

Horner and hearts

Charles Horner sterling thimbles which feature hearts

I am not suggesting that Charles Horner thimbles make your heart beat any faster, though I know if any one of the thimbles featured here ended up in my own collection, my heart would beat so much faster!

CH-hallmarked sterling silver thimbles have a deep attraction for me, especially when the patterning is very different from his usual run-of-the mill thimbles. Some of these are high-end thimbles all featuring **hearts**.

The spring 1990 issue of *The Thimble Society of London* was entirely devoted to their selling the collection of 100 Charles Horner silver thimbles, from the larger selection on offer. These were acquired at the Chester auction - on 16 January 1990 - held by Sotheby's.

The auction introduction reads as follows "A charming collection comes from Halifax, the home of prolific silversmith Charles Horner Ltd. The firm which closed in 1982 was probably known for the manufacture of silver thimbles and the sale contains 500 of them dating from the late 19th and early 20th century. Previously, they were housed in two-glass-fronted cabinets ... in the stock room to facilitate re-orders ... They were sent for sale by the former managing director of the company who bought them when the factory closed".

What an amazing record TSL left us by recording a hundred pristine Horner thimbles!



front cover photo from *The Thimble Society of London*, spring 1990 with their catalogue descriptions

L-R: #6 JT&S 1906 faceted rim, wide border with gold flowers and heart, dimpling (plain)

#6 CH Chester 1898 faceted rim, wide border with gold flowers and heart, dimpling (plain)

#5 CH Chester 1902 rolled rim, wide border with gold flowers and heart gold leaves, dimpling (plain)

#10 CH 1901 Chester faceted rim, wide border with gold flowers and gold three legs for Isle of Man, dimpling (plain)

Other Charles Horner thimble topics

Charles Horner Ltd sterling silver thimbles with other sponsor's marks

Charles Horner's early Dorcas "PAT." thimbles

Dorcas thimble boxes

Horner thimbles featuring a band with a gold heart

arranged in hallmark date order

The basic design has a wide striated band featuring a plain smooth gold heart that has a narrow border and four (?) small gold detailed raised flowers around the band. This is over fine leaf and stylised blackberry flower patterning, which completes the design. The heart is sometimes used as a cartouche for a monogram, as this was probably part of the original intent.

The rest of the body of the thimble has typical CH patterning, some of which he named when registering the design. It's interesting that the majority have plain upper halves, which shows off the prettiest of bands.

There is a variation to these gold heart thimbles where a trailing ivy replaces the individual gold flowers. The earliest CH thimble with ivy I have encountered, was made in 1900.

These fine thimbles were only produced in a very short period, from approximately 1894-1911, of the Horner thimbles era (his hallmarked sterling thimbles date between 1892-1948). I have included all examples I can find and you may be amazed as I am to see how rare they are.

We have examples of the 1900 Horner catalogue and none of these gorgeous thimbles appear there. The other descriptive terms I have used are also from the Horner catalogue pages.

You will notice that some of these thimbles don't have the CH maker's mark, rather those with other "maker's marks". It is on record that Horner produced thimbles for wholesalers, factors etc., using others' marks. If there was any doubt before that Horner made thimbles with other than his CH maker's marks, the thimbles with heart designs confirm that this did happen. The thimbles as illustrated with non-CH marks are identical in design to those with the Horner marks.



1890s
CH
plain
faceted rim
with 'MB' monogram



1894
GWH&Co (for George Hatton & Co)
plain
faceted rim



1895
T&S (for WH Tandy & Sons)
Princess May
embossed Louise rim
b&w photo



1895
JT&S (for John Thompson & Sons)
Princess May (R^D210800)
embossed Louise rim



1896

GG (for George Goodman) #6 & 2

plain

patterned flat rim

a spray of raised gold **ivy** leaves replaces the gold roses and stylised background flowers



1898

CH #8

plain

embossed Louise rim



1898

CH

plain

(the gold ring has nothing to do with the thimble)



