

# Charles May (CM) sterling silver and gold thimbles 1860-1929

I have had a few Charles May's silver thimbles in my collection for a long time - and as they are all fairly similar in design an abstract feathery pattern (also known as wriggle-work) - it came as a surprise to find he'd made other thimble designs. Reading thru back copies of The Thimble Society (of London) catalogues, I noticed that though the feathery patterned bands that I'd always associated with Charles May, there was a wonderful range new to me. I thought I'd share these findings with you. I have noticed that May uses large cartouches on his wriggle work bands and often the hallmarks have been placed here.



Charles May was not one of the most prolific Victorian silver thimble makers; Charles Horner of Halifax and the Birmingham silver thimble makers (Henry Griffith, James Fenton and James Swann) were much bigger thimble producers. Because of this, Charles May thimbles make a niche collection to collect. He was different from most of the English Victorian thimble silversmiths: in that, he didn't work in Birmingham.

May was London-based and he registered his maker's mark at the London assay office. The firm had two primary places of manufacture in London: Shoreditch, and later in Hackney. Gold and silver thimble making was their primary manufacture.



R: it's unusual to find a size mark on such an early hallmark=London 1868

Charles May also registered his maker's mark at the Birmingham assay office in February 1876. All thimbles below were made registered in London, unless stated otherwise.



Von Hoelle describes May as "an English goldsmith in London who made exquisite gold thimbles during the second half of the 19th century". In her 'Letts Guide...' McConnel has that Charles May firm existed from 1805 to 1929.

Holmes attests that by 1900 Charles May concentrated more on making gold thimbles.

There is a time-line for the firm of Charles May as silversmiths, in Culme as follows:

Charles May c.1821-c.1851

Charles Croxton May c.1851-c.1880

C.C. May & Sons c.1880-1907

C.C. May & Sons Ltd 1907-after 1923

It's so good to have had contact with descendants of Charles May- from here in Queensland! This family is in the line of Charles Croxton May.

The thimbles are arranged by date, giving the assay office and date. You can see the similarity of his designs in his later period. The earliest dated hallmarked thimble for Charles May, illustrated here, is for 1860 and the last in 1929. From observation, Charles May may have used size numbers from 1895 and size 2 is larger in diameter than the size 7.

If you study the feathery, stylised leaf (or wriggle-work) patterned band thimbles you will see that each one is different and most have a faceted rim. Another distinctive trait I've noticed from this small selection is the daisy patterns he uses - they are larger and more defined than those used by silver thimble makers in England of the same era.

Scroll down to the foot of this page to see the gorgeous, highly chased silver thimbles that screw into a smooth glass container, forming a compendium, and other delights. Examples illustrated have corks in the mouth of the glass phial. What was this glass container to hold? With a cork stopper, it has to be something liquid? Both are now empty. The hallmarks are both for Birmingham and the hallmark dates are from 1876 and 1886.



1860

flared rim in bell shape with a beautifully finely engraved leaves band

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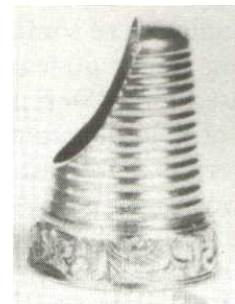
1864

four colours of 15ct gold  
raised band of fruit and leaves



1867

15ct gold thimbles  
with turquoise  
b&w photo



1868

fingerguard  
narrow engraved band

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1868



1868  
band of wavy lines



1869  
narrow patterned band



1878  
Birmingham  
part of a compendium  
see below



1880  
wriggle-work band



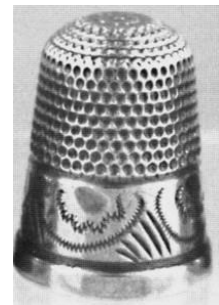
1881  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1883 1887  
a classic thimble



1883 1896



1884  
wriggle-work band



1886  
Birmingham  
wonderful floral pattern



1886  
Birmingham  
part of a compendium  
see below



1886  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band





1887  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1887  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1887  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1887  
Birmingham  
well defined floral pattern



1887  
Birmingham  
Jubilee V.R.I 1887  
well defined floral pattern



1887  
Birmingham  
strong floral pattern



1888  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band



1888  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1888  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1888  
Birmingham  
floral pattern



1888  
well defined floral pattern



1889  
Birmingham



1889  
Birmingham  
floral band



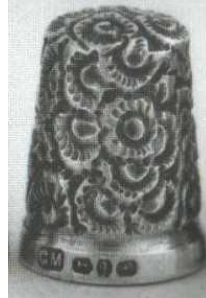
1889  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1890  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1890  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band



1890  
Birmingham  
heavier floral pattern



1890  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band



1890 1891 1894 1896 1914  
Birmingham London  
fine floral pattern

galleried rim over wriggle-work band  
1887 thimble with **H&T** mark has identical patterning



1890  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1890  
wriggle-work band



1891  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1891  
Birmingham  
heavy floral pattern



1892  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim





1892  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1892  
Birmingham  
geometric at its best



