## Glass and crystal thimble makers

In May 2020, I received a most interesting email from Norbert Ullmann, the current CEO of Ullmannglass of Bavaria, in Germany. I know that surname will ring a bell with thimble collectors, as it did with me.

The reason for him in contacting me was that he is planning to write a book on Ullmannglass glass and crystal thimbles. We corresponded over the next few months, which ended with my undertaking a thimble topic on these thimbles. Ullmann offered to provide me with photos of the over 1000 different thimbles that Ullmannglass have created since 1973. That felt too much like a promotional topic for me, as Ullmannglass are still in the business of creating thimbles.

I decided that when the time for a new thimble topic arose, I would cover all makers of glass and crystal thimbles, which he quite accepted.

This isn't going to be a technical treatise. We don't need to understand the difference between glass and crystal, as it doesn't affect who made the thimbles. I do want to highlight tho, the huge role that Ullmannglass has played in keeping the interest in glass thimble afloat, since they began to produce glass thimble in 1973.

The family crest that features on the cover of their thimble catalogue, has a date of 1635. Generations of Ullmann have been involved in the glass and crystal business and the next generation is currently involved. Producing glass thimbles under their own brand (thimbles marked with a sticker 'Made in West Germany'), Ullmannglass were commissioned by other glass manufacturers to create thimbles for them, to their specifications. These thimbles would then be marketed with their own brand names. Some of these glass companies had attempted to make their own thimbles, but it would have been costly. I can't think of any thimble manufacturer of any medium of thimble that has been producing collectables thimbles for over 45 years. Ullmannglass certainly dominated their field.

This is nothing new in the thimble collectors' world – sterling silver thimbles in Victorian England were largely created by makers like Charles Horner and Henry Griffiths & Sons – they were just marked with other maker's assay marks, by Horner and Griffiths.

The same occurred in the 1980s when Sutherland China branded many of their thimbles with other china brand names. It's just a matter of business and economics.

Mr Ullmann provided me with this non-technical information:

"Glass is a mixture of chemicals without any heavy oxides in it e.g. windows and bottles are made out of glass; but thousands of other products too.

**Crystal glass** is "glass with the addition of at least 10 % heavy oxides" to make it softer and clearer.

**Lead Crystal** is "glass with 24 % of lead oxide" added into the batch, which makes the glass heavier, sparklier, softer and allows for chemical polishing; (vs. hand polishing); mostly used in continental Europe.

**High Lead Crystal** is "glass with 33 % of lead oxide" added into the batch to make the glass even heavier, sparklier, softer than "Lead Crystal"; (mostly used in the UK and Ireland)."

The following mail order thimble businesses ordered and sold Ullmannglass thimbles from the 1970s-2020s: Lilian Vernon Inc (New York) – Heirloom Editions (Barbara Ringer California) – Gimbels & Sons (Maine USA) – The Thimble Society of London – The Thimble Collectors Guild/The Thimble Guild (Scotland) - Vingerhoednieuws (Friedy Kamp Netherlands) – Pan Arts (Australia) – Thimbles Only (Jean Shoup California) – Die Fingerhut Post (Feldman) - P J Walter Thimbles (Germany).

All glass thimbles were made for the collectables thimble market, which flourished in the 1980s and 1990s. This includes Ullmannglass thimbles which were "made to be used" by their thimble shape. I defy anyone to use these beautifully created thimbles to sew with. Their rigid sides and weight, never mind being created in one size only, wouldn't work as a sewing tool! Nor would thimbles created in the glass art market be used with items placed on top of thimbles.

Few glass thimbles have been marked with the name of the glass maker, so as collectors, we are dependent on applied paper 'makers' stickers and the paper thimble mail order catalogues from 1970s-2000s for this information. Unless this information is passed on when the thimble is sold, the maker's name is lost. The database hopes to remedy this.

For those of you who have ever tried to photograph glass thimbles, never mind a maker's mark, you will know that this is even trickier if the glass is clear!

