

Horn and bone thimbles

including some sewing tools

This is another thematic topic, this time bringing together the makers of horn and bone thimbles and various types of each used.

Edwin Holmes owned a 19th century Indian-made horn thimble. From these early examples below I was able to straighten out in my mind what horn thimbles should look like. They are of a dark mottled colour.



L: 19th century Indian ox horn

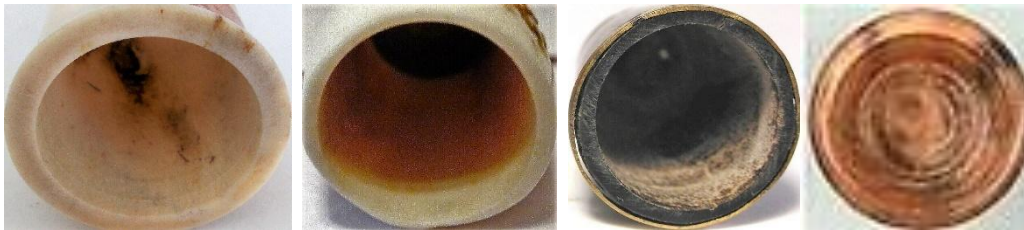
In the 21st century there have been many cow bone or bovine thimbles made of a very pale colour, almost resembling ivory (and can be mistaken for ivory once their labels have been lost).

In the 1990s, thimbles of synthetic material replacing real ivory appeared on the market. I have seen them advertised as horn. Examples are included here as a buyer beware.



L: synthetic – polymer R: synthetic material Melissa Hookway (MH), UK

The inside of a horn and bone thimble will be darker or have a chalk-like appearance.



elk – red deer – buffalo - reindeer

Horn and bone thimbles are made of animal material from the horn, antler or hoof.

water buffalo – cow or cattle – buffalo – yak, are composed of keratin (horn) – the term bovine covers all these animals

red deer stag – elk – moose – any of the African buck, have antlers (bone)

Thimbles can be left natural or be scrimshawed, etched, handpainted. Some makers combine horn and bone in their thimbles.

Like all natural materials used for thimbles, the material will always reveal a hidden colour awaiting polishing to bring out the natural beauty.

I have noticed that on the second hand market, that some thimbles were offered as made of bone -they are early plastic. The inside is very different with bone.



showing natural reindeer rim

No two horn or bone thimbles are ever the same.

Horn and bone is naturally hollow with only the tip having a closed end. This means that other than a thimble made from the tip, all will have to be filled with a different material to create a thimble apex or a separate piece of bone. One thimble in a Gimbels catalogue inadvertently stated "... Thompson can only make one thimble from one antler."

Most are made in two parts, which is the only practical way to use horn and bone to make thimbles. I have been surprised by the variety of the apex materials that these thimble makers have used.

Thimbles made of animal tooth or tusk, which include elephant and whale ivory, hippo etc - are not included in this topic.

for other topics made of natural materials see

Bog oak sewing tools

Ivory thimbles

HORN AND BONE THIMBLE MAKERS

Most horn makers do not mark their thimbles. Where only the initials of the maker is shown, these are found on the thimbles. Handling a variety of horn and bone thimbles will make a collector familiar with traits of the horn and bone thimble maker. I have added dates where thimbles first offered for sale by mail-order catalogues.

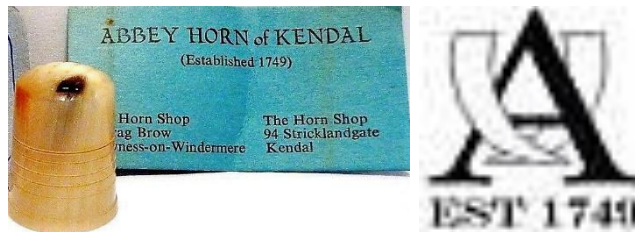
BA



Abbey Horn of Kendal Lake District UK

Abbey Horn thimbles are made of cow horn. The thimbles have a criss-crossed apex where the apex is of the same material. The shape is roughly square with incised rings and a finely stepped rim. They were issued with a 'Real Horn' sticker around the rim. Paul Kleasby is the thimble maker

www.abbeyhorn.co.uk



range of colour in natural horn



smooth apex



original labels



created for Woodsetton Peeps, West Midlands UK

Randa Ahmet Unique Design Egypt

I was sent these bone thimble photos as part of a larger group in 2010. Made of camel bone. similar thimbles were for sale by TTG 2011



feathers
R: orange camel bone



King Tut
R: orange camel bone



Nefertiti
inset brass



pharaonic
inset brass



pharaonic
inset brass



orange camel bone
inset brass



inset gilded brass



Christmas tree
limited to **24**
TTG November 2011



hieroglyphic pattering
TTG June 2011



inset brass
TTG August 2011



carved trees
TTG February 2012

Reza Baharlou Spain



camel bone

Bone Dry Musical Company USA

made to play the washboard, which requires them to be graded in size for all fingers



