

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

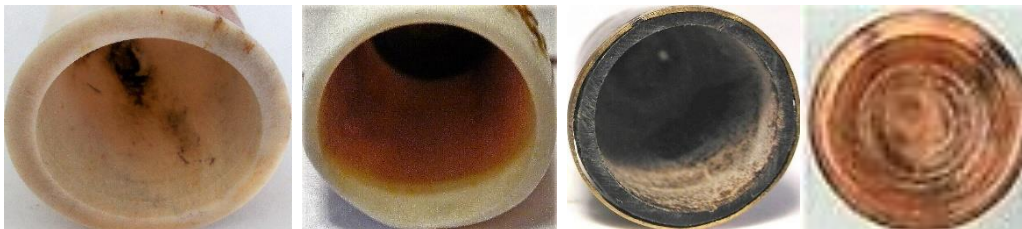
In the 21st century there have been many cow bone or bovine thimbles made of a very pale colour, almost resembling ivory (and can be mistaken for ivory once their labels have been lost).

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.

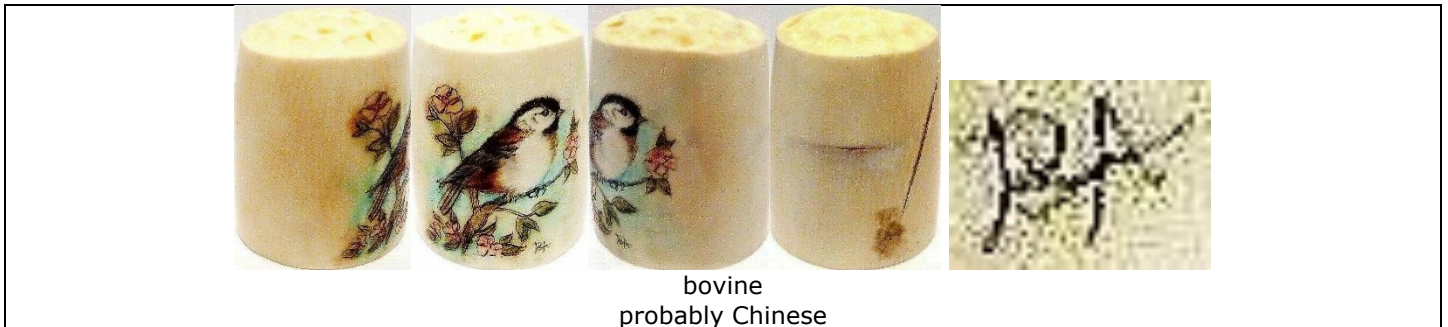
Thimbles made of animal tooth or tusk, which include elephant and whale ivory, hippo etc - are not included in this topic.

For other animal products thimble topics see
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

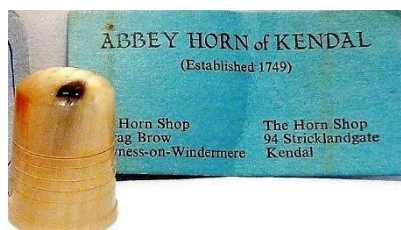


bovine
probably Chinese

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.

www.abbeyhorn.co.uk





range of colour in natural horn



smooth apex



original labels



created for Woodsetton Peeps, West Midlands UK

Randa Ahmet Unique Design Egypt

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

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



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



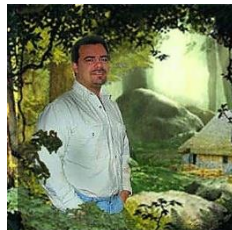
range of colours in natural antler – the apex is made from the same material

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



| | | |
|---|---|---|
|  <p>corgis with a bone</p> |  <p>fairy</p> |  <p>Hey diddle diddle</p> |
|  <p>Goldilocks and the three bears</p> |  <p>Hansel and Gretel</p> |  <p>Jack and Jill moving parts</p> |
|  <p>kittens chasing</p> |  <p>kittens playing</p> |  <p>Little Boy Blue</p> |
|  <p>mice in corn</p> |  <p>lion and mouse 8.23.13</p> |  <p>nativity</p> |
|  <p>Night before Christmas</p> |  <p>Red Riding Hood</p> |  <p>Rub a dub dub</p> |
|  <p>Rumpelstiltskin</p> |  <p>Scottie dog black and red enamel</p> |  <p>sea creatures - fish starfish seahorse shell</p> |