There is another category that I will include after the alphabetical listing, where only the country of the maker is known. The thimbles are grouped by country (**15** countries to date). There are many famous glassworks/makers in Italy and Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic. If one of these is your country, please get in touch so that this database can be updated with makers' names.

Additionally I have photos for 70 glass thimbles where no country nor maker is currently known. I plan on working to get this to zero!

How are glass thimbles decorated? de Smet lists the following headings (each with a brief description of the techniques):

Painting
Enamel painting
Gold powder
Decorating glass with glass
Engraving
Stipple engraving (in dots)
Grinding and relief engraving
Etching
Millefiori technique

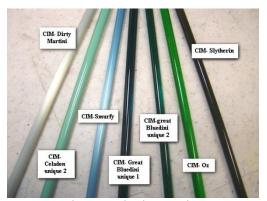
All these forms of decoration will be seen in the examples in the table below.

In the table, I have listed the known glass and crystal thimble makers alphabetically. This includes glass craftsmen – handpainters etc.

I trust you will be able to find the thimble you are looking for here, to identify the maker. There are **81** 'makers' or decorators listed here. Please share your favourite glass thimble maker if not featured.

Many of these makers have created mouthblown glass thimbles, and I understand that they are known as <u>art glass</u>. I have also encountered the term <u>lampwork</u> (Ullmann describes them "uses borosilicate glass tubes, made for the laboratory industry and heats them up "over the lamp" and shapes it into the form of a thimble"). These are the handcrafted thimbles, part of the craft industry from all over the world. In the 2010s lampwork thimbles have become the most sought after form of glass thimble.

A term not heard much anymore is 'cut glass thimbles' or 'frosted glass thimbles' (used in Von Hoelle's *Thimbles collector's encyclopedia*. 1986).



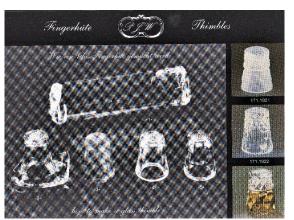
lampwork glass rods

If any of these thimbles listed below were made by <u>Ullmannglass</u> and "rebranded" – you will find this information under "Notes".

Often, we only know who the artist is if the thimbles are handpainted. In this case you will find the thimbles listed below by the **first** name of the artist.

Otherwise the studio name is used.

If you own one of these maker's or artist's thimbles – please let me have a photo of the maker's mark or a new photo to include or replace these from the catalogues. Maybe you have had a thimble handblown for you? Share if you know who made it for you – and where.



P J Walter catalogue 1985/86 showing the process of how Ullmannglass thimbles are made

Thank you, Norbert Ullmann – this topic would not have been possible without your invaluable input.

## Glass thimble makers

thimble	maker	marks/catalogue dates	notes
	Artglass Australia East Bundaberg Queensland Australia (Wolfgang Engel)		
	Atlantis Alcobaça Portugal	ATLANTIS  O O O O O	clear glass – handcut and handpainted – full lead crystal – domed - or concave apex
bee in flower atop	Avon		
thistle	Barrie Reginald Thompson Stockbridge Hants UK	HAND-BLOWN GLASSWARE BY BARRIE THOMPSON VINE HOUSE, HIGH STREET STOCKBRIDGE, HANTS. TEL: (0264) 810088	
BLACKFO HAND COMPANY OF THE PROPERTY OF THE PR	Blackford Aberdeenshire Scotland UK	BLACKFORD HAND CRAI HAND CRAI ABERDEENSHIRI	

mouse - elephant	Bob Scott UK	1988	individually blown – clear – scalloped rims
anchor – heart – thistle  petalled flowers with millefiori centres  clear base is fluted	Perth Scotland UK www.caithnessglass.co.uk	anchor maker's mark  handmade in Scotland  Caithness	Ullmannglass blanks – glass colours: blue – amber – clear – green – pink – mauve – ruby – mauve - turquoise – Caithness specialty is making paperweights – thimbles' apex are mini millefiori domed paperweights – these are made and applied by Caithness – I visited the Caithness works in 1996 and purchased several blanks in various colours – was informed at the time they were made in 'Holland'
Mackintosh designs - daffodil	Caledonian Crystal Scotland UK	2001-2002	some clear with etchings – others: series of twelve flowers of the month – either as colourful toppers or affixed in colour – clear or frosted

