wedgwood group.

Paragon is one of the backstamps - with thimbles made in 1984 for the Los Angeles Olympics - that include "A member of the Royal Doulton Group" inside the thimbles. The thimble shape is in the same mould as the earlier RD thimbles.



These Royal Doulton thimbles are arranged in chronological order of the date they were first produced.

1980

Thimbles of the World's Greatest Porcelain Houses

this the first thimble produced by Royal Doulton
it was designed as one in the set of 25 for Franklin Mint
entitled Thimbles of the World's Greatest Porcelain Houses



with a green abbreviated Royal Doulton backstamp



Thimbles of the World's Greatest Porcelain Houses

fine bone china
the pattern continues around the thimble



the certificate

1982

Brambly Hedge

Royal Doulton had the following set of four thimbles made after the popularity of the **Jill Barklem** Brambly Hedge books for children



Royal Doulton Brambly Hedge Seasons thimble box



each brown backstamp matches the name of each season's thimble with an abbreviated Royal Doulton backstamp each has a © mark for Jill Barklem's illustrations

china

the floral pattering continues around the thimble each design has a different background colour on the front with a type of cake or ice-cream in the centre



Autumn
pink



Spring
yellow



Summer
green

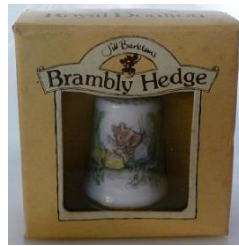


Winter
blue

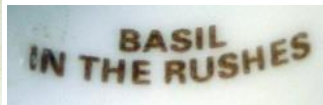
1983

Brambly Hedge

after the success of the first Brambly Hedge thimbles
a complementary set of eight from Royal Doulton appeared the following year
with two different designs for each season



Royal Doulton Brambly Hedge thimble box



each brown backstamp matches the name of each season
with a brown abbreviated Royal Doulton backstamp
each has a © mark for Jill Barklem's illustrations

the design name is also lettered in brown inside

the verse on the verso is a quote from the book
to match Jill Barklem's illustrations of her little mice characters
Royal Doulton did not issue thimbles for all of the main characters of Barklem's books



Lady Woodmouse
Autumn

"Oh dear! said Lady Daisy
Primrose is such a little mouse
where she can be"



Primrose Sleeping
Autumn

"Her Mother gave Princess a kiss
and smoothed her pillow"



Mrs Apple
Spring

"At last the sun began to sink
behind the far woods It was time
to go home"



Wilfred Played his Whistle
Spring

"Wilfred stood up and played
hickory, dickory dandelion clock
on his new whistle"



Basil in the Rushes
Summer

"Basil selected some white
wines, Primrose, Meadowsweet
and Elderflower, and hung them
to cool in the rushes"



The Wedding
Summer

"All the mice cheered as Dusty
kissed his bride and the
bridesmaids threw baskets of
petals over the happy couple"



Clover Toasting Bread
Winter

"Mrs Toadflax put fresh wood on the fire and set Clover to work with the toasting fork"



The Little Children
Winter

"The children climbed out of their bunk beds to watch the snowflakes falling past the window"

1985

The Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Greatest Porcelain Houses

this thimble produced by Royal Doulton was designed as one of the sets of 50 for The Thimble Collectors Club [TCC] entitled The Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Greatest Porcelain Houses



The Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Greatest Porcelain Houses

china

the dotted design pattern continues around the thimble with a gilt Royal Doulton backstamp forming part of the design there is no inner backstamp

1987

The Balloon Seller

Thimble Collectors Society [TCC] commissioned this thimble from Royal Doulton
this is the only thimble that is modelled on a Royal Doulton figurine
Leslie Harradine designed the figurine in 1915 and it is one of the most well-known of the Doulton
figurines



this is one of two full Royal Doulton thimble backstamps
in green



The Balloon Seller

bone china

PS - you can now tell whose thimble smashed!!

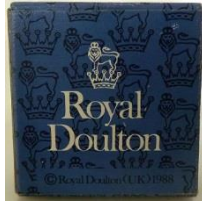
1988

Spanish Armada 1588-1988

this is the only commemorative thimble produced by Royal Doulton
I don't know who commissioned this for the Spanish Armada 400 year celebrations



this is one of two full Royal Doulton thimble backstamps in blue



back of the Armada thimble box showing the date



400th Anniversary of the Spanish Armada 1588-1988

bone china

1988

The Warwick Castle Rose

is this a privately commissioned thimble?