SINGER sewing machine
moving parts
black enamel



squirrel



squirrels



steam train



three monkeys



butterflies



owls

Glenfiddich Horn Product New Zealand



Bill Haley New Zealand



cow horn

Heathergems Pitlochry Scotland

According to the information on their thimble boxes, 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



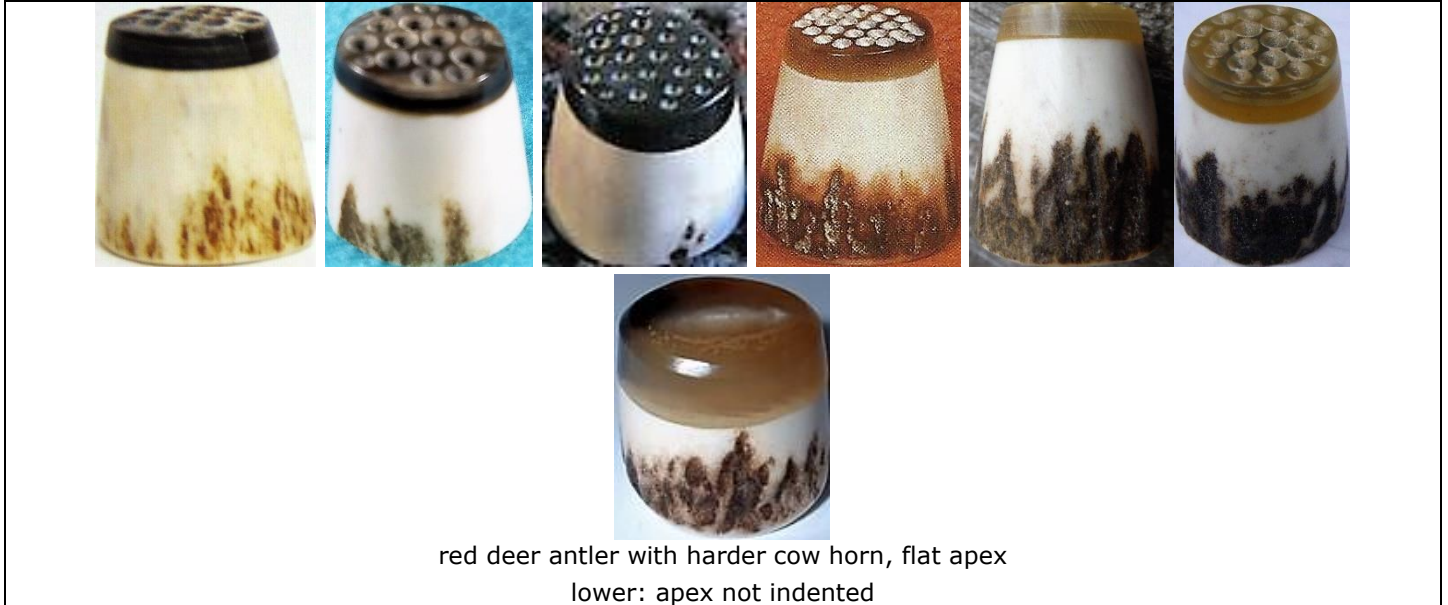
stag antler and heather

