

Metal egg-shaped thimble holders and others

I have done a thorough search for information in the printed needlework tools literature for any shred of information on these gorgeous little metal thimble holders. There is virtually no information, save from a few photos in black and white. No mention of where or by whom they were produced.

Holmes has the most detailed information but there are no accompanying photos.

“Typical of the late Victorian period is a range of small thimble cases made of metal sheeting in the shape of an egg or rectangular box fitted with a small metal chain. The sheeting, which was impressed with a light design, was moulded to shape and held within a brass framework. The inside fittings designed to hold the thimble were made of cardboard and other similar materials in bright colours. These cases, which were available as cheap souvenirs, were made to hold a brass thimble and were sold, it is believed, from 1890 to 1910.”

New information of a metal egg displayed in the Paris Exhibition of 1878, brings these dates into question. That egg was decorated with Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The Thimble Society of London catalogues show these holders for sale in the early 1980s, only featuring again them for sale in 2000-. There were only eight offered by them for sale over nearly a 30-year period.

In summary – we know that are made from a gilt-coloured metal with a pressed pattern and probably made in late Victorian Britain. They were made as thimble holders – we know this because they are lined for a thimble to be held securely in place. They are often referred to as being made of brass. This is incorrect. In 2022 I have seen one of these metal eggs advertised as being French – made for a chatelaine: both incorrect information.

In the upper side of the metal-hinged case there is a textured quilted fabric, which has white rickrack braid all round to cover the edges. The lower section has a covered cardboard lining with a moulded or cut-out shape for the thimble, for it to be held securely in the base of the case. This was lined in a mainly matching or contrasting (less commonly found) fabric - velour. There is an extra protective lining under the thimble cut-out shape - in a contrasting colour. Often the glues have not lasted, and the velour edges become tatty.



showing the cut-out shapes in the velour linings in the lower half where the thimble would fit some are matching colours or opposing colours



example with missing linings

There is a rippled edging or beading to the rim of the case's bottom half.



edging trims – with central clasps

All have a brass link chain on the lower outer edge. A search of the definitive book on chatelaines by Cummins doesn't mention these metal egg thimble holders so they were not meant at manufacture to hang from a chatelaine. The casket or rectangular-shaped holders seem to have longer chains. They are often mistakenly described as being made for attachment to a chatelaine. Examples have emerged in 2019 for sale on ebay with an extra suspension loop/s. Does yours have one? All are included to show how they have changed since their manufacture.

On average the length of the thimble case is 45mm - weight approx. 12.3 grams (without thimble). My only egg thimble case is one for a child's thimble and it's only 32mm long. The inside is different too = there is no need for the cut-out lining to secure a thimble, as the smallness of the case does this.

These small thimble cases were not designed for longevity, so it is difficult to find many in pristine condition. Sometimes the hinges are damaged, the fragile inner linings are tattered or missing – or have been replaced. Many of the chains are missing. Treasure yours if in good condition.



hinged brass edge showing signs of hinge mending

There are also beautiful brass thimble holders without the chain (ie not our cheaper range featured here). They are usually presented on a stand of their own – like a pram or leaf. They are outside the scope of this topic.

Commemorative egg thimble holders are recorded by Zalkin and Holmes. I have listed them separately as they are rare. By November 2023 four **French** placenames, which are lettered in cursive with black pen, have surfaced.

Beware when trying to clean these metal treasures – I know of one occasion where the commemorative lettering was obliterated by overzealous polishing.

As with all my previous topics, when I started to create this topic, I would have guessed that there are under five different pressed patterns, so it came as quite a surprise to find there are as many as **42** differently patterned eggs, with **six** of these different patterns replicated on the **casket shapes**. And maybe this is just the tip of the iceberg?

That's the beauty of beginning a new topic – I can bring the items to your attention in detail for the first time.

From observation of all the accumulated photos, the most commonly found pressed pattern is an all-over floral design, over an almost netlike surface when in pristine condition. The rectangular cases are found in far fewer patterns – so far!



There seem to be two opening mechanisms on these egg-shaped containers. The most frequently found is no 1.

No 1. chain and a single clasp

No 2. no chain and two opening clasps on opposite edge of the egg

In conclusion you will have seen egg-shaped containers made of vegetable ivory that has darkened with age. The nut used are known as corozo or coquilla nuts – found principally in South America. The sides are pierced and patterned all over. They open at the centre.