	Carol Toevs USA	1979	signed and handpainted
crab - compendium	Colleen Schroll Lampwork (CMS) Chesapeake Bay Maryland USA	2012	lampwork with raised colourful designs – signed CMS limited editions
	Connemara Celtic Crystal Co Moycullen County Galway Ireland	Connemara Celtic Crystal Lto.  Moycullen Co. Galway, Ireland.  Tel: Intl. 353 91 555172 Fax: Intl. 353 91 555157	
	Corning Glass Works Inc Corning New York USA see also: Pyrex	- F	non-lead glass made during World War II because of scarcity of metals – never progressed past the prototype stage – not sold commercially – some have appeared in thimble collections – in clear or light blue – some marked 'Corning Glass' or 'Pyrex Brand' (information Holmes in his chapter on Glass thimbles)
d Carton	D Costeo		name lettered in white
	<b>Dan Jacobson</b> USA	a f	pegan as a glassblower in 1972 – he adds his own colour to clear glass – reehand work – fluted rims – various neights

	<b>David Gulland</b> Kirkcudbright Scotland UK	1981	born in Edinburgh – studied glass design and engraving under Helen Munro-Turner at Edinburgh College of Art – own studio – his maker's symbol incorporates medieval glassmakers' sign and the initials of the artist surmounted by castle
Charles and Diana's wedding thimble	David Smith UK (Valda Peacock) handpainter		of Edinburgh  Smith is the glass blower - set of twelve thimbles with Scottish handpainted flowers - gold painted rims - domed glass thimbles - with defined indentations in apex - limited to 500 signed and numbered
iris – anemones – privet - pansies	<b>Derwent</b> UK	30th	English crystal hand made lead crystal
	Dieter Schrade Berlin then: Wertheim Germany	1992 2005	mouthblown – coloured metal oxides fused into the glass
	Eliza M Wright Pompano Beach Florida USA		lampwork – with defined indentations in apex

hearts	Emilio Santini Murano Venice Italy	1987-1988	mouth blown with handpainted details – glass colours come from chemicals (like copper) added to molten glass – the apexes are concave - see also: Lucie Santini
cherries	Enesco Designer Giftware Taiwan	1985  CISS ENESCO IMPORTS CORP. MADE IN TAIWAN R. O. C.	
gondolier	<b>Eola</b> Venice Italy	Colo	handpainted - <u>signed</u>
b&w photo	Ernest F Damron USA	1979	handblown clear crystal glass – hand engraved - <u>signed</u>
Angel – octopus - strawberry	Eugenie Arrowsic Maine USA	1986 1997	handcrafted glass – clear – glass base of spun coloured glass - characters atop

coffee pot – cross – Texas yellow rose	<b>Ferenc</b> USA	1988 1997	handmade – etched on clear glass – some are spun glass – applied 22ct gold - scalloped rims
cardinal – graduation – carousel horse – telephone	Frank Horvath Lakeland Glass Shop Florida USA	1996-1998	scalloped rims – handmade – blown by moth - edged with gold – in 1963 Horvath completed apprenticeship in Hungary – master glass blower
Dolphin – swan – teddy bear	GBS Cheshire UK		lustreware with characters atop
TOTA THE STATE OF	George Davidson & Co UK	1890s	thimblefuls
probable date of 78	<b>Gigi Branch</b> Devon UK		Gigi trained at Limoges in France her handpainted thimbles are signed Gigi see also: British modern handpainted thimbles for her work on china thimbles
reverse painting: bird in cage – handpainted bird	Graham Payne Grimley Worcester UK		his thimble range is mainly handpainted china and enamel

