

Thimble Craft by Shirley porcelain thimbles

1986-1996

Ilford Essex England

My mail-order thimble business, Thimbleselect was 'born' in May 1987 and shortly afterwards I was contacted by Shirley Hewett to ask if I would be her South African thimble agent. As I knew we would be migrating to Australia later that year, I had to decline. By sheer serendipity I was visiting England shortly afterwards and was able to talk to Shirley and Martin – sadly, there was no time for a visit to Ilford in Essex to meet them in person. Martin had joined Shirley in the business, and he registered their business name of Thimble Craft.

By the time I had settled in Australia, there was another thimble agent for Shirley's thimbles in Australia.

I was familiar with the porcelain thimbles from Thimble Craft by Shirley. Her thimbles were featured on a regular basis in *The Thimble Collectors Guild* - later known as *The Thimble Guild* - catalogues from Biggar in Scotland. July 1986 was her first thimble issue. By August 1993 thimbles from Shirley seemed to have ceased, as they were no longer appearing for sale monthly their catalogues.

I now find that TTG still commissioned special commemoratives from Shirley – ie 95th birthday of the Queen Mother in August 1995 and then they continued appearing for sale again in late 1996: again with innovations that Shirley thrived on creating for collectors.

Shirley and Martin Hewett were familiar faces to English thimble collectors, as they sold Shirley's thimbles at fairs around England.

Reading back thru old issues of *The Thimble Exchange Circle* I found a story by Shirley from April 1987. About a year before that date (which confirms the dates above) she decided to start a craft of her own, moving from being 'a bored housewife'. Once her husband Martin began creating thimble moulds for her, Shirley the thimble creator was off. Their most popular thimbles were the ones with crystals in the apex.

I have used the marketing names used in the mail order catalogues and those Dutch or German titles found in *Vingerhoed Nieuws*, run by Friedy and Gerard Kamp in the Netherlands. They commissioned thimbles from Shirley with Dutch lettering.

For most of the time that TTG promoted Thimble Craft thimbles, they spelled her surname 'Hewitt'. It was only from June 1990 that her correctly-spelled name of **Hewett** was used! This has led to many errors by collectors and sellers over the years.

Shirley also produced thimble holders and the most commonly found shape is a shoe - this sometimes combined a pincushion into the heel of the shoe.

Her thimbles have sometimes been described as handpainted: her designs were commercially available decals. As her expertise grew, Shirley created many novelty thimbles. She also produced commemorative thimbles.

A Google search reveals that Shirley and Martin Hewett now produce cufflinks and spoons using coins and operate under the name Coin Jewellers. They have been doing this for the past 15 years (in 2013).



general backstamp



1988 perfumed thimble backstamp

Some of Shirley's thimbles are dependent on batteries to perform as planned. These include musical or clock thimbles. Being made largely over 30 years ago, the thimble will long out last the battery.

Arranged in the date order they were offered for sale by TTG

I have used the thimble names used in their catalogues

1986-1996

These thimbles were made of porcelain unless stated otherwise and had 22ct gold-painted rims



Jewelled Bouquet

seven crystals set into the apex
July 1986



Black Bouquet

black and silver-grey
seven crystals set into the apex
September 1986



Christmas 1986

mistletoe & holly
seven red crystals set into apex
December 1986
with & without gold rim



Shades of Blue

seven sapphire blue crystals set into apex
February 1987



clog thimble holders with floral pattern
also available with turquoise ground
date of manufacture unknown



Pretty in Pink

seven pink crystals with pink roses and leaves of gold and silver
May 1987



Thimble Whistle
a whistle incorporated into apex
small size
July 1987



Amber Rose
orange roses
seven amber crystals set into apex
August 1987



Last Rose of Summer
hexagonal-shaped
seven pink crystals set into the apex
October 1987



Perfumed Thimble
fine bone china
some designs named Oriental Rose
porous top within the apex
making the thimble very shallow
scented rose oil
January 1988



Finger Guard
lilac flowers
cutaway for longer nails
February 1988



Green Crystal Rose
seven green crystals set into the apex
March 1988



Floral Magnetic Thimble
concealed magnet in apex
April 1988
Feldmann no.15, 1991



Green and White porcelain Frog
two colour porcelain - matt apex
April 1988



Little Dutch Thimble Girl
 two thimble pails
 one with a pincushion
 pins taped to her back
 3 inches high
 June 1988
 also sold by Feldmann no.7 1988



Butterfly on Rose
 pink porcelain and bone china
 July 1988



Musical
 plays *No place like home*
 when opening on apex is exposed to light
 large size 42mm
 August 1988



Digitabulist at Night
 available in two sizes
 limited to **1450**
 October 1988



Thimble Shoe with buckle
 brown/black thimble holder
 includes pincushion in heel
 thimble is smaller than usual
 limited to **495**
 December 1988