Buyer beware! These were never made for holding thimbles. They are wax holders from the Victorian era.

This particular topic excludes egg-shaped thimble holders made of precious metals – so no sterling silver, enamelled or mother-of-pearl holders. Many of these more expensive holders are not hinged: they have a central opening where the egg unscrews forming two halves.

Let's see if by putting this topic up as a Learn More About ... that between us all we can find out who made these thimble holders. Maybe there is even more than one maker? Does it matter really who made them – or where?

I was really interested to find that there are other items made in an identical manner – and shape to the casket shaped thimble holders – made to hold sovereigns. Even the patterning and little brass handles are the same. They are just shallower.

Egg-shaped thimble holders

FLORAL

 <p>45mm No. 1 opening mechanism</p>	 <p>the tatted edging and the red silk are not original</p>	 <p>flowers and leaves on netlike ground</p>
 <p>this egg has been altered – an attempt at a painted rose the longer chain is not original original red linings are largely undamaged</p>		



45mm
No. 1 opening mechanism



sprig-like leaves with daisies, grapes and wheat sheaves



two original matching blue linings and rickrack braid are not in the best condition



mini version
32mm



matching red velour linings to larger eggs with no cut-out needed to hold a **child's** thimble



This version has been **altered** since manufacture with the addition of a chain for a chatelaine. The replaced chain originates from the rounded end of the egg



No. 1 opening mechanism



additionally it is unlined



No. 1 opening mechanism



linings are missing



birds with trees, flowers grapes and leaves



No. 2 opening mechanism



showing different patterning on either side



linings missing
what were these holes for?



birds with insects, birds and acanthus patterning on netlike ground



45mm
No. 1 opening mechanism



wide-spaced daisies on smooth surface



45mm
showing different pattern on each side
No. 1 opening mechanism



matching blue velour on each side
there is no cut-out
to hold the thimble
a longer chain than usual



large daisies and leaves on ribbed ground



No. 2 opening mechanism



large lilies with acanthus on ribbed ground



45mm

No. 1 opening mechanism



vine-like leaves only on net-like ground



45mm

No. 1 opening mechanism



original matching turquoise blue linings



shell-shapes on grained ground



C

45mm

No. 1 opening mechanism



showing different pattern on each outer side



morning glory flowers and vine on diagonal ground



showing hinged side
No. 2 opening mechanism



showing opening clasps



all over acanthus richly embossed



no cut-out in the matching maroon velour lining to hold thimble



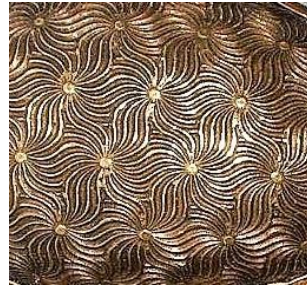
No. 1 opening mechanism



six-petalled flowers on dotted ground



No. 1 opening mechanism



sunburst daisies with strong centres



45mm
No. 1 opening mechanism
the small suspension clip on chain is not original



horizontal lines of ribbed lines and floral and leaves patterning alternating along the egg



original red linings with white rick-rack



this has been created subsequently as a holder for the metal egg. The stand has two grape vines suspending the egg, which has horizontal lines of ribbed lines and floral and leaves patterning



No. 1 opening mechanism



original matching maroon linings



double horizontal bands alternating with floral and leaves patterning on fine ground - rarely seen



No. 1 opening mechanism



linings missing



small roses with acanthus - rarely seen



acanthus chain missing



smooth surface with engraved flowers and leaves chain removed



function changed: egg seated in a 'pram'