bleached horn



horn

Richard Carpenter Salmon Idaho USA



deer antler
parrot



moose antler
sunflower



bat of buffalo horn, thimble of moose antler, magnifying glass
of lucite
created for BATS (Bay Area Thimble Society)



moose antler
lady slipper orchid

two-three created
signed RC 4-22-09

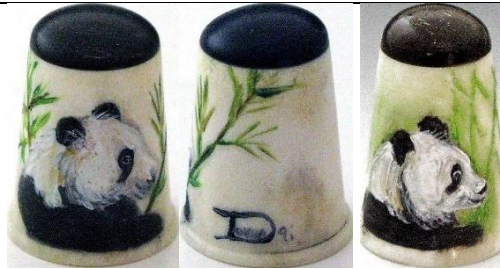
CB



cow horn
duck

Dovea USA

This painter may be one of Thompson's painters. Signed and dated.
wholesaler: Heirloom Editions



elk antler and buffalo horn
panda
1991

Dykehead Horncraft Irvine North Ayrshire Scotland

no longer in business



label in thimble boxes



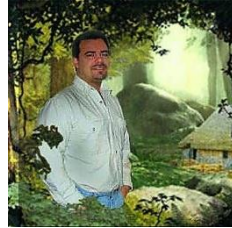
range of colours in natural antler – the apex is made from the same material












Brad Elfrink Elvenkrafte Studios Missouri USA

made of fossil bone from Siberia
 most designs feature fairy tales - mainly one-off creations
 the thimbles are signed on the inside and dated with day month and year
elvenkrafte.com for commissions



R: date 8.23.13



 <p>Alice and caterpillar</p>	 <p>Alice and Cheshire cat</p>	 <p>Alice and dodo</p>
 <p>Alice and White Rabbit</p>	 <p>Alice and teaparty with Mad Hatter</p>	 <p>cat with cotton reel with place to keep needle</p>
 <p>butterflies</p>		 <p>corgis with a bone - Ozzie and Mozzi</p>
 <p>fairy</p>	 <p>Hey diddle diddle</p>	 <p>Goldilocks and the three bears</p>



Hansel and Gretel



Jack and Jill
moving parts



kittens chasing



kittens playing



Little Boy Blue



mice in corn



lion and mouse
8.23.13



nativity



Night before Christmas



owls



Red Riding Hood



Rub a dub dub



Rumpelstiltskin



Scottie dog
black and red enamel



sea creatures - fish starfish seahorse
shell



shepherds



SINGER sewing machine
moving parts
black enamel



squirrel



squirrels



steam train

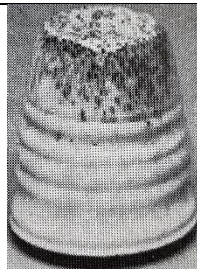


Three Wise Men



three monkeys

Conan Fisher USA



b&w photo

Glenfiddich Horn Product New Zealand



Bill Haley New Zealand



cow horn

Heathergems Pitlochry Scotland

According to the information on their thimble boxes, Hugh Kerr of Heathergems took out Patent 1143252. This would protect their unique creation of using dyed, dried and pressed heather roots and stems, which was incorporated into the natural antler hollow.

Opened in 1950s, the firm is still in existence but no longer produce thimbles.



