

Pewter character head thimbles

When I compiled the first of the thimble heads topics (Francesca and other character thimble heads) in September 2002, pewter thimble heads were the furthest topic from my mind. The beautifully sculpted and handpainted porcelain and china thimbles were the ultimate collectable at that time.

Scroll forward almost twenty years to today's topic and there are many pewter makers who have specialised in creating head-shaped thimbles in pewter – both in Britain (6) and the United States (9) out of the 16 named pewter head thimble makers.

Pewter is a soft metal and as such so malleable. Pewter was made primarily with tin (four parts) and lead forming a soft alloy. Copper could also be added, giving a bronzed effect. From the 1970s onwards pewter became LEAD-FREE. Some pewter items, including thimbles, have a dull finish, others almost look like silver. Even tho it is a soft material, pewter thimbles are always heavy in weight compared to their other materials' counterparts.

The pewter thimble makers could create thimbles in great detail, tho they were totally impractical for use in sewing. Being in the round, the creators can add as many details to the character. A few are embellished with handpainting: part- or fully-handpainted. Does part-painting of a predominant feature detract – or enhance - from the beauty of the plain pewter?

As in the earlier topic of thimble heads, first Francesca and then the many china manufacturers who followed, the shape here is predominant.

My focus is only in the thimbles which capture just the head or bust, be it human or animal. Those that form miniature full figural characters or full animal shapes with a body are NOT included.

The following are **out** of the scope of this topic:

Carol Ann Miniatures

Brieth Design of Stratford-on-Avon

Stephen Frost of Warwick Models Ltd in Britain

Heirloom Editions of California

McMillan & Wife (UK)

These pewter character head thimbles shouldn't be confused with those Staffordshire Fine Ceramics heads that are a basalt colour. Those would be much lighter in weight than pewter thimbles.

The range of topics featured here make them an ideal addition for thematic thimble collectors: clowns by many producers feature predominantly in this topic.

Many of the pewter head thimbles bear a signature and often a date. Information is scarce and I have largely been dependent on the lettering on the actual thimbles. The heyday for the creation of these pewter head thimbles is the late 1970s into the early 1980s, which was the peak period for the manufacture and interest in thimbles made for the collectables market, rather than those made for sewing. They were the forerunner of head-shaped thimbles, and not as I expected, the followers.

Having covered as many thimble topics over the last twenty years covering all mediums from silver to base metal and china, this is the first time where I have encountered the use of the copyright symbol ©.

Most makers of pewter thimbles have incorporated this symbol on their thimbles. Did this prevent copying? You can be the judge.

Very few examples have thimble indentations. I have noted when they do – most are made as novelty thimbles.

There seem to be many unidentified pewter thimble head makers. I have tried to group these by similarities in shape or topic, in the hope that some collectors will recognise the makers and share.

Maybe some belong with the already identified makers?

Often when they are unnamed, the missing details can be found on their original thimble boxes.

The contributors and I have worked well together to show the maker's marks so that previously unidentified pewter head thimble makers can now be recognised with their work.

Pewter head thimbles arranged alphabetically by manufacturer

BS 5140

The thimbles that bear this mark are made by **B S Sils** of England. The really interesting part about choosing this name, BS5140, is that it was the British Standard specification for pewter until 1997!

The first thimbles are from 1974. This date predates the Francesca heads by around seven years.

The characters are from Dickens and the name of the character is quite crudely lettered on the verso of the head, with the copyright symbol ©; 'BS5140' and 'English Pewter'. Sils' characters are not like any of the china head thimbles.

I don't know how many characters form part of the BS5140 stable – maybe you can help?



Carl Wagner

Wagner is a very well-established name in the world of bronze sculpting. He is best known for his sculptures of American wildlife. He also created thimbles using this theme.

He was born in Glassboro NJ on 4 December 1938. When he moved to Salida Colorado, he set up his foundry in the 1970s: known as Hurricane Hills Art Works. He died on 13 August 2011.

These bronzed pewter thimbles are 1½ inches high and a delight. They were made in quantities of 1000 per thimble - I now have to establish if this numbering appears on the thimbles. They were all made in 1978 – again predating the china and porcelain variety.

