

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

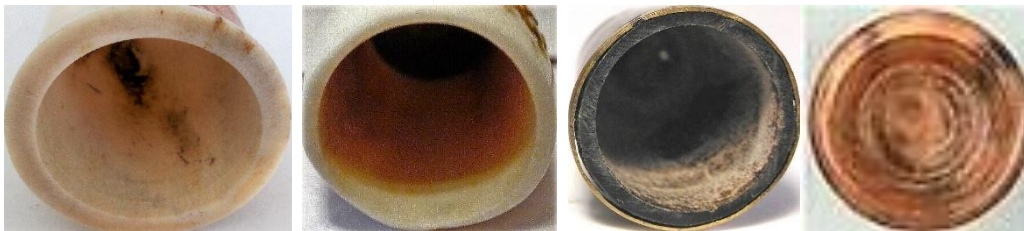
In the 21st century there have been many cow bone or bovine thimbles made of a very pale colour, almost resembling ivory (and can be mistaken for ivory once their labels have been lost).

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

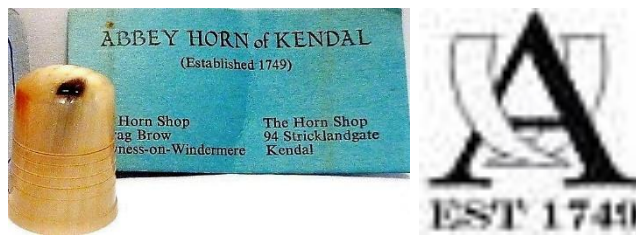


bovine
probably Chinese

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

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 patterning
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)

two-three created
signed RC 4-22-09



moose antler
lady slipper orchid

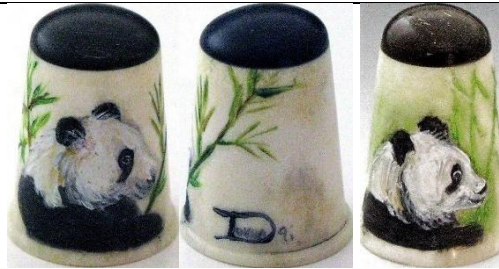
CB



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



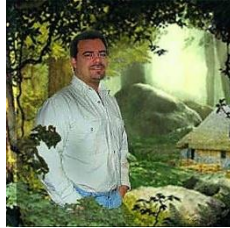
range of colours in natural antler – the apex is made from the same material












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



		
Hansel and Gretel	Jack and Jill moving parts	kittens chasing
		
kittens playing	Little Boy Blue	
		
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

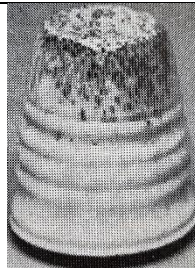


Three Wise Men



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



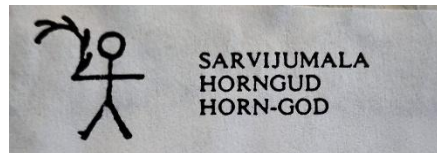
reindeer
very skilful pierced carving



elk antler
pierced elk carving


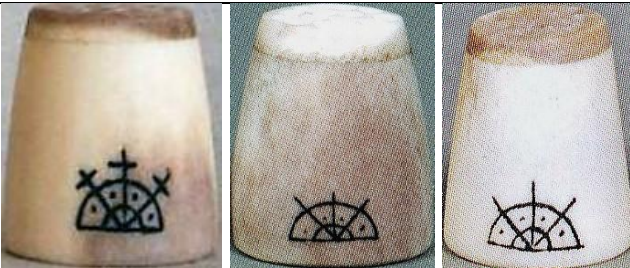
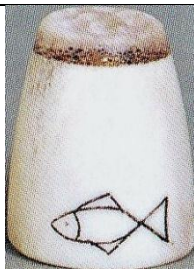


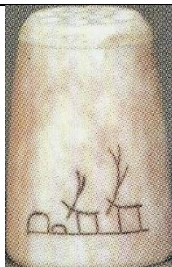

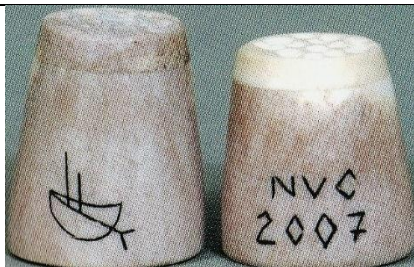
Tuotteet Oy Lauri Rovaniemi Lapland Finland