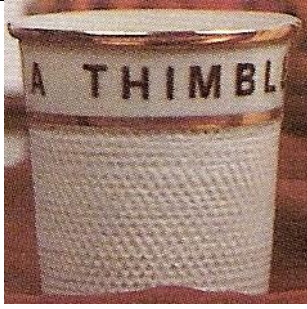
Thimble Fairy
 14mm
 January 1989
 see also: Klein Duimje and Elfe Vingerhut
 Feldmann No 10, 1989



For a Good Girl
 January 1989



'Cat' Thimble Holder
 thimbles fit in either way
 limited to **950**
 February 1989



Just a Thimbleful

33mm

see also: Dutch version Een Vingerhoed Vol
March 1989



Thimble Ring

tailor's

indented on verso

limited to **1000**

also available with maroon flowers
April 1989



Festival of Food & Farming 1989

Shirley attended this festival, held in Hyde Park
taller shape
May 1989



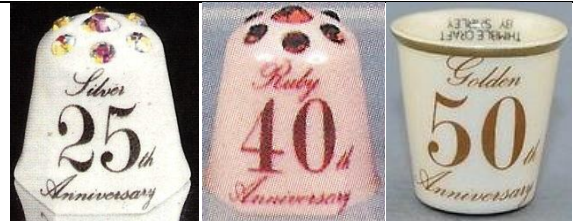
Yellowhammer

two forms of porcelain - matt apex
June 1989



Hedgehog

two forms of porcelain - black matt apex
July 1989



Silver, Ruby or Gold Anniversary

hexagonal cream for silver
seven crystals set into the apex
ground and crystal colour match lettering
silver (25th) - ruby (40th) - gold (50th)
gold one has also been made with no crystals and
lettered upside down
October 1989



Home Sweet Home

C: pale pink apex
available in two colourways
October 1989
see also: Oost west thuis best (Dutch)



Merry Xmas 1989



Thimble Clock

pewter
 cogs, sprigs, cogs and sprockets
 in relief with names of famous horologists
 open lid to reveal working digital clock
 when Shirley sent me my digital thimble clock, she had
 set it to Australian time
 March 1990
 see also porcelain version: Vingerhoed met urewerkje
 (Dutch)
 Feldmann no 14, 1990



Imagination

bowed and fluted hexagon
 small size
 May 1990



Meissen

hand indented
 different patterns on band
 limited to **950**
 June 1990



90th Birthday Queen Mother

with slipper thimble holder
 August 1990



Hampton Court Palace Flower Festival 1993

golden rose
 August 1990



"Tulips from Amsterdam"

Musical

windmills – different styles
 plays the tune when opening on apex is exposed to light
 large size 42mm
 backstamp on verso
 October 1991
 the plastic base protects the battery mechanism



Queen Elizabeth II
40th Anniversary of Coronation 1953-1993
 May 1993



Sweetheart
 orange rose
 seven orange crystals set into apex
 slight variations, including hexagonal
 September 1993



Floral Finger
 July 1995



95th Birthday Queen Mother
 same image as 1990 – different lettering on verso
 limited to **2000**
 August 1995



Miracle Thimble 1
 white flower
 the innovative miracle – in direct sunlight the flower
 changes colour and reverts to white when removed from
 light
 no crystals in apex as July 1986 version
 October 1996



Miracle Thimble 2/Chameleon
 blue flower on black ground
 the miracle – hold it to the light or warm it and the
 flower changes colour!
 large size
 November 1996
 (clever German title indicates the colour changes)



Musical
 Snowman
 tunes play: Jingle bells – Santa Claus is coming to town
 – We wish you're a Merry Christmas
 with instructions for use
 large size
 limited to **400**
 November 1996

This is the end of thimbles offered monthly in TTG catalogues

Arranged in commemorative date order



Dickens Festival 1990



Merry Christmas 1991

with poinsettia
made for Thimble Society of London
see also ... 1992 for similar design
and 1991 German: Frohe Weihnachten 1991 – Dutch:
Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991

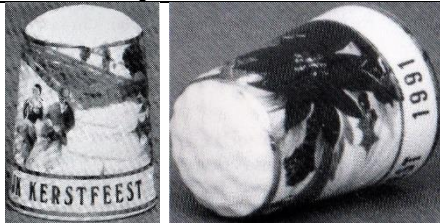


Frohe Weihnachten 1991 (German)

see also English: Merry Christmas 1991 and Dutch
Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991



Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991 (Dutch)



Vrolijk Kerstfeest 1991 (Dutch)

with poinsettia
see also English: Merry Christmas 1991 and German:
Frohe Weihnachten 1991
b&w photo



Beatrix & Klaus 1966-1991

silver lettering with a crown over verso lettering '10
Maart'
b&w photo



Hampton Ct Palace Flower Show 1991



The ASDA Festival of Food & Farming 1992



The ASDA Festival of Food & Farming 1992



Hampton Ct Palace Flower Show 1992



Frohe Weihnachten 1992 (German)