'C Wagner' is lettered vertically down the verso of each wildlife thimble. Are there any more in this set?



American Bison



bloodhound



cougar



coyote



wild cat

Colin Tyler

This pewersmith is well established as a creative (fun) thimble maker. His thimbles are composed of several parts. They either stack one inside the other (like Matryoshka Dolls) or stack one above the other to form a structure (like a totem pole). Tyler is based in Worcestershire, UK. The maker's mark is **CT**.

www.thimblegarden.co.uk

Did you ever have a potato man as a toy as a child? The potato is made up of several parts like ears nose, specs etc. The thimble heads here are composed in the same way



Colonial Pewterer

USA. Nothing else is known about these thimbles.



Danbury Mint

This group was established in late 1960s in the USA. Nothing else is known about these thimbles.



Donohue Enterprises

Paul Fried created these thimbles. They operated out of Denver CO in the USA in 1980s. Their thimbles are marked 'Donohue Enterprises Denver Colo ©', lettered around the under rim.



clown



clown
'1987'

Downs

The thimbles made in 1984 in the USA.



Lady Liberty
bronzed

Exquisite Creations

Exquisite Creations is part of a British group of pewter makers, **Wales Association of Pewter Works [WAWP]**

Is this a set made up of only six Dickensian characters?

This mark appears on their matching pewter mini tankards. There are no maker's marks tho the characters are named.



Bill "Sikes"
part-painted



David Copperfield
part-painted



Fagin
part-painted



Mr Bumble
part-painted



Nicholas Nickleby
part-painted



Scrooge
part-painted

G&J Martin

They are signed and dated. Lettered inside rim 'U.S.A. pewter'



bearded man
thimble has indentations in the flat apex



crowned king
Is this thimble the same as at L?
This gold-plated crown with faux jewels lifts off to reveal the thimble alongside?

Gallo Pewter

These US-made pewter thimbles are signed and dated. The thimbles are marked 'Gallo' with © lettered on the side or verso. There are additional individual marks inside the rim for their various modellers, as well as a date, from 1983-1986. Gallo also made full-body animal thimbles.

Previously known as Comstock & Gallo. They went their separate ways. Comstock Creations are in Colorado.



clown - 1983



George Washington
L: signed 'D Sams' - 1986
R: signed 'EV' for E Vincent



Martha Washington



woman with a 'diamond' crystal necklace
signed 'B'

The heads in this set are all British historical figures. There is no uniformity as to marking – some have the 'HM' on the rim on the verso – others have no marks. They are too similar (with quite prominent eyes) not to have been made by the same manufacturer?

They are all unnamed figures but familiar enough historically to be recognisable?



Anne Boleyn
no maker's mark



King Henry VIII
no maker's mark



Nelson
sporting his famous eye patch
no maker's mark



Oliver Cromwell



Robin Hood



Victoria



William Shakespeare

Mark Models Ltd

I first encountered this British pewter thimble maker whilst researching *Thimbles of Australia*. Established by **Trevor Power** of Birmingham, this set of part-painted clowns is the only head-shaped thimbles made by this prolific thimble maker. All only marked © 1984, with the occasional application of this mark. Clowns not named in the thimbles.

The painters have had fun with their paintbrushes creating 'different' clowns, partly-painted from the same mould, even emphasising their eyes.



R: mark on Reagan thimbles



"Chubby Charlie"



Botany Bert



R: I have seen this clown advertised as made by **Sheffield Pewter** in August 2004 by The Thimble Guild – it still bears the TP mark – on right hand edge



President Ronald Reagan
on occasion of his inauguration
1989
(sold thru The Thimble Guild)

Nicholas C Gish

Undoubtably Gish is the most renowned pewter thimble-maker worldwide. His novelty thimbles are highly-sought after.

Nicholas Gish arrived in the United States from Poland in the 1930s-1940s. He settled in Cape Cod where he opened his own pewter store. In 1955 he formed his own company N.C. Gish & Co, in Millville NJ. He died on 23 December 2006, supposedly of lead poisoning – probably from all the years working with pewter.

Read the new 2019 book on Gish – it features around 200 Gish thimbles - see References below.

