# Charles Horner Ltd sterling silver thimbles made with other sponsor's marks

Charles Horner of Halifax, Yorkshire in England, is probably the best-known name in British thimble history. Known for their steel-lined sterling thimbles, they were also the manufacturers of sterling silver thimbles, some with the most beautiful designs.

Horner took out a patent (No. 8954 of 1884) for his steel-lined thimbles and they were lettered PAT. (being the abbreviation for Patent) with a size number alongside. This enabled him to provide the beauty of sterling silver - with the strength of steel which was sandwiched between two layers of silver. In some of his early advertising Horner uses the term "armour plating" to describe these thimbles. I have never been able to establish when the term Dorcas was first used for these thimbles. In 1905 they took out another patent, No. 5115, which was their Improvements design. This was also to prevent other manufacturers copying their new way of creating these thimbles for a further period. To distinguish his designs from his competitors, Horner registered his thimble designs (RD) and even named them. This would give Horner the jump he needed to stay ahead of his competition. Even that early, he was superb at marketing for his share of the market.

These design names are now commonly known, used and instantly recognised by Horner thimble collectors of today. The designs are:

Diamond (R<sup>D</sup>73426 erroneously for his R<sup>D</sup>73624 of 1887) Louise (R<sup>D</sup>127211 of 1889) Shell (R<sup>D</sup>210799 of 1893) Princess May (R<sup>D</sup>210800 of 1893) Hardwood (R<sup>D</sup>429537 of 1904)

RD426659 of 1904 was given no name but the design consists of a series of interlocking Louise.

Other familiar terms to Horner collectors like Flora and Star didn't have their design names registered. These names were recorded tho in Horner's Dorcas advertisements of 1900 (see Holmes p107).

Apparently, it was a relatively expensive exercise to create the dies used for producing designs on thimbles. So once the dies were created for the Dorcas thimbles using these registered designs, they could be used on both his Dorcas and sterling silver thimbles. These RD covered these designs on both.

The factory used combinations of these designs to create their unique style: and the RD number which was stamped onto the band follows the dominant design, which is the top part of the thimble.

From 1884, the protection for registered designs on metal objects was for five years and later this period could be extended, thus securing their designs from being copied.

The expense of creating dies could have been off-set by creating thimbles for others, using the set of sponsor's marks instead of those with CH marks. These other marks are known as **sponsor marks**: indicating that they were not made by the maker shown. Other terms used are wholesaler, factors and smaller manufacturers. This applied to all the major Victorian thimble makers.

All CH sterling silver (and occasional 9ct gold) thimbles were exclusively assayed in Chester.

Horner used their own basic thimble designs and marked them with the marks of the sponsors as listed below adding their system of thimble sizes alongside (CH sizes are 0-15).

Importantly for identification, these Horner thimble sizes measure 20-11mm, which ranges from the largest to the smallest size.

Additionally, in the quite abbreviated Horner 1900 Catalogue we have the records of sterling silver thimbles being manufactured in the Horner factory each with a unique number.

There is an accompanying Table explaining the designs by those numbers (see Lawson p122-123 and Holmes p44-45).

Terms like Daisy, Ottoman, Persian, Vandyked, Annular, Galerie and Polygon are used in the Table. I have included the Horner Catalogue reference numbers, as identification, to match the corresponding thimbles with a non-CH mark.

Last update: 23 April 2024

An intriguing discovery during this research is that I discovered a previously unknown term used by Horner in his 1900 Table: no 560 **Queen**. I am not able to decipher the design as illustrated in the Catalogue. Do you know what this thimble design looks like?

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	ain, V	Vhisky	Mea	sure	Lettere	d			Roun	d. Tur	n Ov	
) ,			•••		Plain, 1	Varrow				Vandyked		
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The CH catalogue entry for 1900 - R: the description from his Table

According to Holmes (p110) "... the firm of Charles Horner was the largest producer of thimbles during the period 1900-1910. Subsequently under the weight of competition business in plain (sterling) thimbles became less profitable, Charles Horner gradually lost interest, and by 1925 they were making Dorcas thimbles only".

I have encountered a small number of CH sterling thimbles with hallmark dates up to 1936.