box lid

TTG June 1983 – Gimbels 1996 – Thimbles Only winter 1983



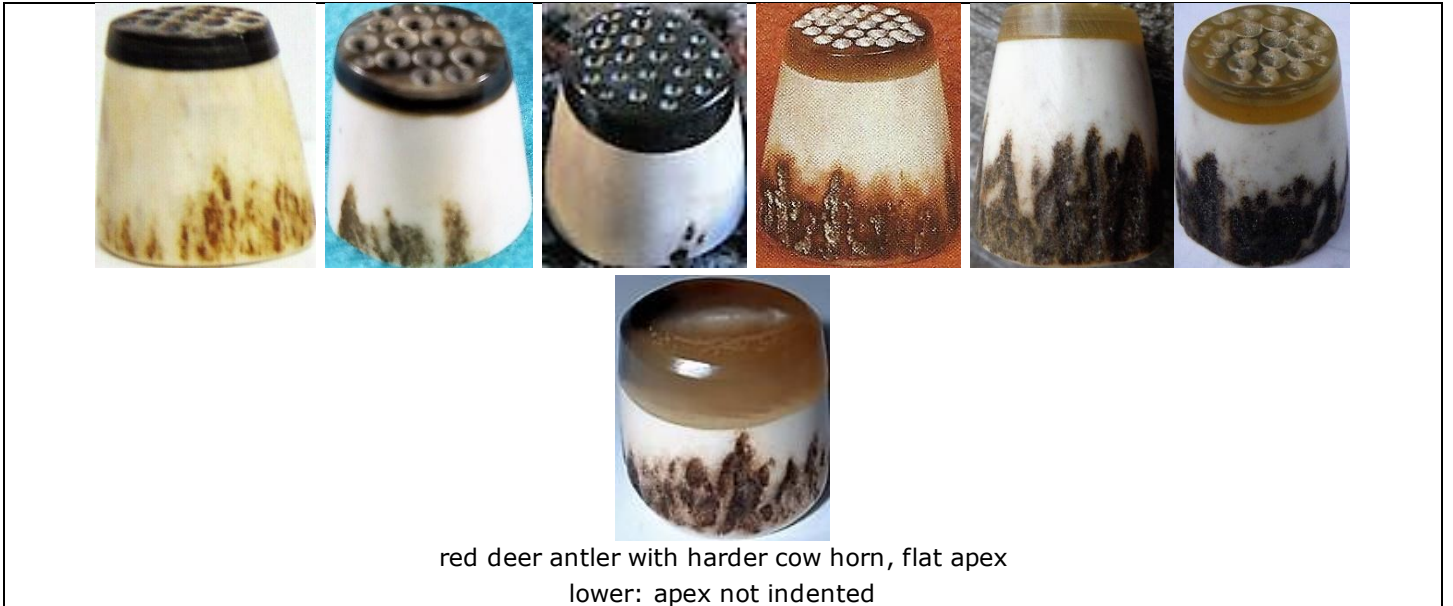
stag antler and heather

Horncraft Argyllshire Scottish Borders

They began their horn business in 1959 and are still in operation but no longer making thimbles.



Gimbels 1981 - TTG March 1983



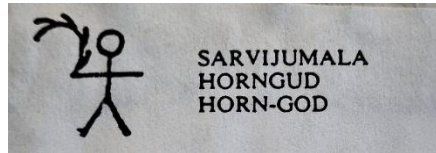
red deer antler with harder cow horn, flat apex
lower: apex not indented

HL USA



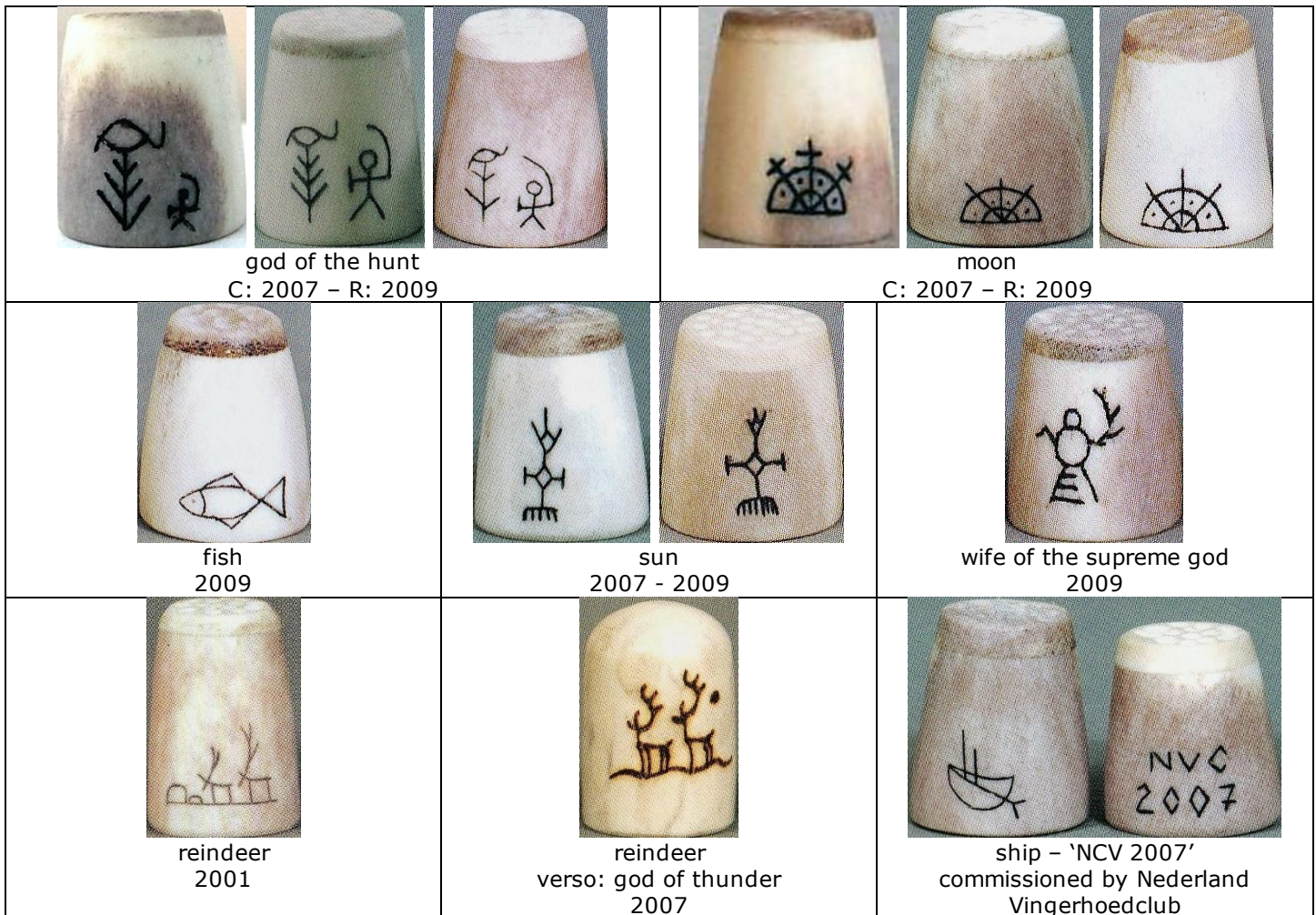
Tuotteet Oy Lauri Rovaniemi Lapland Finland

