

Topázio, Portugal silver thimbles

I have always saved photos of these thimbles as my mother was born in Portugal. I first began to research these thimbles for inclusion in *Thimbles of Australia*. It was von Hoelle who identified the maker of the thimble I was featuring with an Australian flag, tho not as the maker but as made in Topazio, Portugal.

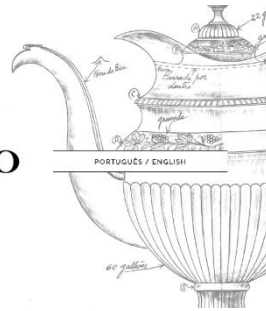
Topázio are silversmiths in Porto who began operating in 1870 and they still have an internet presence today. Their founder was Manual Jose Ferreira Marques and Topazio are still owned by his descendants.

The factory is located in Gondomar, an outer suburb of Porto.

They began by working their jewellery in gold wire. By 1920s they began to work in silver. In 1934 they took the name Topázio for their jewellery range. It was at this time that they used silver filigree in their range.



1870
TOPAZIO
— SILVER STORIES —



factory – business card

The first mention I can find of their thimbles was in Roz Belford's *The Shopping Corner*, in December 1975. There she had thirteen scenes for sale: they were only identified as having been made in Oporto, Portugal. We know that name as Porto today.

Topázio moved from sterling silver goods to silverplated items in the 1970s when the price of silver peaked and this date fits as the introduction of their waffle indented thimble range.

There are two other types of Topázio thimbles: those with knurled indentations and those made of filigree. These are their older sterling silver range.



Topázio are no longer making thimbles.

Silverplated and sterling silver thimbles with waffle indentations

Many of the designs can be found in silverplate and sterling silver. Additionally the thimbles are handpainted (Belford describes this as enamelled). There is a flat apex and each thimble has a mark at its centre.

The silverplated mark has four arms within a circle.

The sterling version has a six-pointed star with 925 lettered within the circle.

The third mark has been found on sterling silver thimbles, where 925 or STERLING is also lettered within the body of the design. Topázio also made thimbles of 800 and 835 silver. The apex has knurled indentations.

The plated thimbles are lightweight.

In practice it is very difficult to identify the marks below, on the left and right, on the Topázio apex from photos, so I am not going to attempt it. I will only show if the centre mark is present



silverplated – 925 (apex 1) – 925 (apex 2)

This brand is easily identifiable by their distinctive silverplated thimbles with embossed scenes around the thimble with their waffle set of indentations above the scene or decoration.

The number of waffle lines is not constant: they can range from two to twelve lines and the bottom row fits around the design. These indentations of waffle are not unique to Topázio.

French sterling silver thimbles have similar indentations but one would never confuse the two if they were to hand. I have been fooled tho by the Lourdes thimbles: French. The French thimbles have a slightly domed apex which the Portuguese thimbles don't have.



Statue of Liberty
L: French – R: Topázio

The themes of the scenes around the lower half of Topázio thimbles are many and varied. Some have Portuguese themes – rooster of Barcelos, Fatima etc.; others portray tourist icons from other countries - Eiffel Tower, Little Mermaid etc.

The greatest proportion tho are generic subjects, like a frog or a turtle. The embossed scenes may stand proud of the surface in the front view, continuing as a flat design on the verso.

Another type of decoration gives an outline or skeleton look to the scene or pattern.



Being embossed, the thimble design is die-stamped into a piece of silverplate and then joined to form a circle. The apex disc is then affixed to the circle. Many of the joins are not well done. The embossed design on the inside is which often gilded.



Very few rims are decorative, they usually have plain or beaded rims.

Being plated, some of the plate has worn off over time and the same applies to the handpainted parts.

Topázio used sticky labels for their thimbles. These may have fallen off. Some have been found inside the thimble. Otherwise there isn't any other lettering for Topázio. The label may cover any of the three types of apex mark.