	<b>Hoegar Schultz</b> South Africa		
	Holly Tree Miniatures UK	1994	combination of pewter on glass
pewter blue tit on glass milk bottle			
dandelion flower – bud - owl b&w photos	<b>Hourglass</b> UK	1983-1984	illustrated on clear glass – domed apex – or on apex
apple trees – guac & sour cream – pumpkin spice – purple pink dichroic	Humming Line Creative Works Colorado Springs USA  (Maxine Grossman (1957-2021)	2011	lampwork glass
apple – Happy New Year b&w photos	Jacqui and David Parker Birmingham UK	1986-1987	handpainted by <u>Olivia</u>
	Jenny Blair Designs	1984-1992	handpainted designs - gilt or silver
A STATE OF THE STA	York UK		applied designs see separate topic on Jenny Blair Designs

heart – watering can – The Thimble Guild with hand-embroidered cloth inserted	John C Spray Leicester UK		3 1996 2003	scalloped rims – mainly clear glass
Madonna and child – pig in pig – circus elephant - owls	John Squeo Windy City Glass USA	1997	7	items atop (toppers)
bird in cage	Johnny Boschoff Pretoria South Africa (Gili Davis)			Gili is known for her handpainted porcelain - died 2015
flowers	<b>Karen</b> USA			lampwork
ANDROLUM CREATION OF THE PROPERTY OF THE PROPE	<b>KB</b> Italy			opaque glass – with sticky label
six-sided rim with heart design at apex	Kilkenny Irish Crystal Tinnamona Callan Co Kilkenny Ireland www.kilkennycrystal.com		Kilkenny Rystal Ireland Est. 1969 Company logo	green sticky label

<b>La Serenissima</b> Murano Venice Italy	thimble sticky label	
The Laffing Glass (LGL) 125 Mason Street Saugatuck Missouri USA  (Lynn Nurge)  https://laffingglass.com	L Nurge signature  Handmade for you by Bead Artist Lynn Nurge at LaffingGull (LGL) Designer Sets, Spacers, Speciality and Pandora Lg Hole Style Beads www.LaffingGull.com + eBay, Etsy accompanying thimble label	lampwork
Leo Pilley (handpainted by Kelly)	Glass Thimbles by LEO PILLEY Hand Painted by KELLY	
Libertine	2018	used as glass nails – that's what's out there
Lucie Santini Murano Venice Italy	1988	`tre fuochi' process (three times fired) – handpainted – concave apex - see also: <b>Emilio Santini</b>

blue flower – rose – blue flower	<b>Lynn</b> Rogue River Oregon USA	1983 1987	handblown – handpainted – thick 24ct gold rims
pineapple	<b>Mae Robinson</b> USA	1990	hand engraved on handmade crystal – master engraver
farm scene – Aboriginal dreamtime - possum	Malcolm Walter South Australia		clear or frosted Ullmannglass blanks - thimbles imported by Pan Arts – Walter has added six of his sterling silver Australian motifs as crowns around crystal – silver is marked MW
	Mariekuniek Amsterdam Netherlands http://mariekuniek.nl	Marieke	glass bead maker – using soft glass - with defined indentations in apex
3 abstract - fish	Mario Ramos Vitreus Ignis Madrid Spain with Mariana Grande (2002-)		workshop began in Buenos Aires Argentina (1988-) mouthblown
gondola – sewing machine – girl - Fragonard	Mary Gregory USA	1978-1980	American handpainter on glass [1856-1908] – her style has been copied on thimbles – on a palette of white enamel – thimbles made in Italy – see also <b>Westmoreland</b>