Lauri Products Limited's thimbles are made from reindeer antler. They are pyrographed with Lapland motifs, created in 1980s with 25 different motifs: for the tourist market. Most have a different part of antler as apex.



accompanying paper with name of Lap god portrayed – in Lap, Finnish and English

'1997'	'Arctic'	hunter	goddess of thunder
shaman with drum R: 2009	walking cat 2007 - 2009	walking cat 2007 - 2009	own seta (god) R: 2009
reindeer	snow crystal 2009	god of thunder 2001	birds of happiness
witchsnake R: 2009	god of fertility 2007 - 2009	god of fertility 2007 - 2009	horngod 2007



L'Étacq Jersey

This maker was inspired by the island's Jersey cows. Using their horn, these thimbles are creamy-orange colour. L'Étacq, the name of a village on Jersey, also turn wooden thimbles. The apex is of the same material as the thimble.
No longer in business.
TTG February 1985



cow horn
L: smooth apex - R: criss-crossed apex
gold-plated cow's head affixed over finely-turned rings



deer antler with abalone



deer antler with glass millefiori

MD USA

This unidentified bone thimble maker uses elk antler and some with buffalo horn. Signed on verso. Not dated

This painter may be one of Thompson's painters.
wholesaler: Heirloom Editions



cougar



ducklings



horse in desert scene



racoon



owl



panda



siamese

MG USA

this unidentified painter may be one of Thompson's painters, who uses elk antler and sometimes with buffalo horn. Not dated. No two are the same



bald eagle



elk



panda

N.P.M. Bophuthatswana South Africa



marketed by Tswana Crafts Industries



wildebeest horn
etched rhino

J R Mason USA



elk antler
handpainted chipmunk
from Stocky's Stag Shop

Nataly Namzur Russia



bone
alligator
2013



bone
carved flower on apex
2013



bone
seagull
2013

Sergei Polunin



bone
bird



bone
fish



bone
lizard



bone
rabbit

Kevin Pourier USA

the artist is of the Lakota people



buffalo horn
dragonfly
inset abalone
2016



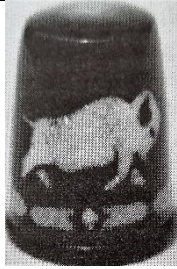
buffalo horn
magpie
inset MOP
2016-2018



buffalo horn
monarch butterfly
inset orange sandstone
2016



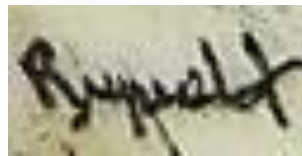
buffalo horn
skunk
inset MOP
2016



buffalo horn with mother-of-pearl inlay
TCI spring 2000
b&w photo

Donna Ruprecht USA

This painter works on elk antler with scrimshaw, sometimes also handpainted, and signs her work: Ruprecht. The thimbles are thick-walled, as they were not meant for sewing: rather showing the scrimshander's skill. I am intrigued by the variety of the bits of horn used, and so show the non-decorated side



bass



bear



compass



dreamcatcher
turquoise stone rim



elk



forget-me-nots



humpback whales



Lady Slipper orchid
commissioned by Lady Slipper Thimblers of Minnesota
2012



iris



lighthouse



lighthouse



loon



moose



roses



roses



schooner



schooner with lighthouse



clipper and compass



clipper and compass



fish



clipper and dolphin



clipper and whale's tail



clipper and lighthouse



clipper and lighthouse



hummingbird
strawberries

Peter Seeley Banff Alberta Canada

moose antler



flower



moose



flower



moose
'drawn on moose antler'