I do not know who commissioned this thimble – was it Warwick Castle?

Their Victorian Rose Garden reopened in 1986, which included the newly bred rose 'Warwick Rose'.

The dates do not match tho



a dual-coloured abbreviated Royal Doulton backstamp



The Warwick Castle Rose
china

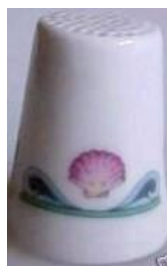
1989

Indian Summer Collection



difficult lettering to read

this is the last issue by Royal Doulton using their original thimble shape



Indian Summer Collection
china

1990

The Snowmen Gift Collection

I am only including this set for posterity
when the Snowmen range of merchandise was released by Royal Doulton in 1990, I checked for a range
of thimbles - with no joy
only two prototype sets were produced
did they eventually go into production? Maybe at a date later than 1990?
there are six designs in the set
with the identifying lettering on each verso
there is no accompanying Royal Doulton crown symbol with no inner markings
this is the first time Royal Doulton used the new shorter squatter shape thimble moulds
extra lettering in the backstamp DST ... and © S. ENT.



verso lettering
a different DST number appears on each thimble in the set



Snowmen

1994

The First Royal Doulton Thimble Collection

Lawleys by Post, the mail order arm of Royal Doulton marketed this set of 12 thimbles

I purchased this set to have the Flambé thimble!!

the patterns were from established designs in the Royal Doulton range of tableware from the 1890s to 1990s

the date included is the first time the pattern or process, in the case of the Flambé glaze, was introduced

Fine china

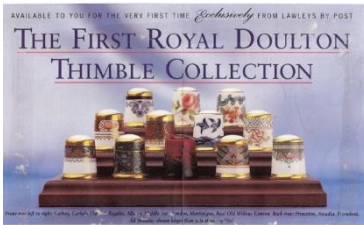
most of these thimbles have the same patterning all round



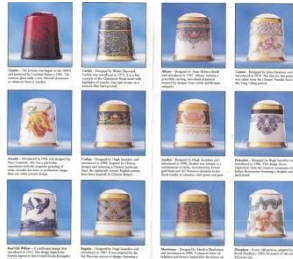
brown abbreviated Royal Doulton fine china thimble backstamp



flambé abbreviated Royal Doulton thimble backstamp



brochure of full set on the presentation stand



brochure of full set with descriptions



original advert for set of 12 on wooden plinth



Albany

original pattern designed by Anne Holmes-Smith | 1987



Arcadia

original pattern designed by Percy Curnock | 1946



Canton

original pattern designed by John Dennison | 1978



Carlyle

original pattern designed by Walter Hayward | 1989



Cathay

original pattern designed by Hugh Saunders | 1989



Flambé

original pattern perfected by Cuthbert Bailey | c.1903



Floradora
c.1905



Martinique
original pattern designed by
Marilyn Hankinson | 1990



Princeton
original pattern designed by Hugh
Saunders | 1986



Real Old Willow
1912



Regalia
original pattern designed by
Hugh Saunders | 1987



Sandon
original pattern designed by Hugh
Saunders | 1990

1995

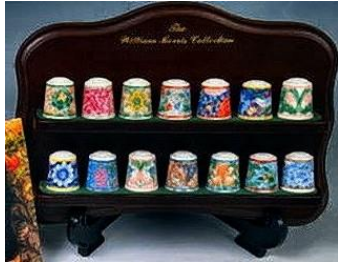
The William Morris Collection

marketed by Lawleys by Post, the mail order arm of Royal Doulton
this 14 thimble set was authorised by the Victoria and Albert Museum
1996 sets were commissioned - I wonder if all of them were made?