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

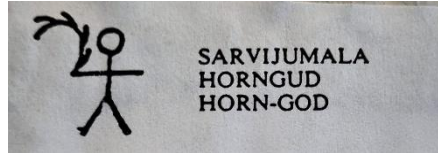
HL



reindeer
very skilful pierced carving

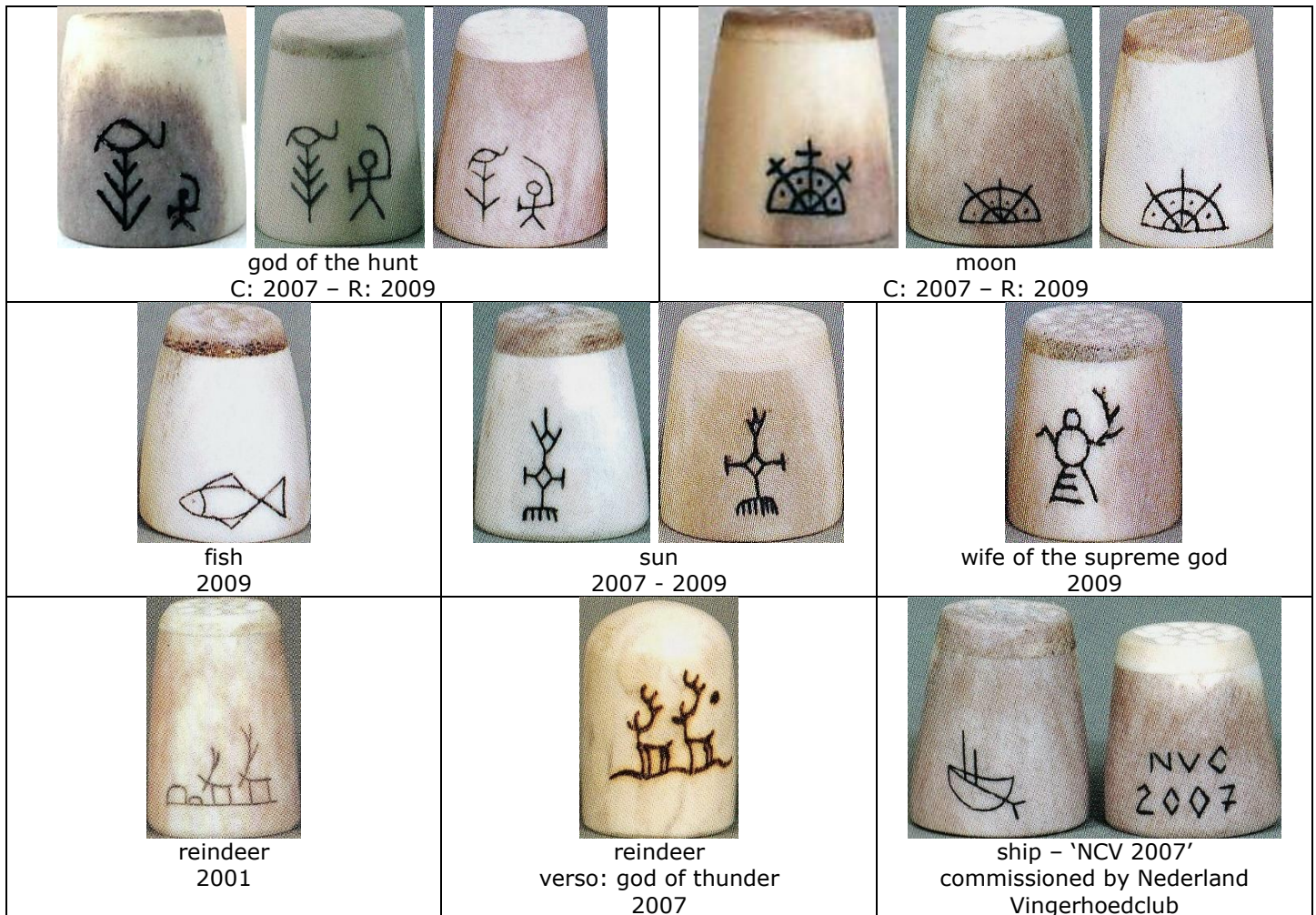
Tuotteet Oy Lauri Rovaniemi Lapland Finland

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 | own seta (god) R: 2009 | |
| reindeer | snow crystal 2009 | god of thunder 2001 | birds of happiness |
| witchsnake R: 2009 | god of fertility 2007 - 2009 | horn god 2007 | |