	Mavis Smith Studio Solebury Pennsylvania USA		lampwork – glass bead maker – smooth apex
Disney's Aladdin – rose fairy	Mayfair UK bases are made by Tudor Crystal Stourbridge UK		pewter characters
WSTA	Morgan Indiana USA		coloured berry glass thimblefuls
	Moser Ohio USA	M	coloured berry glass thimblefuls
1776-1976 – windjammer - koala b&w photos	Nico (Nick) Ferro USA  (Michos) handcutter	1976 1979	handblown – free hand cut leaded crystal – carved into clear glass – born in Greece
	Nikki Shaw Glass Attic Somerset UK	2004	decorated with gold and diamante
bees	Paul Ticknor Osceola MI USA		P.a.g.o.   14 of 29

tend trended dates and find it temporable as special continuous and disconnection from the temporable and appare			,
	<b>Pepi Herrmann</b> USA	1983	born in Austria – master craftsman – handcut and <u>signed</u> lead crystal
	Pinpoint Design UK	1993	dried flowers applied over most of clear surface first thermochromism (temperature sensitive) thimbles which change colour
moon – sun (night and day)	<b>Poppie Gifts</b> UK		crystal – fused platinum or gold into glass
blue - green	Pyrex Brand USA see also: Corning Glass Works Inc	1942	
gold tortoise – forget-me-nots – winter tree b&w photos	Quorn Glass UK (Eddie Hughes) glassblower	1983-1986	example of glass blower's art – mainly scalloped rims – gold rims fused into glass by a unique technique
berries - tulip	R & T Decorative Glass UK  (Tamar Altman) designer and handpainter	1994-1995	drawing inspiration from Tiffany – large size handpainted thimbles

etched church	Rj	1978	
	R Corbett Cape Town South Africa	1985 1988	glass blowing firm – handblown – handpainted in black afterwards to give swirls
fishes -poppy - fish	Rachel Pugh UK	2001-2002	handpainter
Tutankhamun - Christmas	Raimundas Lapsys USA	1978	signed and dated – handcut by master cutter – Tutankhamun designs limited to 7500 – apex 22ct gold painted
shamrock – wren - rabbit b&w photos	Riverside Works UK  (Jeff Jeffries) engraver	1983-1984	engraved designs on clear glass – scalloped rim
'Merry Xmas'	Robert Hands Edinburgh	1989	handmade & engraved

wedding of Charles and Diana	<b>Royal Brierley</b> UK	1981	Ullmannglass blanks – etching by Royal Brierley – boxed as such
Thumbelina – embroidery stitches	Royal Doulton Stoke-on-Trent UK	1980s  The district of the control o	Royal Doulton are china manufacturers  – producing two sets of crystal thimbles  – five Thumbelina set - <b>Webb Corbett</b> did engraving – four Embroidery stitches set made by <b>Thomas Webb &amp; Sons</b> Stourbridge
starfish	Sandra Breedt Schenk Bella Murano Glass Creations Cape Town South Africa		lampwork – using glass from Murano
JUST A TRUE	Saunders & Shepherd UK	1894	thimblefuls - RD 230818
Father Time - Hongluo - Confucius Disciples - Butterfly Rose	Mr <b>Song Jim-Ming</b> Hebel Province China		reverse glass painting ('in painting')

	<b>Sowerby</b> UK		frosted thimblefuls
dolphins – kitten – cat – opal necklace fairy -	Sterling Classic UK  bases are made by Tudor Crystal Stourbridge		Connoisseur Collection –incorporating pewter – some using Ullmannglass blanks (dolphins)
	Studio Glass UK		
snowman – daisy - dolphin	Suffolk Glass Works/Studios UK www.suffolkglass.co.uk	1994 2003	clear glass – some with coloured figurals atop
SHOWING A GOLD THE CONTROL OF THE CO	Susan Stokes Canada		lampwork
crocus – snowflakes - daffodils	Svetlana Chernova Russia		handpainted on Ullmannglass blank thimbles