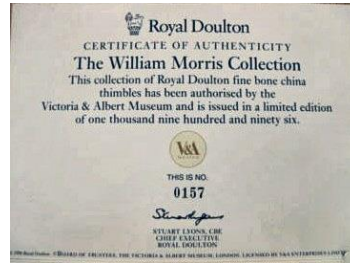
it will be one set that I need to show both sides of the thimble
for better identification

china

the thimbles have a matching colour trim at both ends of the thimble



full set on the presentation stand



accompanying leaflet



Acanthus



African Marigold



Bluebell and Columbine



Cray



Daisy



Eden



Grafton



Iris



Larkspur



Pomegranate



Strawberry Thief



Sunflower



Tom Tit



Vine

Others

date unknown

I would love to hear from you if you do know the exact date of issue of these thimbles



Carousel

Thimble Collectors Society [TCC] commissioned this thimble from Royal Doulton
this is a unique Royal Doulton shape with a pointed apex
was this the shape issued between the taller and squatter shapes?
the artist whose work appears on this thimble is Jane Winton
shortened version of the backstamp where there is no accompanying Royal Doulton crown symbol



brown flowers

fine bone china
with a different RD backstamp
the thimble shape is from the pre-1994 thimble era?
the thimble seems to have a lustre-finish that I have not encountered in a RD thimble before



applied pale pink rose / daffodil

these are the first RD thimbles that I have encountered with an applied flower

Daffodil thimble at R has gold tips

Do you have any RD thimbles with other applied flowers?

the thimble shape is from the pre-1994 thimble era

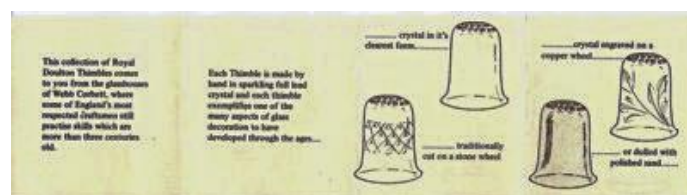
These may be the British "royal" floral emblems? Maybe there is a thistle and a shamrock still to find?

Crystal Thumbelina

made by the glasshouses of William Corbett
which was owned by Royal Doulton
the first set of six were produced in the early 1980s
it seems that there are two sets of these thimbles - with gold rims and those without
crystal thimbles are notoriously difficult to photograph!!



one side of the accompanying leaflet



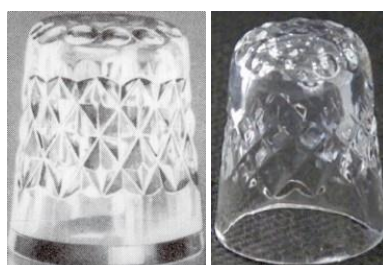
the inner side of the accompanying leaflet



two types of Royal Doulton crystal thimble boxes



Clear



Cut

with & without the gold band



Engraved

with & without the gold band



Intaglio



Sand blasted

there are no maker's marks
the names are taken from the accompanying leaflet
once the thimble is separated from its leaflet or the Royal Doulton crystal thimble box
they become unidentifiable
some have gold bands - others just show the glassmakers' skills
the apexes are flat with slight indentations

Crystal

Embroidery Stitches or Sewing Stitch designs
made by the glasshouses of Thomas Webb & Sons
which was owned by Royal Doulton
the second set was also produced in the 1980s, around 1984
there were only four not six designs
using stitches is a very clever marketing tactic
as many thimble collectors are stitchers as well!



the boxed set of 4



verso of these thimbles



Blanket Stitch



Cross-Stitch



Herringbone Stitch



Lazy Daisy Stitch

there are no maker's marks
the names are lettered for each stitch
under the example of the well-known embroidery stitch
with a threaded needle
each has four crystal cut stars on the verso
with a well faceted apex

Enamel

2004

Bunnykins

this enamel on brass thimble that was designed by Royal Doulton
was made in **China**
are there any other similar thimbles produced?

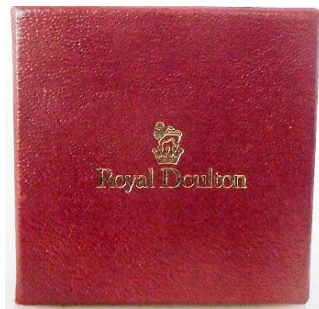


Playful

being made of enamel, the shape is totally different from all other RD thimbles

Royal Doulton boxes

several of the boxes to house specific thimble issues have been featured above
these are the miscellaneous RD thimble boxes



Royal Doulton sewing tools

This is the only known sewing 'tool' known to have been made by Royal Doulton



Pindish

'Limited edition of 2000'

1979

Commemorating the Centenary of the Opening ROYAL DOULTON EXHIBITION

At the Sydney International Exhibition 1879

the pindishes predate the thimbles – it isn't known who commissioned these pindishes

References

Desmond Eyles and Richard Dennis *Royal Doulton Figures produced at Burslem Staffordshire*. 1978

Contributors

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This listing of Royal Doulton 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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