In The Thimble Society of London (TSL) spring 1990 issue "The entire Spring catalogue has been devoted to the Charles Horner thimbles purchased at the Chester (Sotheby's) auction on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 1990 ... all the thimbles were found together in the showrooms. The thimbles are in mint condition, as crisp and sparkling as the day they were made ... I was granted the privilege of photographing the entire collection before it went under the hammer ..."

Bridget McConnel of the TSL goes on to quote from the press release by Sotheby's: "A charming collection in the sale comes from Halifax, the home of the prolific silversmith Charles Horner Ltd. The firm which closed in 1982, was probably best known for the manufacture of silver thimbles and the sale contains 500 (400) of them, dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Previously, they were housed in two glass-fronted cabinets in which they were displayed in the firm's stockroom to facilitate re-orders ... They were sent for sale by the former managing director of the company who bought them when the factory closed down ... Horner died in 1896, leaving a large family including six sons, two of whom, James Dobson Horner (died 1913) and Charles Henry Horner (known as Harry, died 1949) became managing directors...".

TSL listed the 100 thimbles they had for sale from the auction in the following way: "The size number of each thimble will be shown first, followed by the maker's initials, the assay office and they year. The registration mark will be given when one appears".

Browsing thru this catalogue one becomes aware of the Horner thimbles with other marks and this was the starting point for this little bit of research I have undertaken.

What a resource this issue is for me to be able to illustrate some Horner thimbles with the designs used on thimbles that don't bear Horner marks, rather showing those of sponsors.

Clues can be found in the designs used for these non-CH marked thimbles, or the presence of a Horner RD number on the rim.

I am aware that in my comparative choices, size can change the look of the thimble design. I have not gone into the detail of checking how many minor differences there are in each design – they match as closely as I have the resources for.

Henry Griffith & Sons (HG&S) of Birmingham and later in Leamington was one of the other prominent Victorian thimble silversmiths in competition with Horner for a slice of the thimble market. They also made the thimbles that they were commissioned by their sponsors.

Griffith was the only British thimble maker to use the millimetre sizing on their thimbles – sizes 13-20, which equate to 13-20mm openings: smallest to largest which is the opposite from the CH sizes. If in doubt whether you have a Chester thimble made for a British sponsor by either CH or HG&S – use this size clue.

Griffith didn't only use one assay office as Horner did – the main assay office he chose was Birmingham, then Chester. This can cause confusion when trying to locate Horner-made Chester thimbles.

Some the following may also have made thimbles themselves.

Some of the sponsors below engaged both Horner and Griffith to make thimbles for them.

In 2003 Spicer & Pelham indicated that Horner made thimbles for 20 other sponsors. This study reveals that there were actually **31**.

They go on to say " ... the small makers would have bought the thimbles, which already had the RD number on them, and then had their own hallmark put on the thimbles".

At this stage only eleven of these sponsors' thimbles below, bear Horner's RD marks.

From this small sample, the earliest date I can find by Horner with a non-CH mark is 1885 and there are very few examples of thimble assay dates in the 1880s. The biggest proportion are for 1890-1900, tailing off in the Edwardian era, ending in 1911.

After years of handling thousands of British thimbles and amassing many thousands of photographs, one gets a feel for the high quality of the earlier Horner thimbles and this is evident in the examples I have chosen to illustrate the following sponsors' thimbles.

The photos are mainly in black and white so don't show the thimbles at their sparkling best.

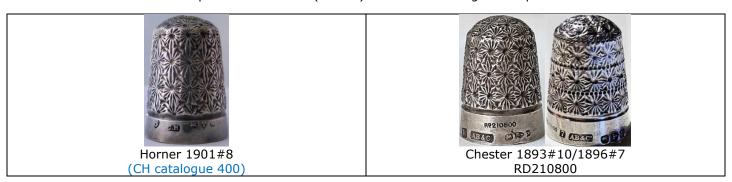
From this small sample two sponsors stand out – HWL<sup>TD</sup> and JT&S. HWL<sup>TD</sup> was Horner's first sponsor: in 1881.