1898

CH #6

Princess May (R^D210800)

embossed Louise rim



1898

CH #10

plain

faceted rim



1898

CH

Princess May (R^D210800)

embossed Louise rim

a spray of raised gold flowers and leaves replaces the gold roses and stylised background flowers



1898

JT&S (for John Thompson & Sons)

Princess May (R^D210800)

embossed Louise rim

with no stylised flowers in the background, just stems



1899

CH #7

Princess May

embossed Louise rim

lovely photos show the band details



1899

CH #11

Princess May (R^D210800)

embossed Louise rim

vertical leaf design



1899

CH

plain
faceted rim



1900

CH #7

daisy

faceted rim

a spray of raised gold **ivy** leaves replaces the gold roses



1900

CH #6

plain
rolled rim

a spray of raised gold **ivy** leaves replaces the gold roses
and stylised background flowers



1900

CH

Princess May
embossed Louise rim



1900

CH #7

plain
beaded rim



1901

CH

plain
rolled rim

well used and not as ornate



1901

CH #9

plain
faceted rim



1901

CH #10

plain
faceted rim

instead of a gold heart, this example has the Isle of Man
triskelion (three-legged symbol)



1902

CH #6

plain

a spray of raised gold **ivy** leaves replaces the gold roses
and stylised background flowers



1902

CH #8

Princess May
embossed Louise rim



1903
C&Co (for Carrington & Co) #8
 plain
 faceted rim



1906
JT&S (for John Thompson & Son)
 as well as a gold heart, this example has the Isle of Man triskelion (three-legged symbol)
 faceted rim



1907
CH
 plain
 faceted rim
 top: the leaf patterning around the band is more detailed with no stylised flowers #6
 bottom: includes stylised flowers + rubbed faceted rim #9



1911
CH #.6.
 Princess May
 embossed Louise rim



CH #7
 not assayed Louise
 embossed Louise rim
 a spray of raised gold **ivy** leaves replaces the gold roses
 and background stylised flowers



GG (for George Goodman) #3
plain

gold heart with a spray of raised gold ivy leaves and leaf patterning over striations
replaces the gold roses and background stylised flowers
flat rim with fine patterning

Horner thimbles featuring a band with a stone heart

arranged in hallmark date order

The basic design has a very wide striated band featuring an affixed raised stone heart. This is over fine leaf and - sometimes has the stylised blackberry flower patterning - and rarely with two **swallows**. It would appear that the stone heart is affixed between the two swallows, when they are present on these thimbles. The stone heart has a silver heart-shaped mount.

The rest of the body of the thimble has typical CH patterning, some of which he named when registering the design. It's interesting that the majority have patterned upper halves to enhance the plainer heart. Where the size is known, there are quite a few examples of size 10 thimbles, which in Horner sizing, is a small size.

These thimbles were produced towards the end of the gold heart thimbles production - from 1904-1919. We have examples of the 1900 Horner catalogue and as these thimbles post-date the catalogue, we have no record of them. There is an article in *TCI Bulletin*, winter 2009, by Magdalena and William Isbister entitled "Hybrid thimbles", which deals with 'doctored' thimbles. They have the opinion that these hearts were not applied by the Horner Company - rather that they were added later by someone unknown. I have included all examples I can find and it seems that these thimbles were produced in the Horner factory, tho the hearts findings made have been made elsewhere, for Horner. In contrast to the thimbles featured above, many of which were made by CH using other sponsor marks, all the examples below only carry Horner marks. There are a range of his typical thimble patterns too.

I am sure you would agree that these are the stepchildren of the CH heart thimbles? There don't seem to be as many made and none of this type of thimble was offered for sale by the TSL in their Horner edition in 1990. The rims aren't as ornate as the gold heart thimbles. The addition of the etched/engraved swallows is certainly different.



two gleaming glass hearts

There is room for debate - are these real semi-precious stones or just coloured glass? I would welcome your opinion. I don't know anything about the type of stones, so I have used the dominant colour as description, unless described elsewhere as such.



