

# Spode thimbles 1976-1992

Josiah Spode founded Spode in 1776. His son, also Josiah, was responsible in 1797 for perfecting the process of adding bone ash to china clay to produce fine bone china, which is still used today as the benchmark for good china. This gives strength, whiteness and translucence to Spode china and this includes their thimbles.

Spode underwent several name changes, according to von Hoelle, until William Copeland's son [Josiah's partner] took over the company in 1833 and from 1847 the name of the firm was Copeland. This name reverted to Spode in 1970 and thimbles, amongst other merchandise, were made in Stoke-on-Trent, England of fine bone china, from 1974. Spode became part of Royal Worcester in 1986, but still produced thimbles with the Spode backstamp. Sadly, production of Spode thimbles was discontinued in 1993.

The thimbles have a recognisable shape which only varies when there is a vertical ridging of the body. There are only three of these ridged examples in their range.

Most of the apexes have a self-patterned floral design, with a slight knob at the centre; this apex is gilded on most of their thimbles, which makes Spode thimbles quite distinctive. Some commemorative Spode thimbles have apex colours matching the rest of the thimble, enriching the thimble to signify a special occasion. Some apexes tho are totally smooth.

Many of Spode's thimbles have patterns from their wider range, like their dinner services.

Maroon/magenta and blue are two traditional colours. Magenta is combined with gold and often with green for their commemorative thimbles. Some thimbles are identical except for a handpainted gold rim or the gilded apex. I have never encountered handpainted Spode thimbles - all their patterns are high quality transfers/decals. You will notice that when the design is repeated on the verso of the thimbles that the design is slightly different. When comparing your thimbles with the photos below, make sure you are looking at the matching side.

I have included the three different version of the Buttercups thimbles - same design but differing backstamps or without the gold apex :  
thanks to Hans.

It is interesting to note that Spode undertook special thimble commissions. These wouldn't have been big commercial runs and of the English quality china thimble makers, Spode led the way on undertaking small commissions.

It's a real delight to find just how many commemorative thimbles have emerged, mainly from the early 1980s, since I created this topic. The commemorative thimbles commissioned for the Victorian Embroiderers' Guild of Victoria 21st anniversary was a small run of 200 thimbles.

Because the Spode thimble production was relatively limited, I have arranged their output alphabetically by subject. The subject chosen is the predominant theme on the thimble. Spode didn't often name their thimble patterns, so the naming used here is quite arbitrary, but I have used those names first used by the Thimble Society of London in 1981, when the thimbles would have been readily available.

In under 15 years of thimble production, Spode have left us a legacy of highly collectable thimbles which would make a wonderful niche collection.

Dates have been included where possible.

Why in 2018 are we still discovering previously unrecorded Spode thimbles?



apexes



boxes



## backstamps

 <p>standard red Spode mark</p>	 <p>heavier red Spode mark used on ridged examples</p>	 <p>red Spode mark + number in 1982 Christmas thimbles</p>
 <p>William of Wales thimbles' gold Spode mark and lettering</p>	 <p>extra mark in Bluebell thimbles</p>	 <p>purple iris thimbles' Spode mark</p>
 <p>Christmas 1983 Spode mark</p>	 <p>Christmas 1984 Spode mark</p>	 <p>black Spode mark found in gold cherub thimbles</p>
 <p>red Spode mark with gold lettering found in gold cherub thimbles</p>		

## Birds



**English birds**  
apex 2



**Tropical birds**  
apex 2



**bird & nest**  
on both sides  
apex 1

in 2013, a previously unrecorded version exists  
where body is **ridged** with a stepped band  
similar to the Spode cherubs thimbles



**'Mulberry'**  
blue bird with blue flower on verso  
apex 1



colourful bird with pink flower on verso  
blue rim  
apex 1

## Butterflies



**Butterfly**  
1993  
apex 4b



**'Dandelion Clocks and Butterflies'**  
or  
**'Butterflies and Dandelions'**  
apex 2  
issued by Thimble Collectors Club  
R: no gold band version



**'Trapnell'**  
blue & yellow butterfly  
turquoise band  
apex 1



**English butterflies**  
apex 2



**tropical butterflies**  
apex 2

## Christmas

1982-1986



**1982**  
apex 2

the thimbles are numbered according to a letter in my possession, the 1982 & 1983 issues were 'specially produced for John Sinclair [of Sheffield] by Spode'



**1983**  
apex 2

numbered limited to **2000**



**1983**  
apex 2



**1984**  
apex 2



**1985**  
apex 2



**1986**  
apex 2



**1986**  
green rim  
apex 4a  
ironstone



undated  
apex 4a  
no painted rim



undated  
apex 1  
no painted rim

## Twelve Days of Christmas

different pastel colours, all with 22ct gold decorations, lettering and apex 2  
**1990**, issued by the Thimble Collectors Club (TCC)



lettering for each day on verso



advertised as a gift with the collection a wreath-like frame display unit resembling a holly wreath