#### Other Charles Horner thimble and related topics

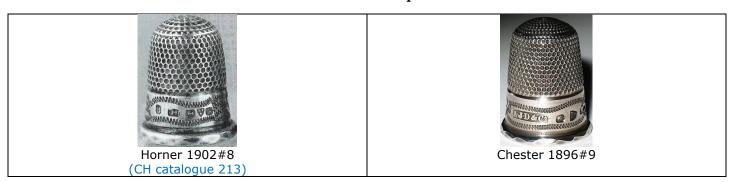
Alfred Bromet (AB&Co) thimbles
Charles Horner's early Dorcas "PAT." thimbles
Dorcas thimble boxes
Horner and hearts
Olney, Amsden (OA & OA&S) thimbles
Robert Pringle (RP) thimbles

#### AB&Co - Alfred Bromet & Co

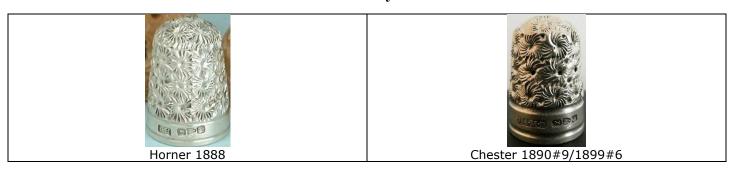
see also topic: Alfred Bromet (AB&Co) thimbles including the Empire thimble



## AJD&C° – A J Davenport & Co



## AMB – Abraham Meyer Blankensee



#### AS – Albert Sydenham

I was going to remove this sponsor as too few examples have been found until I found this advert, showing Sydenham's connection to Charles Horner Ltd



## C&Co - Carrington & Co





 $C^{E}\&F^{D}$  – Alfred Constantine & Floyd

there are also  $C^E\&F^D$  thimbles with Birmingham assay marks





## **CP - Charles Peach**



Horner 1898#7



(CH catalogue 215)

## CS\*FS - Saunders & Shepherd



Horner 1905#10 (CH catalogue 642)



#### D&F - Deakin & Francis

there are also D&F thimbles with Birmingham assay marks



Horner#11 (like CH catalogue 249)



Chester 1898#7 RD210800

## EGP – Eustace George Parker



## GG – George Goodman

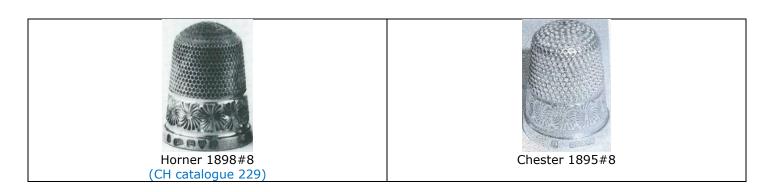
his sizing marks are different from both CH and HG&S there are also GG thimbles with Birmingham assay marks

see also topic: George Goodman (GG) and Gomms (G'S) sterling silver thimbles



## GV&Co - Gourdel Vales & Co





# $GWH\&C^o$ – GWHarvey&Co







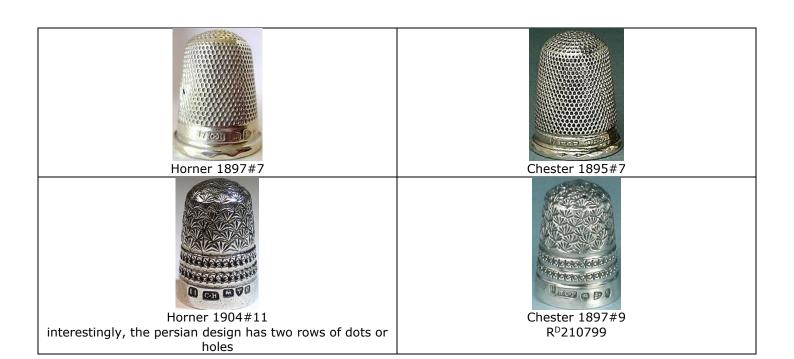
#### H&T - Hilliard & Thomason

there are also H&T thimbles with Birmingham assay marks



## **HCF** – Henry Charles Freeman





HJC - H J Cooper





# HW – Henry Wainwright





## $HWL^{TD}$ – Henry Williamson Ltd

I have deleted five unique designs for this sponsor as there are no matching patterns by CH there are a few  $HWL^{TD}$  thimbles with Birmingham assay marks









#### IS&C° - Isaac Silverston & Co



Horner 1897#7 (CH catalogue 474)