Egg-shaped thimble holders

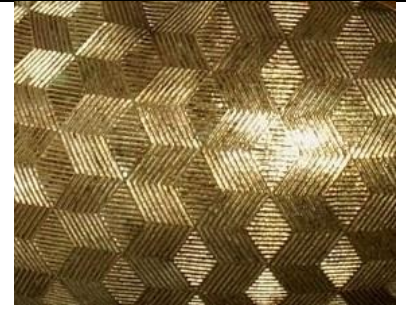
GEOMETRIC



45mm
No. 1 opening mechanism



original matching green linings



chevron blocks



No. 1 opening mechanism



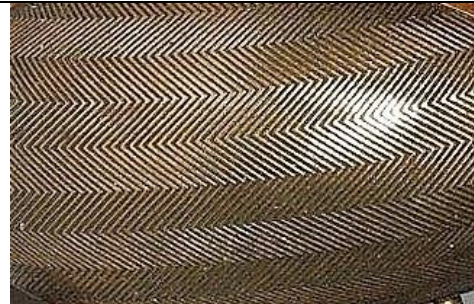
original matching red linings



No. 1 opening mechanism



No. 1 opening mechanism



chevron stripes



No. 1 opening mechanism



chain missing



missing linings



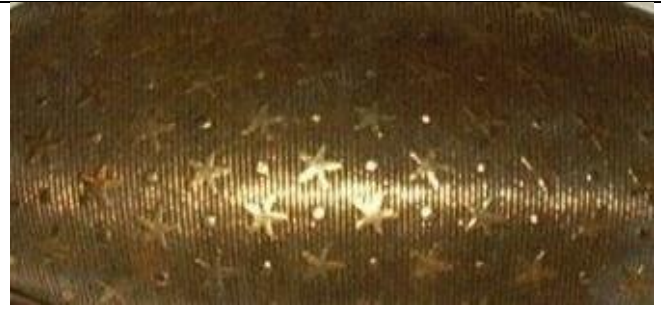
45mm
No. 1 opening mechanism
chain missing
clear indication of beading on egg rim



criss-cross forming squares with a dot inside each with a star at each intersection



this egg is longer than the usual run of egg thimble holders
No. 2 opening mechanism



stars and dots on ribbed ground



this egg is longer than the usual run of egg thimble holders
No. 2 opening mechanism – suspension loop



original linings



stars and dots on ribbed ground
No. 1 opening mechanism



chain is not original as it is not of brass



original non-matching linings



No. 2 opening mechanism



upper lining is missing



No. 1 opening mechanism



unknown purpose for these drilled holes



linings are missing



stars and dots alternating with vertical solid lines



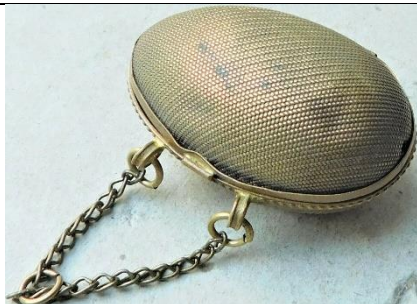
brass chain seems longer than usual
No. 1 opening mechanism



fine diagonal wheatlike pattern



linings are in poor condition



there is an extra hanging loop on the chain for possible suspension on a chatelaine
No. 1 opening mechanism





handpainted over the diagonal pattern



45mm
No. 1 opening mechanism



lines of diagonally squared shapes vertically down the egg



the chain has been replaced



original linings



No. 2 opening mechanism



diagonally squared shapes are separated by lines of finely checked pattern



linings missing – just small holes for unknown purpose



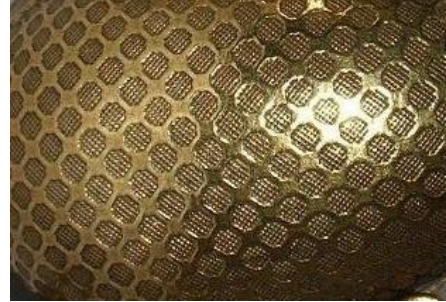
45mm
No. 1 opening mechanism



swirled abstract leaf pattern



brass chain seems longer than usual
No. 1 opening mechanism



squared circles on fine squared ground



No. 2 opening mechanism



tortoise shell-like or crazy paving-like, even cobblestones, pattern



squared shapes in joining straight lines
added suspension loop
No. 1 opening mechanism