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

		
god of the hunt C: 2007 – R: 2009	moon C: 2007 – R: 2009	
		
fish 2009	sun 2007 - 2009	wife of the supreme god 2009
		
reindeer 2001	reindeer verso: god of thunder 2007	ship – 'NVC 2007' commissioned by Nederland Vingerhoedclub

L'Etacq Jersey

This maker was inspired by the island's Jersey cows. Using their horn, these thimbles are creamy-orange colour. L'Etacq, 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



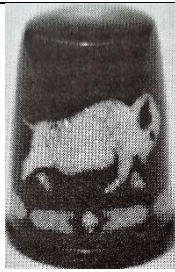
buffalo horn
magpie
inset MOP
2016-2018



buffalo horn
monarch butterfly
inset orange sandstone
2016



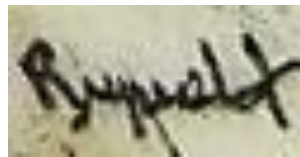
buffalo horn
skunk
inset MOP
2016



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

T Seeley Banff Alberta Canada

Moose antler



flower



moose



flower



moose

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



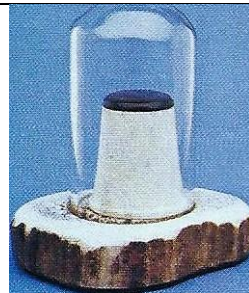
pheasant



squirrel



Siamese



plain horn
on horn plinth

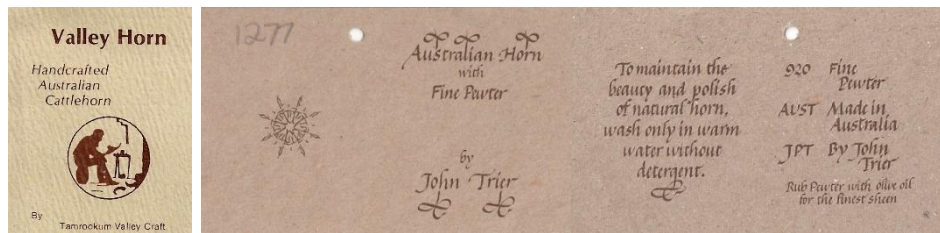
Paul Tichnor USA



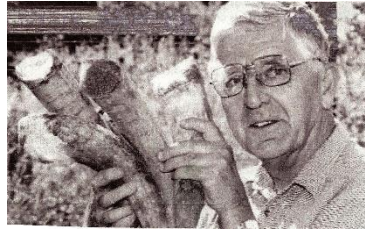
bee
elk horn
special commission

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



tattooing 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



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



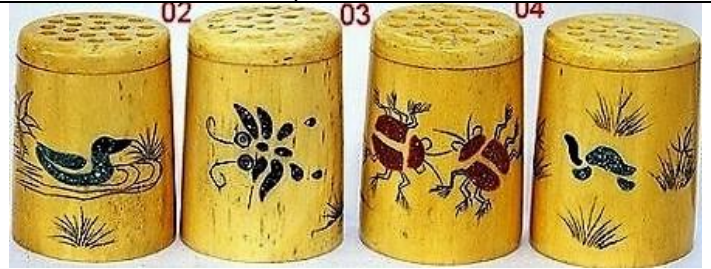
handpainted mountains



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





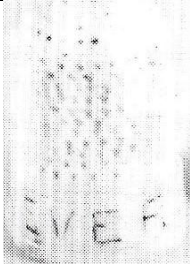



ox bone
carved dragonfly

 <p>bone carved cobra with additional inked work</p>	 <p>bone carved flower with additional inked work</p>	 <p>bone carved mice with additional inked work</p>
 <p>carved frog</p>		
 <p>bone dragon - horse – monkey – pig – tiger set of 5: TTG February 1995</p>		
<p>*these bovine thimbles may be described as ivory in 2nd hand market</p>		