Merry Christmas 1992

similar pattern to 1991 thimbles-different date

Unknown date of manufacture – with lettering



Dickens Festival



Een Vingerhoed Vol (Dutch)
33mm
see also: Just A Thimble full



Elfe Vingerhut (German)
14mm
see also: Klein Duimje and Thimble Fairy



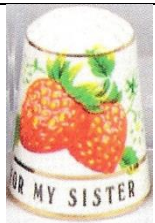
Elke Dag een Draadje
(Dutch: A thread every day/A stitch in time saves nine)



For my Friend



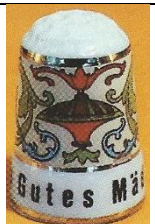
For my Sister
floral posy



For my Sister
strawberries



Fur's Paw
porcelain in a cobalt blue glass German clog thimble



Gutes Mädchen (German: Good Girl)



Home Sweet Home
presumably when made the battery operated thimble
'sang' like a bird



Klein Duimje (Dutch: Tom Thumb)

see also: Thimble fairy



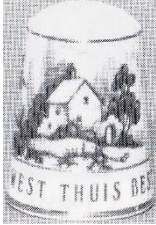
Mozart



Mum
red crystal set into apex



Mums Thimble



Oost West Thuis Best (Dutch: East west home is best)
see also: Home Sweet Home
b&w photo



Stitch in Time



TEC - Thimble Exchange Circle



Veel Geluk (Dutch Good luck)
lucky shamrocks
b&w photo

Unknown date of manufacture – no lettering
roughly grouped by SHAPE

ROUND SHAPE



bird



orange roses



floral



white flower
no crystals in apex
like 1986 version



floral



floral
large size



orange rose
seven green crystals set into
apex



gold rose
gold crystal set into apex

 <p>large white flower</p>	 <p>thimble ring</p>	 <p>holly and mistletoe no crystals like Christmas 1986</p>	 <p>shamrocks</p>
 <p>red flower</p>	 <p>Ebony Rose seven purple crystals set into apex</p>	 <p>white flowers & leaves</p>	
 <p>bird</p>	 <p>blue rose</p>	 <p>mini 14mm</p>	
 <p>applied yellow rose</p>	 <p>cat topaz-coloured crystal set into apex</p>	 <p>Fragonard scene</p>	 <p>Fragonard scene porous apex</p>
 <p>Fragonard scene glass Shirley still her porcelain backstamp</p>	<p>no photo</p> <p>Siamese cat two forms of porcelain - black matt apex</p>	 <p>poodles</p>	 <p>applied butterfly</p>
 <p>finger-shaped different flower decals</p>			



months of the year
May



signs of the **zodiac**
Aries/Leo
some with clear crystal set into
apex



salt (S) and pepper (P) cruet set



gold rings



beehive
ridged



letters of the **alphabet** set
A – astronaut
B – balloons
X - xylophone



Scottish piper
porcelain with porous apex



flowers all round
pink crystal set into apex



clog thimble holder with bird
thimble stands on closed end



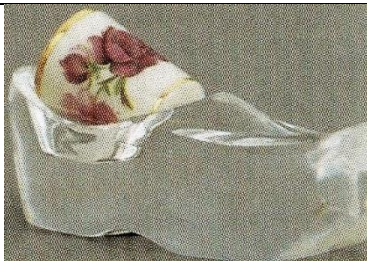
nursery rhymes
Humpty Dumpty – Old Mother Hubbard – Tom
Tom the Piper's son
larger size 40mm
backstamp on outside of thimble



decal advertising **Crescent**
Cycles
all round



unknown gold symbol



German crystal clog thimble holder with a mini roses
thimble



Vingerhoed met urewerkje (Dutch)
cogs, sprigs, cogs and sprockets
in relief with names of famous horologists
open lid to reveal working digital clock
see also pewter version: Thimble Clock
b&w photo



seven blue crystals
white flower on pale ground
slightly fluted



pride of lions
large size

HEXAGONAL SHAPE



lily of the valley



primroses
heavy rim



white flower



floral – different posies
three-ridges rim



red flowers all round



holly and mistletoe
no crystals like Christmas 1986



Celtic design



narrow band of roses
three-ridges rim



peony
seven multicoloured crystals set in
apex



harebells



posies



green rose
seven green crystals set into apex



bold coloured flowers



violets
seven purple crystals into
apex



holly and mistletoe

References

Feldmann *Die Fingerhut Post/The Thimble Mail* 1988-
Know your thimble suppliers Shirley Hewett. The Thimble Exchange Circle April 1987
The Thimble Guild catalogues
Mave Wiskin *A passion for Shirley Thimbles! TCI Bulletin spring 2009*

Contributors

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This listing of Thimble Craft by Shirley porcelain 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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