Topázio silverplated souvenir thimbles have enamelled panels affixed.



The religious themes may have a circular disc on the band.



On the sterling silver range other than 925, STERLING or MADE IN PORTUGAL, there may be additional marks. These may be the city mark for Porto, an export mark and a maker's initials.

To date only two designs have maker's initials. Another has the importer's initials.



current silver Porto mark of an eagle – the head faces in a different direction for the lower grades of silver

Topazio thimbles range have varying heights.

There is a buyer beware about the waffle indented thimbles: The Thimble Connoisseur's Collection issued by The Thimble Guild in Scotland: a set of six identical scenes to those made by Topázio: made in **THAILAND**. They were for sale in April 1998. The THAI thimble scenes are deer standing – horse's head owl – bird – deer leaping - angel



TTG April 1998

A British silversmith, **Ari Daniel Norman**, imported Topázio thimbles. He added his maker's mark **AR**. The range he imported can be found in Modern British silversmiths.



thistle design - marks: **AR** London 1990 with a London import mark

This Topázio cat thimble below has fake marks. The marks are: 7 (size) - CH (Charles Horner's maker's mark) - Chester assay mark - C (1953). Two things this 'maker' didn't know are that there is a Topázio mark on the apex and that Horner made their last thimbles in 1947.



Here is another example of a non-Portuguese thimble. The frog design is the same as the Topázio frog but the apex mark is not Topázio's. It may be Italian-made? The thimble is cast and marked 800 on the apex.



I have listed the scenes with the plain version first – then the handpainted version. To date there are **64** different scenes.

abstract



925



925
maker's mark: **GA**
centre mark unknown

Açores / Albufeira



Açores
enameled disc
also lettered: Souvenir Portugal



Albufeira
enameled disc
also lettered: Souvenir Portugal

angel



925 on band
Christmas 1994
TTG November 1994



this may be a Thai thimble

bells



925
VH 897



STERLING



Christmas
gilt inside



Christmas



wedding - gold



wedding - white

bird



this may be a Thai thimble



925 in scene
TSL winter 2005



apex 1



L: gilt inside
Sewing Corner December 1975

boats



925 in scene

boy playing



gilt inside

butterfly



maker's mark: **FJ**
Porto mark



925 and Porto mark



STERLING
gilt inside



L: apex **1**
Turquoise
TTG July 1986



blue



Monarch
Sewing Corner December 1975

cardinal



R: apex **1**
L: gilt inside



L: 925 gilt inside



cat



gilt inside
Sewing Corner December 1975 - VH 901



cat with ball
TO winter 19846



handpainted - blue cat with red ball - gold cat with green ball
R: gilt inside

clover



L: 835 – R: 925, marks within band

coat-of-arms



apex **1**

this is Portugal's coat-of-arms

crowns



silverplated

L: Porto mark - C: crowns upside down – 2nd R: 925 – R: crowns on smooth band

dancer



silverplated
Porto mark
gilt inside

deer



leaping deer
L: Porto mark

R: this may be a Thai thimble



gilt inside



apex 1



seated deer
STERLING

apex 2

ornate rim



925

seated deer facing L
TO winter 1983



standing deer
this may be a Thai thimble

dhow



925
Porto mark

elephant



925



different scene on verso band



925 within band



L: entire band painted all over

face



925

Porto mark

similar to a Norwegian thimble marked 925S - without the same waffle indentations