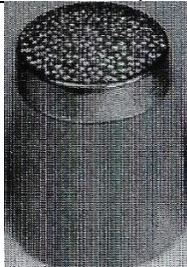



English

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

 <p>early 1900s lovely patina</p>	 <p>reindeer 1987</p>	 <p>sterling silver apex 1820s</p>
 <p>horn 1800s child's</p>	 <p>bone "Ever dear" TSL spring 1983 b&w photo</p>	 <p>bone fingerguard inscribed '15.7.84' TSL autumn 1985 b&w photo</p>

 <p>bone TSL autumn 1996</p>	 <p>horn 1830s TSL autumn 1995</p>	 <p>bone 1825 Kay Sullivan December 1984 b&w photo</p>
		 <p>'Token of regard' 17th century</p>

Finland



 <p>reindeer with gold apex b&w photo</p>	 <p>reindeer with Lap symbol b&w photo</p>	 <p>moose b&w photo</p>
 <p>scrimshawed reindeer hexagon shape with steel apex 1920s</p>		 <p>reindeer with gold apex b&w photo</p>
 <p>reindeer with steel apex late 19th century b&w photo</p>	 <p>etched reindeer</p>	 <p>reindeer</p>

 <p>eight-sided pyrographed reindeer metal apex 1950s</p>	 <p>carved reindeer</p>	 <p>ice crystals 2007</p>	 <p>Lynx 2007</p>
 <p>reindeer at Arctic Circle 2007</p>		 <p>Lap letters and symbols 2007</p>	

France

 <p>horn 1820s</p>
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Germany

 <p>horn Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1</p>	 <p>rose Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1</p>
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India



water buffalo horn
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - TTG
October 1986



buffalo bone with wood apex
and rim
TTG August 1997



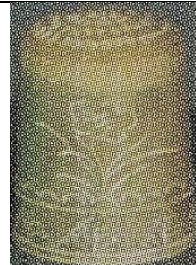
water buffalo horn
Kay Sullivan March 1987



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

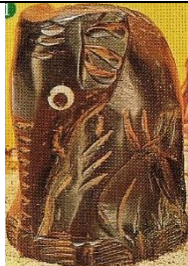
Nepal



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 хибинь (Khibiny)



handpainted ducks

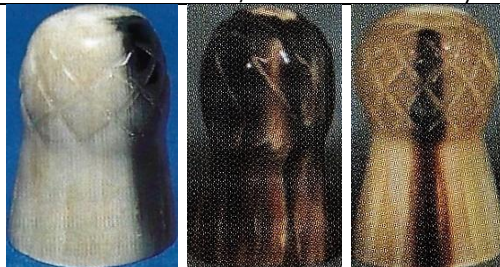
Scotland



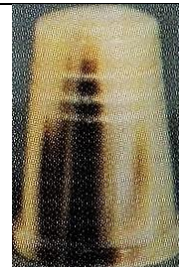
showing the ridged natural surface of stag antler – from the antler tip
wholesaled by Charles Buyers, Scotland
they currently specialise selling products that keep alive traditional skills using natural materials
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - Feldmann 8/1989 - TTG February 1996 – Gimbels 1996



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



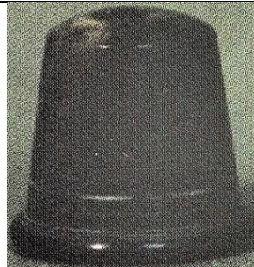
hippo tusk
carved elephant
VN 46 1998



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

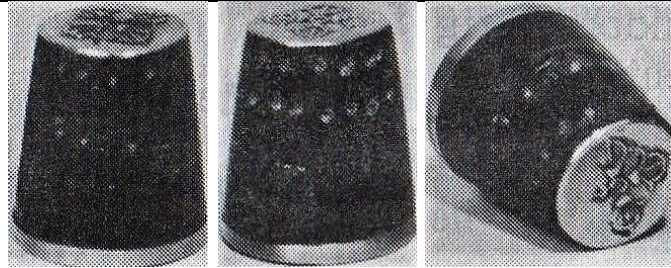


penguin
inlaid eyes



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 'Türkiye'



camel bone
handpainted fuchsia



camel bone
handpainted



camel bone
handpainted Grand Mosque
yellow trim



camel bone
handpainted 'İstanbul Türkiye'



camel bone
handpainted 'İstanbul Türkiye'