Gish's thimbles are always signed with a signature-type lettering with ©. Typically, there is extra embellishment as in this pair of Amish figures – heart-shaped motifs on the apex, forming elaborate indentations.

These are the only two head-shaped thimbles by Gish I have encountered (tho in fact they may only be faces?)



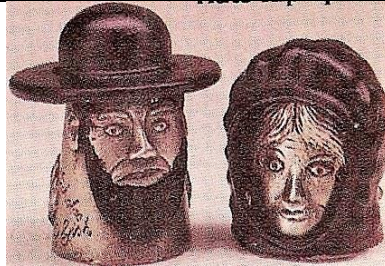
1997



Amish man



Amish woman



hatted Amish pair
their hats lift off

Nugaris Art Works

Based in Denver, CO in the USA, their thimbles are bronzed. Marked with the name and © with a date on the rim on the verso.



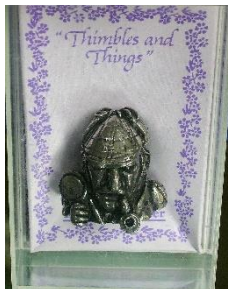
collie 1979
numbered edition out of 5000



elephant 1979
numbered edition out of 5000

P G Enterprises

Based in Yorkshire, PG Enterprises are part of Thimbles and Things, a British pewter company. They made thimbles during the 1980s and 1990s. These thimbles are marked 'PG' up inside the apex, with no other marks, with no character name either. The thimble boxes are labelled **Thimbles and Things**.



Sherlock Holmes
hinged hat
(borderline inclusion)

Spoontiques

One of the most-prolific pewter character heads manufacturers. Massachusetts-based in the USA, their New England thimbles are dated © (range 1980-1988). 'Spoontiques' (or 'Spo') and 'Pewter' is lettered on the verso base, with sometimes a number alongside.

Spoontiques also made many little figurals that are more than the bust level ...



CLOWNS



Bopo 1980

L: part-painted - R: fully-painted



Happy

L & C: part-painted - R: fully-painted



1983

part-painted



L: fully-painted



part-painted



Pierre

giving you a peep inside



Koko

Cappy

all five clowns when they are fully handpainted are in red, yellow, white and orange - 1985
they are painted white inside
the plain pewter ones show the detail of the mould

TEDDY BEARS



1980

+ unknown six-digit number
R: bronzed and part-painted



1982 - '7357'
R: fully-painted

OTHERS



bighorn ram



cat 1980



cat - fluffy 1988



eagle



elephant 1981



horse 1981
'Spo'



koala 1981



owl

R: the fully-painted version was offered for sale in 1986 in the Gimbel & Sons catalogue as 'Otto Owl'



pig 1980



Rabbit
R: fully-painted



Santa 1980
part-painted
is thimble at R marked with a different date?
possibly 1987?



unicorn 1983



unicorn 1984
R: fully-painted

Theodore Paul

Theodore Paul of London pewter. Marked inside 'Made in England'.



cat with bell



dog



horse

Tinn-Per

This is pewter factory is in Hanefors Norway. He was inspired by Norwegian heritage, Nordic mythology and Scandinavian culture in creating these thimbles. The thimbles have the maker's mark on the verso, but no date. The apices are flat and are indented.



Troll



Viking

Pewter head thimbles

unknown manufacturers

NAMED CHARACTERS



King Arthur

SIMILAR-STYLED CHARACTERS

unnamed – larger **noses** – hatted (which symbolise their character)
(borderline inclusion as there are foreshortened arms)



Guy Fawkes



Roman soldier



sailor



Scottish bagpiper



soldier



teacher

ALL OTHER CHARACTERS or ANIMALS



cat



hare



horse



Janus



Lady Liberty
indentations on her head



masks
happy - sad



miner



policeman



Punch and Judy



Robin Hood



Sherlock Holmes - i



Sherlock Holmes - ii



Skull - Day of the dead



tiger
with sparkly eyes
USA



Vincent - Beauty and the Beast
© 1990 Republic Pictures Corp

References

Gimbel & Sons Country Store catalogues 1986-2001

Don Griffin *The artistry of Nicholas Gish: a catalog of design and thimble manufacturing and mastery*. 2019

Contributors

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This listing of pewter character head 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.

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