40mm
stippled finish blues painted
flowers and butterfly
gilt egg (different, later maker)



extra gilt scalloped bands along opening
edges
no suspension chain



hinged at short end



stippled finish with applied leaf



no suspension chain



red velour lining with no thimble cut-out space



applied brass leaf on gilt egg



no suspension chain



no lining



31.75mm
stippled finish with applied enamelled flower and leaf



No 2 opening



honeycomb pattern



No. 1 opening mechanism



no chain
no lining

Egg-shaped thimble holders

SCENIC



Oriental scene – includes a bridge and two figures with sunshade
the ring is not original, tho the brass ring and chain may be = single clasp



matching blue original velour linings



figures and bridge scene



figures with sunshade or parasol and bridge scene



differing Oriental scenes



No. 1 opening with brass chain



hieroglyphic pattern with Egyptian motifs



matching blue original linings with white rick-rack



45mm

No. 2 opening mechanism



L: the blue upper lining is missing – R matching red linings with white rick-rack



hieroglyphic pattern with Egyptian motifs – such a rich patterning on both sides of the egg



showing both hinged and two-clasp opening sides
note the small opposing clasps on the egg rims



Egyptian hieroglyphics
egg suspended between and above three bars of brass, finely decorated with flowers
displayed at Paris Exhibition **1878**
(this date brings the making of metal eggs far earlier than recorded)



2nd Oriental scene – this seems to be farm-orientated – stylised animals and farmers, showing plants and maybe corn stacks?
40x 28mm



No. 2 opening mechanism



remnants of original maroon lining – some unattached

Casket (rectangular) thimble holders

FLORAL or GEOMETRIC



flowers and leaves on netlike ground
No. 1 opening mechanism



this case has the original red linings
the lower half has been cleaned with a commercial brass cleaner and this is now embedded in the embossing!!
the chain is longer than usual



flowers and leaves on netlike ground



L: showing extra protective layer under the thimble
the different coloured linings look original



L: unexplained small hole on upper side corner – inside the casket showing the inner metal surface – fluffy lining, like the example above



sprig-like leaves with daisies, grapes and wheat sheaves
the large clasp doesn't look to be original?
No. 1 opening mechanism



richly embossed with birds, grapes, insects, leaves and flowers
No. 1 opening mechanism



the chain is longer than usual
No. 1 opening mechanism



large rose with acanthus
[pattern not recorded yet in the egg-shapes]



matching blue original inner linings



chevron blocks



No. 1 opening mechanism



contrasting original linings with white rickrack



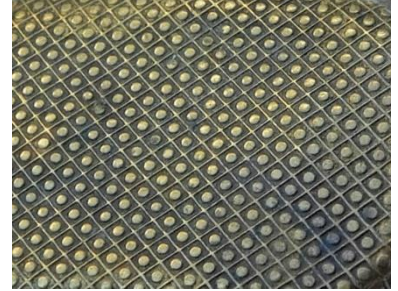
morning glory flowers and vine on diagonal ground
No. 1 opening mechanism
chain missing



original gold and blue linings with underlying blue quilted fabric



the chain is longer than usual
No. 1 opening mechanism



spots within squares
(pattern not recorded yet in the egg-shapes)



matching blue original inner linings with underlying soft fabric



No. 1 opening mechanism



tortoise shell-like or crazy paving-like, even
cobblestones, pattern



matching blue original inner linings

Commemorative and souvenir thimble holders

many of the hand-inscribed placenames are French



Queen Victoria for **1897** Diamond Jubilee
flowers and leaves on a netlike ground
No. 1 opening mechanism



Queen Victoria for **1897**
Diamond Jubilee



original linings showing wear



lines of geometric and floral -
vertically along the casket



showing rim of "button" mounted on top with Victoria's portrait
No. 1 opening mechanism
missing chain



inscribed Paris 1900
stars and dots
No. 1 opening mechanism
45mm

no photo

inscribed Franco-British Exhibition London **1908**

no photo

inscribed Exposition Paris **1900**
on floral egg



inscribed Souvenir de Lourdes
on chevron ground



inscribed Souvenir
it may be French but I can't decipher the name
missing chain



inscribed Souvenir de Madeleine
on chevron ground



inscribed Paray le Monial
on chevron ground



miniature sewing tools including a thimble

Anomalies



a ring holder has been attached to the chain
not original
notice how easily the egg surface has dented



a new handle has been added
the wire handle is neatly attached with matching screws
not original



tho the embossed patterning and chain are present there is something different about the shape of the egg – the egg-shape dips down towards the rim. The matching description has this as a sewing kit as there are scissors with pincushion inside. There are no inner views or measurements available. Even the colour is different – shown for interest.

References

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This listing of brass eggs 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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