fairy



R: apex 1

Fatima



flag

planned as a set of country flags



Australia
enamelled disc
gilt inside
silverplated



Canada
enamelled disc
Sewing Corner spring 1977 - VH
906



United States
enamelled disc
Sewing Corner spring 1977

flowers



R: 925 with import into Florence marks
star Pesaresi Anglo Company



turquoise and blue enamelled flowers
Feld 17 1991

frog



gilt inside
Feld 10 1989



galleon



835



925

Porto import mark - seahorse maker's mark, all stamped on rim
gilt inside



gilt inside

goose



silverplated

granary



R: 835 Porto mark



Porto mark

gryphon



L: 800 - R: 925
VH 896 - TSL spring 2007

hearts



L: gold - R: red and black
gilt inside
Sewing Corner December 1975

Home is where the heart is
pictogram



925



TO spring 1987

horse



this may be a Thai thimble

horse head in horseshoe



apex **1**

horseshoe



Houses of Parliament



Ilha Terceira



enamelled disc
additional lettering: Souvenir of Portugal
Mat 214

ladybird



VH 905

Little Mermaid



925
apex **1**
TSL autumn 2004

Madeira



silverplated

owl



apex 1

a similar owl design could be a Thai thimble



red eyes

Sewing Corner December 1975



silverplated



clear crystal eyes



925

green crystal eyes

parrot



gilt inside



925
London import mark 1976
importer: BLD Bennet Ltd

penguin



VH 904

playing cards



925 R: TO winter 1983

poodle



925

Sewing Corner December 1975 - VH 898

Porto



Portugal



enamelled disc
also lettered Souvenir of Portugal

rabbit



925

reçordacao Basilica de Fatima

reçordacao is the Portuguese word for Keepsake



R: MADE IN PORTUGAL

Sewing Corner December 1975 - VH 900 - TSL spring 2003

recoardacao de Fatima



additional lettering: N.S. de Fatima
TSL spring 2003



additional lettering: N.S. de Fatima



additional lettering: N.S. de Fatima
gilt inside

L: STERLING apex 2

Sewing Corner December 1975 - VH 899 - TSL spring 2003



enamelled disc
additional lettering: N.S. de Fatima
Portugal
non-standard apex mark

recoardacao de Portugal



925

pink crystal hearts
TSL winter 2008

rooster (de Barcelos)



left facing

L: 925 and STERLING apex 2



right facing
non-standard apex mark



left facing

L: cast

Sewing Corner December 1975 - VH 903 - TTG March 1984



left facing



right facing

sagitario



enamelled disc

Sancho Panza



Santa Teresa a Jesu Infante



Porto mark

shamrock



925

apex **1**



gilt inside

snail



gilt inside

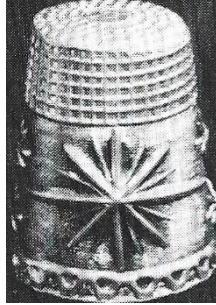
snowflake



L: silverplated - R: STERLING

gilt inside

star



VH 903

Statue of Liberty



apex **1**
TO winter 1983

stork



gilt inside

sun



925

swans



teddy



thistle



925

apex **1**

Mat 152 - TSL autumn 1999

turtle



silverplated

gilt inside

Mat 85 - Sewing Corner December 1975 - VH 895 - TSL spring 2007

unicorn



925

R: Mat 243



925

facing R

TO winter 1983

windmill



925 R: TO winter 1983

woman's head



R: VN 31 1994

Sterling silver thimbles with knurled indentations

This is a much smaller group of Topázio thimbles than the later silverplated ones. There are many similarities, like the apex marks, the varying heights of the same thimble patterning. The designs are confined to the border.

This group of thimbles that bear the mark TOPAZIO. This is lettered up inside the apex. A size number may also be present under the name.