sulphur-crested cockatoo – different bases –	Swarovski Crystal Vienna Austria www.swarovski.com		set of five crystal frosted birds atop crystal thimbles – two different bases (fish scale / fireball)
HID MAY (No. 1) THE STATE OF TH	Techniglass West Bay Bridport Devon UK		
Trperary	Tipperary Crystal Ireland		mouth blown – handcut – Ullmannglass blank thimbles – boxed in Irish-marked thimble boxes
black - blue - green - red  handpainted by Julie Menzies (2009)	Ullmannglass GmbH Siegstatt 2-4 Osterhofen Bavaria Germany www.ullmannglass.de	1973-	crystal colours: topaz - clear - blue - aqua - red - amethyst - ruby - many of these have a lustre finish - they use ten different thimble moulds for blank thimbles for their customers with customised orders - their most current catalogue lists over 160 different popular designs/colourway thimbles in stock which includes a 'novelties' section - some designs are etched - many handpainted - apex pleasantly slightly domed on all their range - not "well" hollowed out inside

		Unique Design Egypt (Randa Ahmed)	designs made 2010
R: moonlit clouds	Village Glass Bridge of Allan Stirlingshire Scotland UK (Tom Young)	1993-1994 1998	scalloped rims – fused with 22ct gold – from clear to heathery shades – handblown thimbles – some lustre
mushroom - snowman	Walter Hasenfus Boothbay Harbor Maine USA	1997-1998	spun glass with toppers



## **Country Glass thimble makers**

This is where I am out of my depth - I believe I have the country of origin correct - please HELP if these are your country's thimbles. They are arranged in NO order.

#### **Argentina thimbles**









#### **Australia thimbles**



Lismore NSW

## **Czech thimbles**







black paper inserted for photographic purposes





metal filigree cage over various colour glass pink - topaz - green - blue



**Egypt thimbles** 



gold leaves



crown







stripes - topaz bird atop

## **Germany thimbles**



engraved top half rest clear - flat apex squat shape



purple ridged with gold rim - flat apex



mouth-blown



handpainted milk glass 1990

#### **Great Britain thimbles**



hand etched





19<sup>th</sup> century cut glass with glass crosshatchings



Georgian



held in British Museum



Tudor rose



Stourbridge in 1993



G G for Girl Guides

#### **Greece thimbles**



Zakynthos

## **Hungary thimbles**



lettered 'Hungary' in gold



'Héviz' coat-of-arms

# **Italy thimbles** mainly from Venice



handpainted black paper inserted for photographic purposes



Murano cobalt - black cat



Murano stripes



Murano knobbed ("hobnailed")



Murano metal apex



Murano handpainted - cobalt



Murano green dots – red dots



Murano handpainted



Murano millefiori



Murano millefiori



Murano opaque



Murano opaque – red – black – yellow – handblown -1982



Murano handpainted - turquoise



Murano handpainted



Murano handpainted



Murano handpainted – royal blue showing distinctive white painted dots on apex



Murano



Murano millefiori



Murano handpainted



'Venezio 1884' spun glass (Holmes in his chapter on Glass thimbles)



`1885' spun glass with glass flowers



from Roman times



Murano handpainted



Murano



Murano handpainted metal apex



Murano metal apex



Murano metal apex



Murano handpainted gondolier



Murano handpainted metal apex



Murano handpainted



Murano metal apex



Murano handpainted pierrot



Murano metal apex



Murano handpainted Venice scene



Murano handpainted 'Venezia'



Murano Handpainted with gold flecks

## Japan thimbles



handpainted - concave apex - gold rims

#### **Scotland thimbles**





handcrafted decorative stained glass

#### **South Africa thimbles**



etched 'Sue 14 June 1986' with flowers – scalloped rim red paper inserted for photographic purposes

## **Spain thimbles**



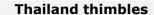
'Poblet' with handpainted city scene



bullfighting white lettering behind the scenes



Flamenco dancer white lettering behind the scene









1997

spun - 1992

**USA thimbles** 



four leaf clover like windmill shape - 1986



penguin inside clear plain thimble

no photo

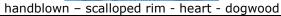
thimble housed in Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (information Holmes in his chapter on Glass thimbles)



antique

## **Wales thimbles**







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This listing of Glass thimble makers 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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