M
moose
'drawn on moose antler'

Janet Thompson Montana South Dakota USA 1981-1983

Thompson's thimbles are made of elk antler, with buffalo horn forming a contrast on the apex. Her thimbles are dated and signed **JT** on the verso. No two are the same

AX

see also: Dovea, MD and MG – where some of these animals appear
Thimbles Only winter 1983 – Gimbels 1991a



big horn sheep
1982 - 1983



bison



deer - doe
1981



deer - doe
1981



elk
1981



elk
1982



elk in the wild



fawn
1982 - 1983



fox



goslings



hummingbird
L: 1983



hummingbird 1982



owl



panda



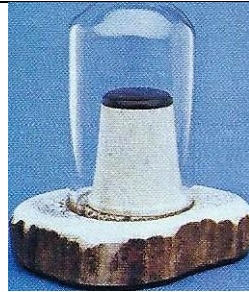
pheasant



squirrel



Siamese



plain horn
on horn plinth

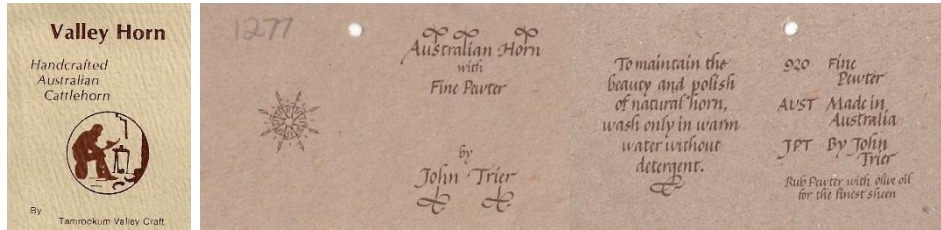
Paul Tichnor USA



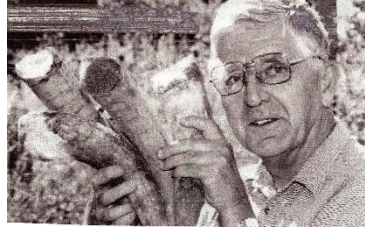
bee
elk horn
special commission

John Trier Beaudesert Queensland Australia

Trier began working with horn from his cattle on his farm in 1977. Largely self-taught he began making thimbles in 1979. His business name is Tamrookum Valley Crafts. His natural horn thimbles have a criss-crossed pattern on the apex. In 1980 he introduced scrimshaw of native animals to his popular range. By 1995 he was using pewter as the apex as this soft metal is sympathetic to the burnished finish of horn.



L: first thimbles vertificate – R: pewter and horn certificate



Trier 2007



criss-crossed apex

tailor's



horn and pewter
1995-



pyrographed set
kangaroo – platypus – echidna - koala – hopping mouse – possum
criss-crossed apex
1980 – first set created



tating shuttle

John van der Westhuizen Phalaborwa South Africa

John specialised in turning wooden thimbles. He tried kudu horn and achieved a translucency not found in many other thimbles. A small sticker for **JJ K** is in the apex.



JJ K sticker in apex



kudu

John von Hoelle USA



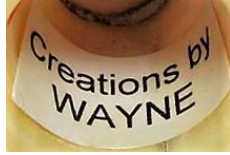
pierced, some with silver apexes or studded with semi-precious stones (turquoise, opal, pearls), gold bands or scrimshaw
b&w photos

Col Ward Brisbane Australia



cow bone

Wayne Canada



reindeer
2002

HORN AND BONE THIMBLES BY COUNTRY

Country of origin is known - the maker is not.

Argentina



cow horn
silver rim



cow horn
carved



cow horn
engraved silver rim



cow horn
engraved silver rim



cow horn

Canada



bone tailor's

China



water buffalo horn
mother-of-pearl
carved owl
Thimbles Only winter 1983



water buffalo horn
mother-of-pearl
carved flower



water buffalo
pewter
yacht



buffalo bone
handpainted birds in tree



buffalo bone
handpainted elephant and calf



buffalo bone
handpainted mermaid with fish



handpainted monkey*



cow
handpainted rooster*



carved rose



bovine
handpainted tiger*



buffalo bone
handpainted cat



bovine



buffalo bone
handpainted bird - lighthouse with sailing ship - turtle



bone
carved whale
200 purchased by Christina Bertrand for sale at 2004 TCI
Convention
later seen for sale as 19th century scrimshaw



handpainted mountains



handpainted women



buffalo bone
inset stone powder
handpainted owl - flower - frogs - bird



buffalo bone
inset stone powder
handpainted duck - flower - ladybirds - turtle



buffalo bone
inset stone powder
handpainted elephants - elephant - ladybird - cat -
flower - frogs - bird