The silver mark of an eagle for Porto is found on most of these thimbles. This mark dates the 833 silver thimble from 1938. There is usually a maker's mark of initials alongside. They are too small to identify any further details.



acanthus



925 Porto mark with maker's mark L



amizade



833 Oporto mark with maker's mark R with doves

anthemion



830
OXO



925
MADE IN PORTUGAL

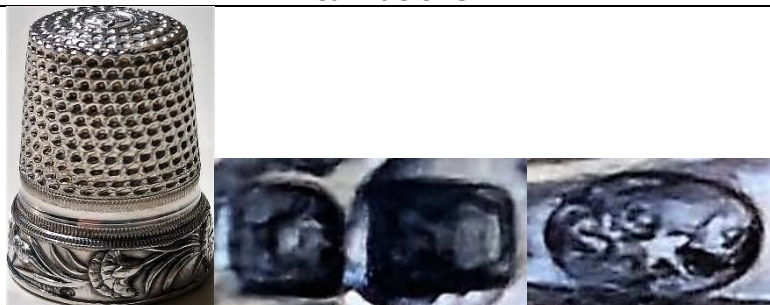


925
Porto mark
London 1975 import mark
MFD



925
Porto mark
London 1976 import mark
importer: BL^D Bennet Ltd
gilt inside

carnations



835 Porto mark with maker's mark

child's



835 Porto mark with maker's mark **A**
size 2 on apex
1920s
gilt inside

doves



gilt inside



Porto mark with maker's mark **L**
unusual heart apex mark

Fatima

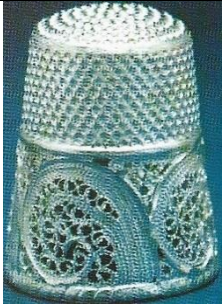


N.S. de Fatima

filigree



835 Porto mark with maker's mark R



925

London 1991 import mark
importers: MG&SA for Martin Gerald and Sid Adler
Mat 213 - PJW 1985-6