Chester 1897#8 RD210800

Chester 1893#11/10 R<sup>D</sup>210799

## JT&S – John Thompson & Sons



Horner 1900#10

(CH catalogue 427)







#### M&C - Marks & Cohen

there are a few M&C thimbles with Birmingham assay marks



# RP – Robert Pringle

7-107-4-12-12-	
Horner 1898#5	Chester 1894#6
Horner 1898	Chester 1898/1899
(CH catalogue 519)  Horner 1889 (CH catalogue 300)	Chester 1899#10
Horner 1898	Chester 1899#10
Horner 1898#11 R <sup>D</sup> 73626 (CH catalogue 476)	Chester 1900#7



# S&C° – Sydney & Co

there are also steel-cored sterling silver thimbles with this maker's mark



#### S&G - Salmon & Gluckstein

no photo	
tho the thimble alongside comes from the 1990 CH auction	Chester 1904#8

# SBROS – Sydenham Bros

there are early (1887) SBROS thimbles with Birmingham assay marks

Horner 1894# 8 (CH catalogue 233)	Chester 1894#11
Horner 1898#7 (CH catalogue 407)	Chester 1898
Horner 1898#9 (CH catalogue 270)	Chester 1900
Horner 1898#8 (CH catalogue 229)	Chester 1902

## T&S – Tandy & Sons

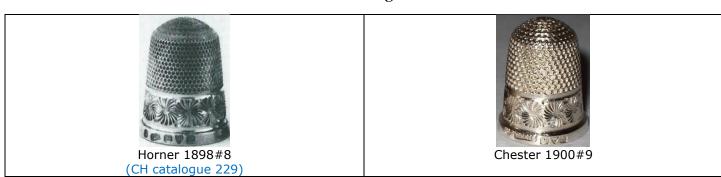


TBs - Turnbull Bros

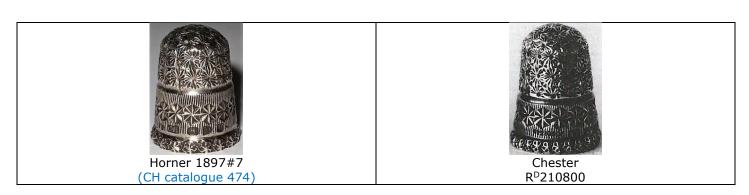




## ${\bf WBROS-Wengold\ Bros}$



#### **WEHW**



## WGM - Walter & George Matthews

there are a few WGM thimbles with Birmingham assay marks



#### WH - William Hutchinson





### WHW – William Harrison Walter









Chester#9

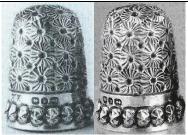
#### WJH – William James Holden

there are WJH thimbles with Birmingham assay marks



#### **ANOMALIES**

Isn't it always the way? Just when you've nailed a topic, there are an odd assortment that fit nowhere and blows big holes into the whole venture



This **GG** thimble has the correct look for a Horner thimble with the beading associated with his thimbles – EXCEPT this thimble was assayed in BIRMINGHAM in 1901!



a beautifully executed HG&S 1923 Birmingham thimble - of the out-of-registration Louise pattern





and to end

a Birmingham 1901 assay mark for Charles Horner – using a familiar design

we are aware of another CH mark for London 1896 = for **Charles Hirth** (often confused with Charles Horner's mark. This was a foreign maker, the F mark for a foreign maker will distinguish his thimbles from Horner's).

his thimbles are lighter in weight and European in style



#### References

Roz Belford *The "Dorcas" thimble - a pictorial journey into the past*. <u>Collector Circle Gazette</u> vol.2, no.2, fall 1977 Edwin Holmes *Charles Horner and the Chester assay office*. <u>Thimble Notes and Queries</u> autumn 1991 Edwin Holmes *History of thimbles*. 1985

Edwin Holmes *Makers' marks found in Chester hallmarked silver thimbles* Thimble Notes and Queries spring 1992
Tom Lawson *Charles Horner of Halifax*. 2002

Diane Pelham Burn *Identifying steel-cored thimbles*. 1993 Norma Spicer *Henry Griffiths & Sons of Birmingham & Leamington Spa.* 2003 Norma Spicer & Diane Pelham Burn *British registered design thimbles*. 2003 The Thimble Society of London *Catalogues* 1981-2009

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This listing of these Horner 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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