buffalo bone
handpainted yellow flower



buffalo bone
handpainted village scene



carved bird and leaves*



leaf band*
carved scalloped rim



buffalo bone
handpainted cats



buffalo bone
handpainted dragon



buffalo bone
handpainted mice



bone
handpainted dragonfly



buffalo bone
handpainted rabbits



buffalo bone
carved elephant



buffalo bone
carved turtle



buffalo bone carved rabbit



buffalo bone



buffalo bone handpainted duck



buffalo bone carved butterfly



buffalo bone handpainted flower



buffalo bone handpainted butterfly



buffalo bone handpainted chrysanthemum



buffalo bone carved



buffalo bone carved cats handpainted flowers



buffalo bone carved dragon



buffalo bone carved owl



buffalo bone handpainted river scene



ox bone old man god shou



ox bone old man god shou



ox bone immortal god Lu



ox bone Japanese kimono girl 2 inches



ox bone Japanese kimono girl with fan 2 inches



ox bone carved dragonfly



bone
carved cobra with additional inked work



bone
carved flower with additional inked work



bone
carved mice with additional inked work



carved frog



bone
dragon - horse - monkey - pig - tiger
set of 5: TTG February 1995

*these bovine thimbles may be described as ivory in 2nd hand market

English

For centuries, in the City of London there was a guild, the Worshipful Company of Horners



early 1900s
lovely patina



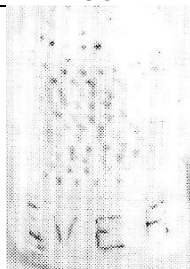
reindeer
1987



sterling silver apex
1820s



horn
1800s child's



bone
"Ever dear"
TSL spring 1983
b&w photo



bone fingerguard
inscribed '15.7.84'
TSL autumn 1985
b&w photo



bone
TSL autumn 1996



horn
1830s
TSL autumn 1995



bone
1825
Kay Sullivan December 1984
b&w photo



'Token of regard'
17th century

Finland



reindeer with gold apex
b&w photo



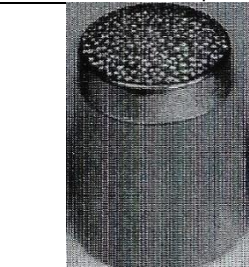
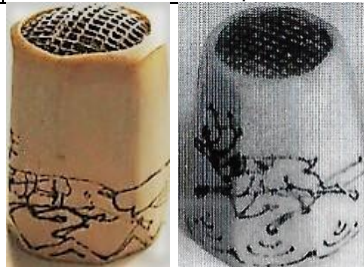
reindeer with Lap symbol
b&w photo



moose
b&w photo



scrimshawed reindeer
hexagon shape with steel apex
1920s



reindeer with gold apex
b&w photo



reindeer with steel apex
late 19th century
b&w photo



etched reindeer



reindeer



eight-sided
pyrographed reindeer
metal apex
1950s



carved reindeer



ice crystals
2007



Lynx
2007



reindeer at Arctic Circle
2007



Lap letters and symbols
2007

France



horn
1820s

Germany



horn
Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1



rose
Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1

India



water buffalo horn
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - TTG
October 1986



buffalo bone with wood apex
and rim
TTG August 1997



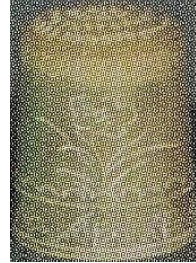
water buffalo horn
Kay Sullivan March 1987



camel bone
Gimbels 1980



camel bone
Gimbels 1981



buffalo bone
VN 69 2001



TTG February 2004

Kenya



bone
carved in Machakos, Kenya
TTG February 1991



antler

Madagascar



zebu (cattle) horn



zebu (cattle) horn

Malaysia



buffalo horn
Feldmann 17-1991

Nepal



water buffalo horn and bone
ying yang apex design

C: silver rim – R: brass rim

Thimbles Only 1996 - TTG October 1986 (R: limited to 40)