 <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
cross-hatched apex



cow
19th century



cow



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



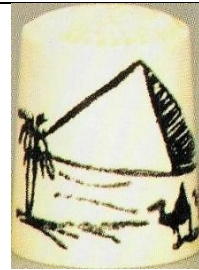
handpainted bison with hoofprints



bone
painted birds
TSL winter 2008



horn
European
TSL spring 2009



camel bone
Dutch Thimble Club 2002
Gimbels 1983



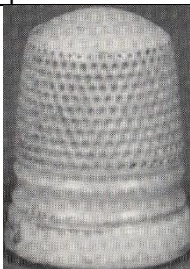
horn
applied bull in ivory



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



Chinese etched and handpainted bone needlecase



Chinese bone needlecase carved and handpainted



Chinese bone needlecase handpainted



Chinese (Canton) cow bone tatting shuttle



English cow bone thread winder
1830s



English bone church thimble holder



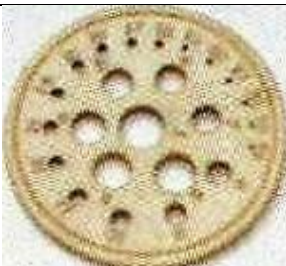
English sewing kit
18th century



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



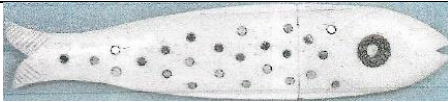
English pedestal pincushions
'Forget me not'



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 Worchester'



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 tatting shuttle with
inlaid MOP
1870s



English handpainted bone thimble
holder



English horn knotting shuttle with applied gold musical
instruments



English buttonhole cutter
1790s



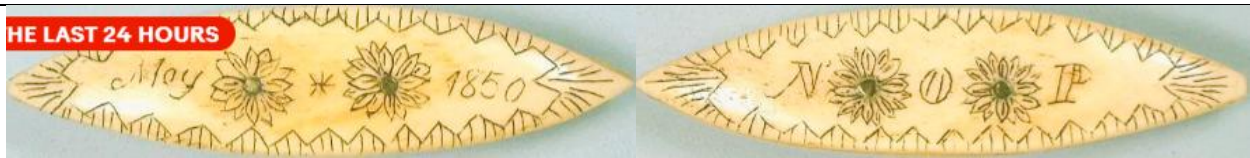
English cow bone thimble and holder
1870s



English needlecases
cow bone
1850s



English stiletto
bone
thistle



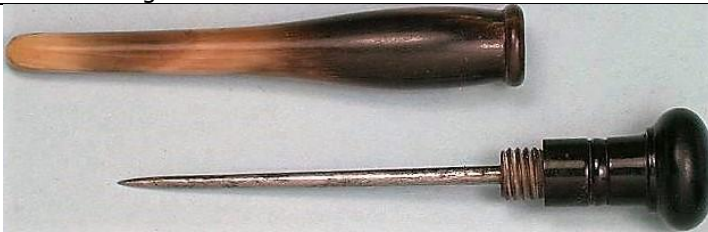
English cow bone tatting shuttle
'May 1850' 'NOP'



English beaded cow bone thimble holder



English sewing kit
A trifle from Maryport



English stiletto
1880s



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



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 stilettoes
Napoleonic prisoner-of-war work
bone
dog – knot



French workbox bone tools



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



German handpainted needlebook
'BadKoesen'



Madras Indian pedestal combination
tape measure and emery



New Zealand deer horn buttons



Norwegian etched reindeer bone
needlecase with thread winder



crochet hook
bone
snake coiled around shaft



needlecase
etched and handpainted bone



needlecase
bone
etched monkey



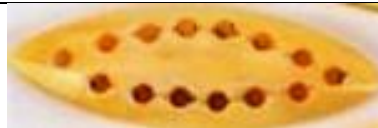
pincushion
bellows
bone



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



tattooing shuttles
stained bone
19th century



tattooing shuttle
pierced bone
19th century



thimble holder
chalet-shaped
bone



thimble holder
cow bone

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This listing of Horn 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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