925 Porto mark with maker's mark L
gilt



925 Porto mark with maker's **SS** mark
Mat 212



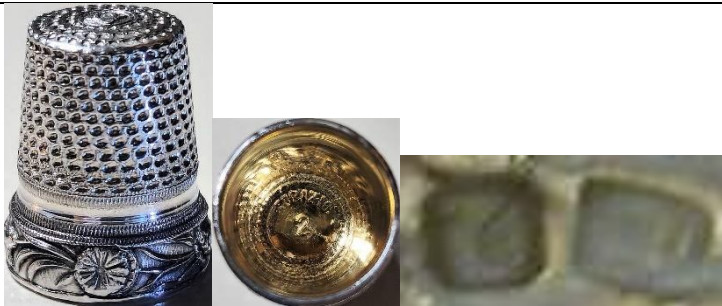
flowers



800
 enamelled on gilt filigree band
 TOPAZIO
 1950s
 gilt inside
 VH 908



enamelled on filigree band
 TOPAZIO



835 Porto mark with maker's mark L
 TOPAZIO
 size 2



833 Porto mark with maker's mark R



925 Porto mark with maker's mark L
 MADE IN PORTUGAL

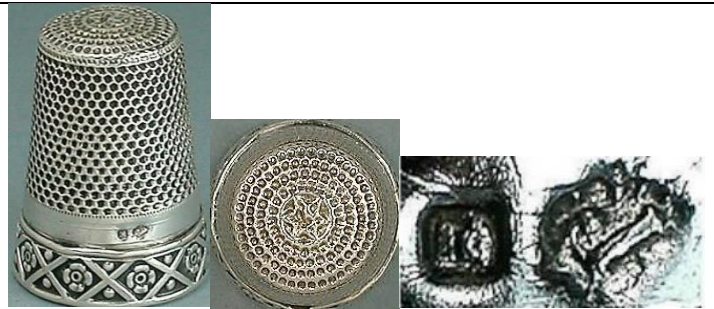


STERLING
 PORTUGAL



TOPAZIO
 size 3
 Porto mark with maker's mark L
 gilt inside





833 Porto mark with maker's mark R



833 Porto mark with maker's mark R

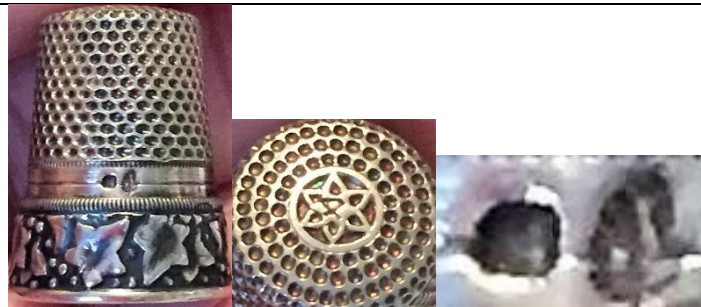
TOPAZIO
size 3

grapes



L: silver-gilt
R: 925

leaves



Porto mark with maker's mark R

Lembranca



835 Porto mark with maker's mark R

pierced



rooster de Barcelos



925

roses



835 Porto mark with maker's mark L
gilt lined

Salem 1692



Sylvia Silberman, New York
commissioned limited edition tailor's thimble
reproduction of K&MD original
for 1984 TCI Convention

scrolls



Porto mark with maker's mark R



Porto mark
taller
gilt inside

Silver filigree thimbles

This third group of Topázio thimbles is different again. There are none of the familiar apex marks: they have flat or domed apices. They can be of filigree, light waffle indentations or ridged lines. The filigree work is very fine. Typically the pattern duplicates around the thimble. There is different heights as with the waffle thimbles.

Most of the rims are plain or rolled basic pattern.

Other countries create filigree thimbles – Malta (with a Maltese cross) – India – Philippines – Israel – Yemen – Russia (modern with inset handpainted porcelain discs) – England (early 19th century).

butterfly



925

enamel



925 Porto mark
maker's marks
blue dots



835 Porto mark with maker's mark L
blue enamelled flowers



925
blue enamelled flowers
gilt inside
VN 2002



835

Porto mark with maker's mark below
green enamelled flowers



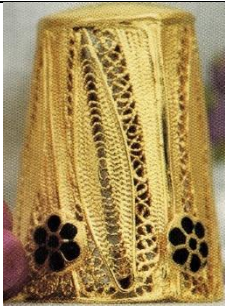
red enamelled flowers



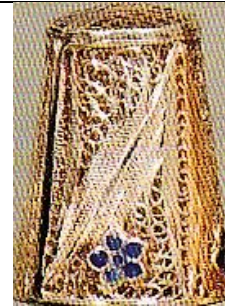
blue and green enamelled flowers



18ct
blue enamelled flowers
VN 2004



red enamelled flowers
VN 1993

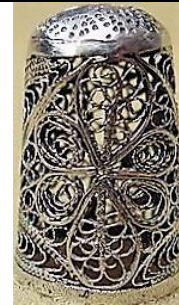


blue enamelled flowers
VN 2004

flower



925



925

gilt



835

Porto mark with maker's mark L

heart



Portugal



enamelled

rooster de Bardelos



835

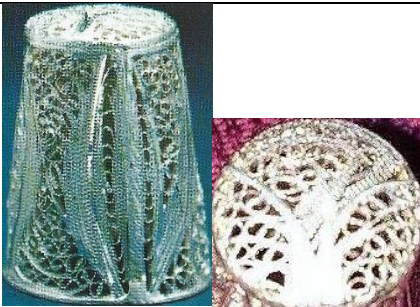
enamelled cock



835

Porto mark with maker's mark L

others



Mat 213





835 Porto Mark with maker's marks L
R: taller version



900
BSP



VH 909



TO 1983



TCI summer 2000

Other sewing related items



needlecase
833 Porto mark



needlecase
833 Porto mark



stiletto
833 Porto boar mark



thimble holder
embossed acanthus
loops for green chatelaine attachment
'MADE IN PORTUGAL' with Porto mark



thimble holder
 embossed lotus flowers
 loops for green chatelaine attachment
 'MADE IN PORTUGAL' with Porto mark



thimble holder
 filigree
 PJW 1985-6

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This listing of Topázio, Portugal silver 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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