elephant
TTG May 1998



frog
eyes: goat's horn from Himalayas
TTG April 1998



dog – owl – rabbit
set of three
TTG August 1999

New Zealand



cow horn
thimble holder
Vingerhoed nieuws June 2007

Paraguay



horn

Philippines



water buffalo horn (Carabao)
TTG February 2008

Russia

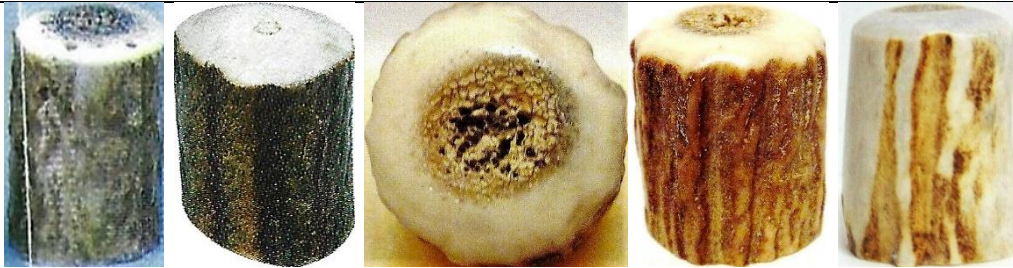


deer hoof
R: Cyrillic lettering хибины (Khibiny)



handpainted ducks

Scotland



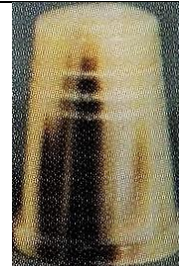
showing the ridged natural surface of stag antler – from the antler tip
wholesaled by Charles Buyers, Scotland
they currently specialise selling products that keep alive traditional skills using natural materials
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - Feldmann 8/1989 - TTG February 1996 - Gimbels 1996



reindeer



reindeer
carved thistle-shape
L: Thimbles Only spring 1987 – VN December 2001



reindeer
VN December 2001

South Africa



buffalo
made in Natal
1992



hippo tusk
carved frogs



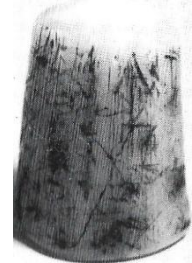
bone



hippo tusk
carved elephant
VN 46 1998



giraffe bone
scrimshaw lion
VN 46 1998



African ox
Feldmann 6-1988
b&w photo



wildebeest
VN July 2001

Spain



bone

Sweden



reindeer
six-sided
Swedish Lapland with steel apex
18th century

Thailand

Thai horn used is carved water buffalo, unless listed differently below. Most thimbles are figural



bird
inlaid eyes
limited to **150**

JHB 1998-2002 - TTG February 1999



cat
inlaid eyes



eagle
inlaid eyes



yak horn
elephant
inlaid eyes



owl
'THAILAND'
inlaid eyes



elephant
ivory eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



elephant
inlaid eyes



frog
inlaid ivory



frog
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes



owl
inlaid eyes
TTG April 2003

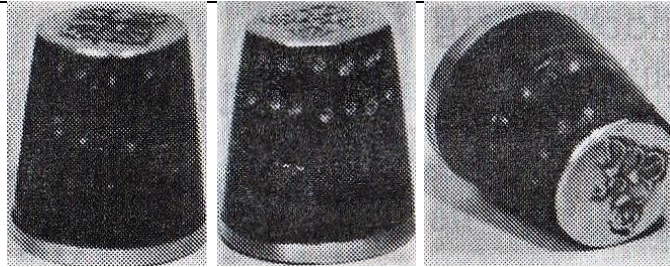


penguin
inlaid eyes



inlaid shell

Tibet



yak horn
brass rim
Buddhist drawings on apex
VN March 1988

Turkiye



camel bone
handpainted



camel bone
handpainted 'Kuradasi'



camel bone
handpainted 'Turkiye'



camel bone
handpainted fuchsia



camel bone
handpainted



camel bone
handpainted Grand Mosque
yellow trim



camel bone
handpainted 'Istanbul Turkiye'



camel bone
handpainted 'Istanbul Turkiye'

 <p>camel bone handpainted 'Istanbul Türkiye'</p>	 <p>camel bone handpainted blue flowers</p>	 <p>Bone handpainted</p>
 <p>camel bone</p>	 <p>camel bone</p>	 <p>camel bone VN 1998</p>
 <p>camel bone handpainted VN 1998</p>	 <p>camel bone handpainted</p>	

United States

 <p>handpainted American eagle</p>	 <p>malachite flat stone apex</p>
 <p>sugalite flat stone apex thimble is oval</p>	 <p>turquoise flat stone apex</p>



flat stone apex
thimble is oval



cow bone
North-west Territories



caribou
tailor's 1800s
Alaska



elk
tailor's 1953
Helena MO



elk
Dallas



hummingbird



reindeer with walrus top
scrimshaw reindeer with Alaskan maker's marks
from the collection of Alta Thompson 1950s



elk
oak leaves

Uruguay

Uruguayan thimbles are made of cow horn



Sewing Corner spring 1978



amethyst

Vietnam

handpainted buffalo horn – probably all by the same artist



flowers



scholar



temple



junk



cock



woman



fish



fish



dragon



lotus



lotus



flowers

Zimbabwe

Wild animal horn is used – buck, buffalo or cow horn. Other carved animals: buffalo, elephant, rhino