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 buffalo horn. Signed on verso.
This painter may be one of Thompson's painters.
wholesaler: Heirloom Editions



cougar



horse in desert scene



racoon



owl



panda



siamese

MG USA

this unidentified painter may be one of Thompson's painters



elk and buffalo

N.P.M. Bophuthatswana South Africa

marketed by Tswana Crafts Industries



buck
rhino

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



buffalo horn
dragonfly
inset abalone
2016



buffalo horn
magpie
inset MOP
2016-2018



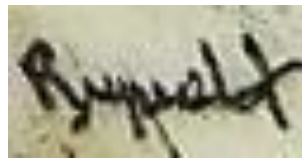
buffalo horn
monarch butterfly
inset orange sandstone
2016



buffalo horn
skunk
inset MOP
2016

Donna Ruprecht USA

This painter works on antler and signs her work: Ruprecht



forget-me-nots



Lady Slipper orchid
commissioned by Lady Slipper Thimblers of Minnesota,
2012

T Seeley Banff Alberta Canada

Moose antler



flower

moose

flower

moose

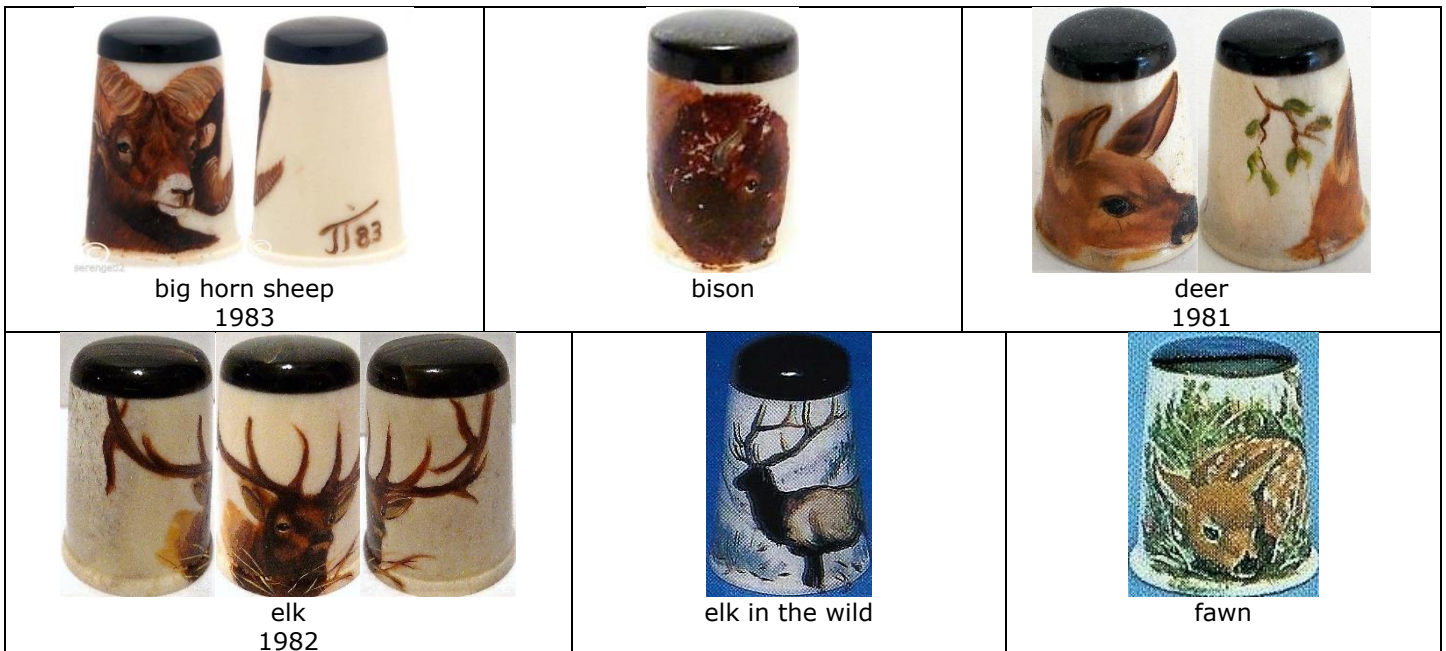
Janet Thompson Montana South Dakota USA

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.