1904
CH #8
amethyst
shell
showing two swallows
rolled rim



1904
CH #6
green stone
shell
rolled rim



1904
CH #9
pinky-purple stone – possibly carnelian
diamond
showing swallows
some type of patterning on rim



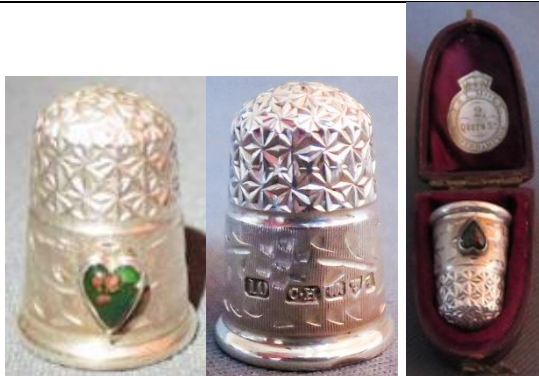
1905
CH
amethyst stone
daisy
rolled rim



1905
CH #10
amethyst stone
daisy
rolled rim



1905
CH
purple amethyst stone
shell
rolled rim
R: b&w photo



1905
CH #10
bloodstone
Louise
rolled rim



1905
CH #9
bloodstone
shell
rolled rim



1906
CH
opaque red stone
diamond
rolled rim



1906
CH
this thimble is missing its stone heart
I have wondered what is below the heart but this photo
is too indistinct to really know
patterning around the band does seem slightly different?
shell
rolled rim



1919
CH
blue stone
shell
rolled rim



CH
opaque green stone
diamond
rolled rim



CH
brown-red stone
diamond
there are daisies on the band
rolled rim



CH
turquoise
Princess May
rolled rim



CH
purple stone
daisy
showing one of the swallows
rolled rim



CH

pink – citrine – turquoise
 Louise – diamond – shell
 rolled rims

Other Horner thimbles with bands featuring hearts



9ct gold

CH #10

hearts with dots in border engraved around band
 Louise
 + R^D127211

Other Horner thimbles - featuring cupids

I can't end this Horner thematic topic without sharing these thimbles – call them cupids, cherubs or putti they do belong with hearts ... two cupids with garlands of flowers around the band. I know there are no bow and arrows ...



9ct gold
CH #6
plain



1901
CH
diamond



1906
CH
diamond
blackberry apex



1906
CH #11
daisy



1906
CH
Princess May



1906

HWLtd (Henry Williamson Ltd) #10
Louise

Other British thimble makers' thimbles with bands featuring gold hearts etc

I would have sworn I'd never seen similar heart thimbles by other English thimble makers, other than Horner. How wrong could I be? During Victorian times thimble makers copied designs from their rivals.



1896

Henry Griffith & Sons Chester #14

plain

gold heart with a spray of raised gold ivy leaves
flat rim with patterning

Finally, this is James Swann and others take on applied gold band decoration – the bands just don't feature any hearts. The hallmark date approximates to the other British thimble makers, using gold applied decoration to their thimble bands.

I have seen these hearts described as a cartouche



1900

James Swann

applied gold flowers with the Isle of Man triskelion symbol around band
daisies



James Swann
date unknown

applied gold shield on striated band with "berries"



James Swann
date unknown

applied gold leaves on striated band



1897 Chester
Clark & Sewell

applied gold shield and gold beading rim

References

- Magdalena & William Isbister *Hybrid thimbles*. *TCI Bulletin* winter 2009
 Di Pelham Burn *A Valentine for thimble collectors*. *TCI Bulletin* winter 1999
 Bridget McConnell *The story of the thimble*. 1997
 Norma Spicer *Charles Horner thimbles*. in: Tom J Lawson *Charles Horner of Halifax*. 2002
The Thimble Society of London spring 1990

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This listing of these Charles Horner thimbles with hearts 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.

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