wildebeest horn
etched elephant – giraffe
1987

OTHER HORN AND BONE THIMBLES



buffalo



cow
19th century



cow



cow
cross-hatched apex



flowers



mid 20th century
gilt metal on apex



elk
tailor's



handpainted bone



bone
1820s



bone



bone
turned 19th century



bone carved leaves



bone handpainted carved flower on apex



bone



bone carved elephant head



bone handpainted elephant diagonal indentations



bone



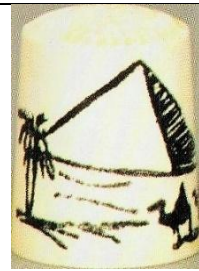
handpainted bison with hoofprints



bone painted birds TSL winter 2008



horn European TSL spring 2009



camel bone Dutch Thimble Club 2002 Gimbel's 1983



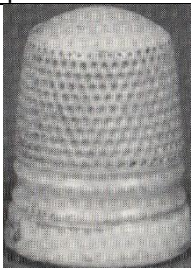
horn applied bull in ivory



cow bone



horn or bone TSL winter 2001



bone Vingerhoednieuws 31 1994



camel



cow horn and silver





horn with applied silver reindeer

HORN AND BONE SEWING TOOLS



American Caribou antler buttons
Jer - Buckhorn Crafts
 Kingston WA



American Eskimo reindeer horn needlecase with octagonal taper reindeer leather liner



American handpainted bodkin
 1920s



American hoof pincushion
 World's Fair St Louis'
 1904



American awl - Alaskan with jointed seal carving



American bird bone needlecase with wooden ends - Alaskan



Chinese bone needlecase
 handpainted



Chinese (Canton) cow bone tating shuttle



Chinese bone needlecase
 carved and handpainted



Chinese etched and handpainted bone needlecase



English cow bone thread winder
 1830s



English bone church thimble holder



English sewing kit
18th century



English tape measure
1880s



English thimble holder
bone
'Token of regard'



English bone needle gauge



English horn and ivory boot
needlecase



English cow bone lace bobbins with
glass bead spangles



English pedestal pincushions
'Forget me not'



English pedestal handpainted
pincushion
'Love the giver'



English castle turret needlecase



English fish needlecase with steel
spangles



English handpainted pincushions with
handles



English handpainted pinwheel
'A present from Worcester'



English handpainted needlebook



English cow bone thread spool
1860s



English bone combination pincushion
and tape measure



English stiletto with clenched hand
cow bone



English horn tating shuttle with
inlaid MOP
1870s



English handpainted bone thimble
holder



English horn knotting shuttle with applied gold musical instruments



English buttonhole cutter
1790s



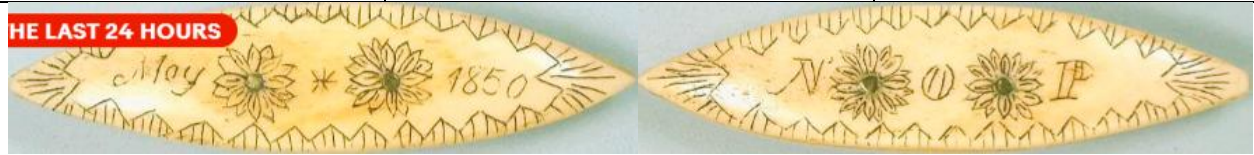
English cow bone thimble and holder
1870s



English needlecases
cow bone
1850s



English stiletto
bone
thistle



English cow bone tating shuttle
'May 1850' 'NOP'



English beaded cow bone thimble holder



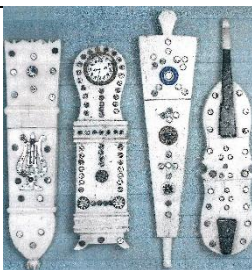
English sewing kit
A trifle from Maryport



English cow bone needlecase



English stiletto
1880s



English and French figural needlecases with steelspangles
etched harp - clock - bellows - violin



French tating shuttle
straw work
Napoleonic prisoner-of-war work



French needlecase
harp
1800s



French carved sewing kit



French tatting shuttle
Napoleonic prisoner-of-war work
bone
hearts on one side – inset in the other



French stiletto
Napoleonic prisoner-of-war work
bone
dog - knot



French workbox bone tools



German handpainted needlebook
'Bad Koesen'



Madras Indian pedestal combination
tape measure and emery



New Zealand deer horn buttons



Norwegian etched reindeer bone
needlecase with thread winder



Swiss carved corn bone needlecase



crochet hook
bone
snake coiled around shaft



needlecase
etched and handpainted bone



needlecase



needlecase
bone
etched monkey



pincushion
bellows
bone



stiletto
carved stained cradle – horse –
edelweiss
bone – bone and steel



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This listing of Horn 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.

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