Other animals: ram - pheasant - robin - peacock - swan - American eagle - mustang - mallard antelope - otter - loon - cardinal

see also: Dovea, MD and MG - where some of these animals appear

Thimbles Only winter 1983 - Gimbels 1991a



big horn sheep
1983

bison

deer
1981

elk
1982

elk in the wild

fawn



fox



goslings



hummingbird
L: 1983



owl



panda



squirrel



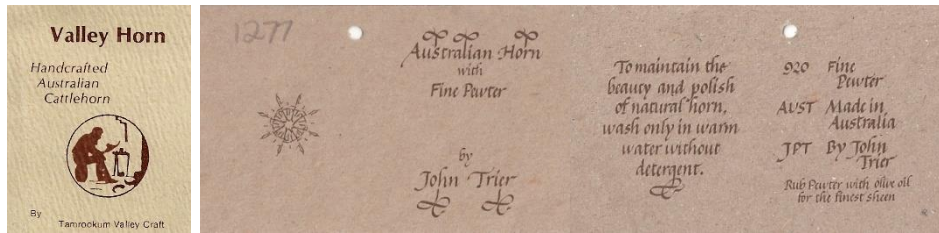
Siamese



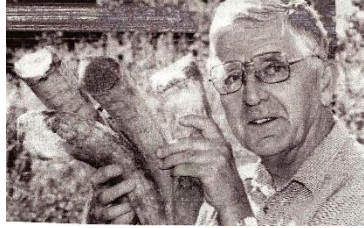
plain horn
on horn plinth

John Trier Beaudesert Queensland Australia

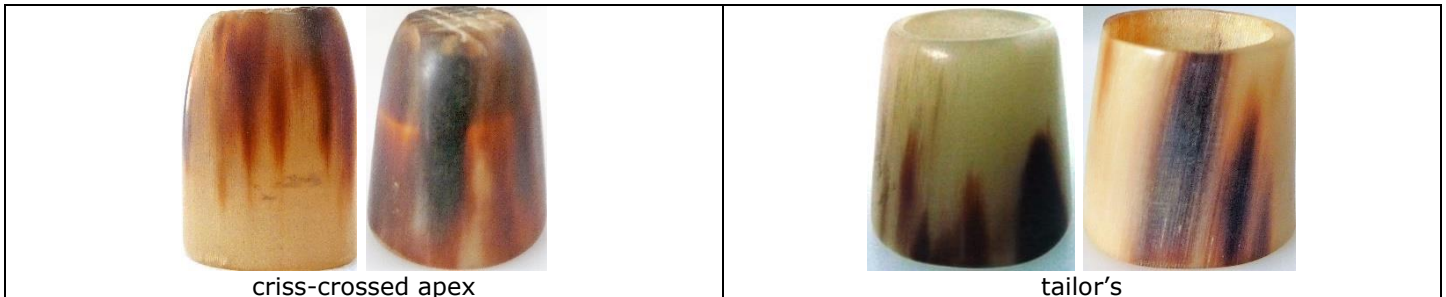
Trier began working with horn from his cattle on his farm in 1977. Largely self-taught he began making thimbles in 1979. His business name is Tamrookum Valley Crafts. His natural horn thimbles have a criss-crossed pattern on the apex. In 1980 he introduced scrimshaw of native animals to his popular range. 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

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

Wayne Canada



reindeer
2002

HORN AND BONE THIMBLES BY COUNTRY

Country of origin is known - the maker is not.