1893  
Birmingham  
diamond band



1893 Birmingham  
heavier floral pattern  
galleried rim over wriggle-work band



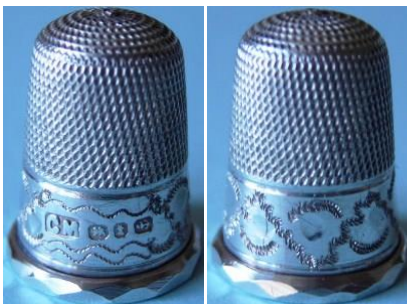
1893  
Birmingham



1893  
Birmingham  
Atlantic Cable pattern  
over wriggle-work band



1893  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1893  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1894 Birmingham  
flowers within circles



1894  
Birmingham  
strong floral pattern



1894  
Birmingham



1895  
Birmingham  
fleur-de-lis scalloped rim  
over wriggle-work band  
size 3



1895  
Birmingham  
daisy pattern  
size 6



1895  
combination pattern of daisy band,  
diamond pattern with daisy apex  
size 5



1895  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1895  
Birmingham  
strong diamond patterned band  
size 5



1895  
large flower on apex  
faceted diamond pattern  
one of May's prettiest designs  
size 6



1896  
daisy within a circle pattern



1896  
daisy pattern  
size 4



1896  
Atlantic Cable pattern  
over wriggle-work band  
size 5



1896  
unusual blackberry pattern



1896  
strong diamond patterned band  
size 6





1896  
long wriggle work cartouche  
size 2



1897  
wriggle-work band  
size 7



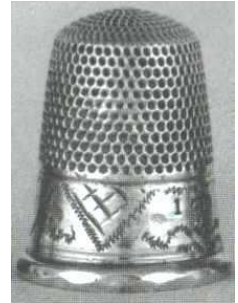
1897  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1897  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1897  
well-defined fan pattern  
exquisite faceting on apex  
size 6



1897  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1897  
Birmingham  
Atlantic Cable pattern  
over wriggle-work band



1897  
daisy pattern



1897  
narrow band



1898  
Birmingham  
Atlantic Cable pattern  
over wriggle-work band  
size 6



1898  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim





1898  
Birmingham  
dots and diamond patterned band  
size 3



1899  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim  
size 6



1899 1909  
Birmingham  
daisy band  
size 2 4



1899  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1900  
Birmingham  
stippled pattern  
size 5



1900  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
size 7



1900  
Birmingham  
daisy band with diamond pattern  
size 4



1901  
Birmingham  
diamond within diamond pattern  
interspersed with daisy pattern



1901



1901  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1901  
Birmingham  
floral pattern  
galleried rim over wriggle-work band  
size 4



1901  
London Birmingham  
strong diamond patterned band with  
daisy pattern  
size 3



1901  
Birmingham  
daisy band  
size 5



1902  
Birmingham  
vertical bands of daisy and  
diamond pattern  
size 2



1902  
Birmingham  
daisy pattern  
size 2



1902  
Birmingham  
combination pattern of daisy band, diamond pattern with  
daisy apex



1903  
Birmingham  
strong diamond patterned band with daisy pattern



1903  
Birmingham  
mixed horizontal patterns  
size 4



1905  
Birmingham  
vertical bands of daisy and strong diamond pattern  
size 4



1905  
well-defined wriggle-work band



1905  
Birmingham  
horizontal rows of diamond and  
defined circles  
size 5



1905  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
wide cartouche  
faceted rim





1907 1910  
Birmingham  
size 4  
strong diamond patterned band with  
daisy pattern



1907  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim  
size 3



1909  
Birmingham  
well-defined wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1910  
Birmingham  
Zipper-type wriggle-work band  
faceted rim  
size 4



1911  
Birmingham  
swirled wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1911  
Birmingham  
diamond patterned band with  
daisy pattern  
size 5



1912  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1915  
combination pattern of daisy band,  
diamond pattern with daisy apex  
size 5



1916  
daisy pattern with defined centre



1916  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1917  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1917  
strong diamond patterned band with  
daisy pattern  
size 8



1917  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1918  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



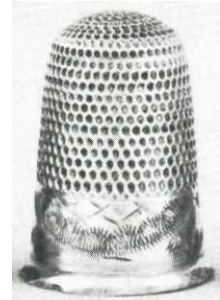
1918  
diamond patterned band with daisy  
pattern  
size 7



1918  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1918 1919  
strong diamond patterned band with  
daisy pattern  
sizes 6/9



1919  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



1919  
wriggle-work band



1920  
vertical daisy pattern with bands of  
defined circles



1920  
strong diamond patterned band with  
daisy pattern



1920  
daisy pattern with bands of defined  
circles



1920



1926  
15ct gold  
finely engraved narrow band





1929  
Birmingham  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim  
size 3



1929  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



Birmingham  
date unknown  
strong diamond patterned band with  
daisy pattern



Birmingham  
date unknown  
daisy pattern



Birmingham  
date unknown  
wriggle-work band  
faceted rim



assay office and date unknown  
daisy within circle pattern



assay office and date unknown  
wriggle-work band

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## Compendiums and thimble holders

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1876  
Birmingham  
red glass



1886  
Birmingham  
white glass



1889  
Birmingham  
ornately chased with a pierced top thimble holder which has a face as part of patterning  
hanging chatelaine loop

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Charles May didn't only make thimbles. Collectors have let me know of a faceted scent bottle with hallmarked CM silver top with a Birmingham assay mark.



## References

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## Contributors

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This listing of Charles May 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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