Argentina



cow horn
silver rim

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



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
handpainted village scene



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
dragon



buffalo bone
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
dragonfly



bone
dragon - horse - monkey - pig - tiger
set of 5: TTG February 1995

*these bovine thimbles may be described as ivory in 2nd hand market

Finland



reindeer with gold apex
b&w photo



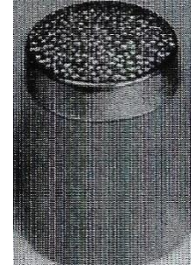
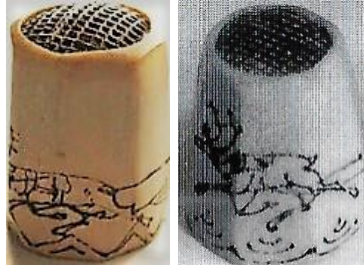
reindeer with Lap symbol
b&w photo



moose
b&w photo



scrimshawed reindeer
hexagon shape with steel apex
1920s



reindeer with gold apex
b&w photo



reindeer with steel apex
late 19th century
b&w photo



etched reindeer



reindeer



eight-sided
pyrographed reindeer
metal apex
1950s



carved reindeer



ice crystals
2007



Lynx
2007



reindeer at Arctic Circle
2007



Lap letters and symbols
2007

France



horn
1820s

Germany



horn
Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1



rose
Het vingerhoedje vol 4/1

Great Britain (excluding Scotland)

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



early 1900s
lovely patina



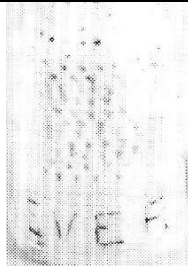
reindeer
1987



sterling silver apex
1820s



horn
1800s child's



bone
"Ever dear"
TSL spring 1983
b&w photo



bone fingerguard
inscribed '15.7.84'
TSL autumn 1985
b&w photo



bone
TSL autumn 1996



horn
1830s
TSL autumn 1995



bone
1825
Kay Sullivan December 1984
b&w photo

India



water buffalo horn
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - TTG
October 1986



buffalo bone with wood apex
and rim
TTG August 1997



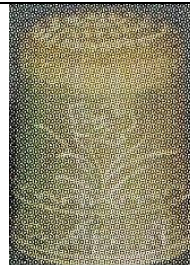
water buffalo horn
Kay Sullivan March 1987



camel bone
Gimbels 1980



camel bone
Gimbels 1981



buffalo bone
VN 69 2001

Kenya



bone
carved in Machakos, Kenya
TTG February 1991



antler

Madagascar



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

Norway

Paraguay



horn

Philippines



water buffalo horn (Carabao)
TTG February 2008

Russia



deer hoof
R: Cyrillic lettering хибины (Khibiny)



handpainted ducks

Scotland



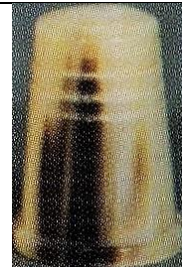
showing the ridged natural surface of stag antler – from the antler tip
wholesaled by Charles Buyers, Scotland
they currently specialise selling products that keep alive traditional skills using natural materials
Thimbles Only winter 1983 - Feldmann 8/1989 - TTG February 1996 – Gimbels 1996



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 bone
carved frogs



bone



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
JHB 1998-2002



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

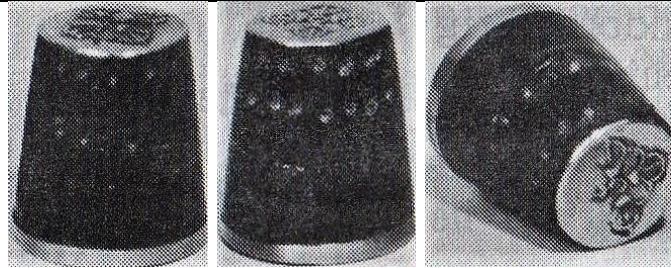


penguin
inlaid eyes



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 'Istanbul Türkiye'



camel bone
handpainted 'Istanbul Türkiye'



camel bone
handpainted 'Istanbul Türkiye'



camel bone
handpainted blue flowers



Bone
handpainted

United States



handpainted American eagle



malachite
flat stone apex



sugalite
flat stone apex
thimble is oval



turquoise
flat stone apex



flat stone apex
thimble is oval



stag antler
handpainted roses



stag antler
handpainted loon



stag antler
etched fish



stag antler
etched sailing ship



cow bone
North-west Territories



hummingbird



reindeer with walrus top
scrimshaw reindeer with Alaskan maker's marks
from the collection of Alta Thompson 1950s

Uruguay

Uruguayan thimbles are made of cow horn



Vietnam

handpainted buffalo horn – probably all by the same artist



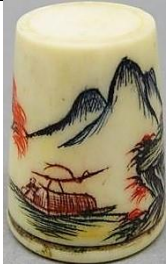
flowers



scholar



temple



junk



cock



woman



fish



fish



dragon



lotus

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
19th century



cow



cow
cross-hatched apex



flowers



mid 20th century
gilt metal on apex



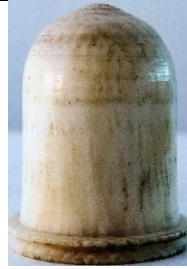
elk
tailor's



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



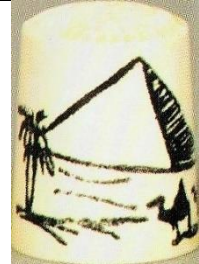
handpainted bison with hoofprints



bone
painted birds
TSL winter 2008



horn
European
TSL spring 2009



camel bone
Dutch Thimble Club 2002



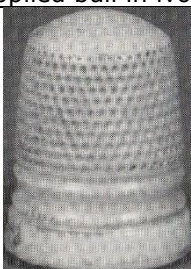
horn
applied bull in ivory



cow bone



horn or bone
TSL winter 2001



bone
Vingerhoednieuws 31 1994



camel



cow horn and silver

HORN AND BONE SEWING TOOLS



English buttonhole cutter
1790s



English sewing kit
18th century



English tape measure
1880s



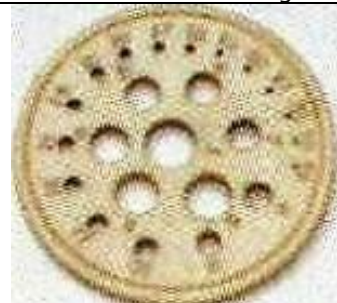
English stiletto
1880s



English thimble holder
bone
'Token of regard'



American Caribou antler buttons
Jer – Buckhorn Crafts Kingston WA



English bone needle gauge



etched and handpainted bone needlecase



Chinese etched and handpainted bone needlecase



Norwegian etched reindeer bone needlecase with thread winder



cow bone thimble holder



English horn and ivory boot needlecase



Chinese bone needlecase carved and handpainted



Chinese bone needlecase handpainted



English and French figural needlecases with steel spangles etched harp - clock - bellows- violin



cow bone English lace bobbins with glass bead spangles



English castle turret needlecase



English fish needlecase with steel spangles



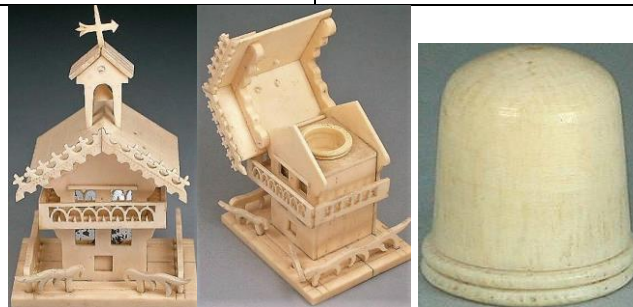
American Eskimo reindeer horn needlecase with octagonal taper reindeer leather liner



New Zealand deer horn buttons



American handpainted bodkin 1920s



English bone church thimble holder

References

- Elizabeth Aldridge *Thoughts on thimbles. Part VII. Other materials.* 1984
Jenny Scharff Bockel *Thimbles of Southern Africa.* 2004
Susan Dempster *An Abbeyhorn thimble.* TCI Bulletin summer 2019
Susan Jean Gowan *Thimbles of Australia.* 1988
Irja Helsila *Thimbles in Lapland.* Thimble Society of London autumn 1998
Irene Schwall & Christina Bertrand *The whale thimble saga.* TCI Bulletin summer 2015

Contributors

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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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