			
<b>a partridge in a pear tree</b>	<b>2 turtles doves</b>	<b>3 French hens</b>	<b>4 calling birds</b>
			
<b>5 gold rings</b>	<b>6 geese a-laying</b>	<b>7 swans a-swimming</b>	<b>8 maids a-milking</b>
			
<b>9 drummers drumming</b>	<b>10 pipers piping</b>	<b>11 ladies dancing</b>	<b>12 lords a-leaping</b>

There is more than one version of one of this set – with apex 1 with different images altogether



**2 turtles doves**

L: apex 1 – R: apex 7

## Commemorative

these thimbles are all dated and arranged by date of issue



**250th Anniversary of Spode**  
**1976**  
apex 2



**Victoria Embroiderers Guild**  
(Australia)  
**1981**  
apex 1



**H.R.H. Prince Charles to  
Lady Diana Spencer...1981**  
**Royal Wedding**  
apex 2



**Visit of Pope John Paul to England**  
**1982**  
apex 5



**H.R.H Prince William of Wales**  
**4 August 1982** inside  
apex 8



**250th Anniversary of Spode**  
**1733-1983**  
apex 2



**Montgolfier Brothers**  
**bicentenary of flight**  
**November 21<sup>st</sup> 1783-1983**  
special gold trefoil patterned apex  
apex 3



**30th anniversary of**  
**Queen Elizabeth's Coronation**  
**2nd June 1953-1983**  
apex 6





**10th Anniversary of  
The Royal College of Music  
1973-1983**  
apex 4b



**Prince Andrew to Sarah Ferguson  
Royal wedding  
July 23 1986**  
apex 2

### Country scenes

Spode traditional red & blue dinner service patterns  
from hand engravings  
the design wraps around the thimble  
apex 2  
no gold rim



**'Blue Italian' - blue**



**'Blue Italian' - red**



**'Traditional' - blue**



**'Traditional' - red**

# Flowers

## 'The Flower of the Year'

notice the differing images on each side – neither side is dominant  
issued by the Thimble Collectors Club (TCC)

**1985-1992**



**Poppy 1985**  
apex 2



**Buttercup 1986**  
apex 2  
see other versions below



**Bluebell 1987**  
apex 2



**Wild Rose 1990**  
apex 2



**Iris 1991**  
apex 1



**Foxglove 1992**  
apex 1

Other flowers



**Autumn**

also known as **Primroses and Hyacinths**

apex 2

second version has no gold rim



**'Balmoral Sprays'**

apex 1



**'Billingsley Rose'**

1993

apex 1



**Buttercup**

no date

apex 2



**Buttercup**

no date - no gold rim

apex 1



**'Campanula'**

harebells

apex 1



**'Country Village'**

windmill garden scene

apex 2



**'Marlborough Sprays'**

from dinner service pattern 1915  
pink or green rim  
1993  
apex 1



**'Mikado'**

red chrysanthemum  
apex 1



**'Mikado'**

purple chrysanthemum  
apex 1



**'Oriental Bird'**

pink peony  
apex 1



**'Posy' or 'Bowtie'**

flowers & ribbon in a band  
L: body **ridged** with a stepped band  
R: smooth  
apex 1



**'Spring Clover'**

apex 1



**'Spring flowers'**

tulip with ribbon  
apex 2



**'Summer Meadow'**  
 buttercup  
 1980  
 apex 1

### Special commissions

these are not commemorative thimbles as they are not dated



**'Ladies Circle  
 Great Britain & Ireland'**  
 the Round Table emblem  
 limited to **500**  
 L: apex 2 – R: no emblem on verso



**'Melton Mowbray'**  
 this scene shows the local church &  
 The Anne of Cleves public house  
 apex 2



**'NALC 50'**  
 National Association of Ladies Circles  
 apex 2  
 limited to **1000**



**'Skegness'**  
 The Jolly Fisherman  
 this poster figure has become the emblem of the  
 town  
 bright primary colours  
 apex 2



**'Merchant Taylors' Company'**  
 L: apex 8 – R: apex 1 – no upper gold rim  
 see the same design (1989) by Halcyon Days in Modern British enamelled thimbles topic

## Tradesmen/Craftsmen

the trade or craft depicted has a corresponding symbol for the trade on the verso  
apex 2 with monochrome brown designs

How many are in the set? Is this their correct title?

this Spode topic is 12 years old – and in August 2016, this is the first time that I have encountered these thimbles



'Cooper'  
barrel



'Farrier'  
horse shoe

## Treasures of the Orient

design wraps around the thimble  
apex 2

thimbles lettered inside in corresponding colour  
issued by the Thimble Collectors Club (TCC)  
**1987**



'Arita'



'Bamboo'



'Cairo'



'Chinese garden'



'Dragons'

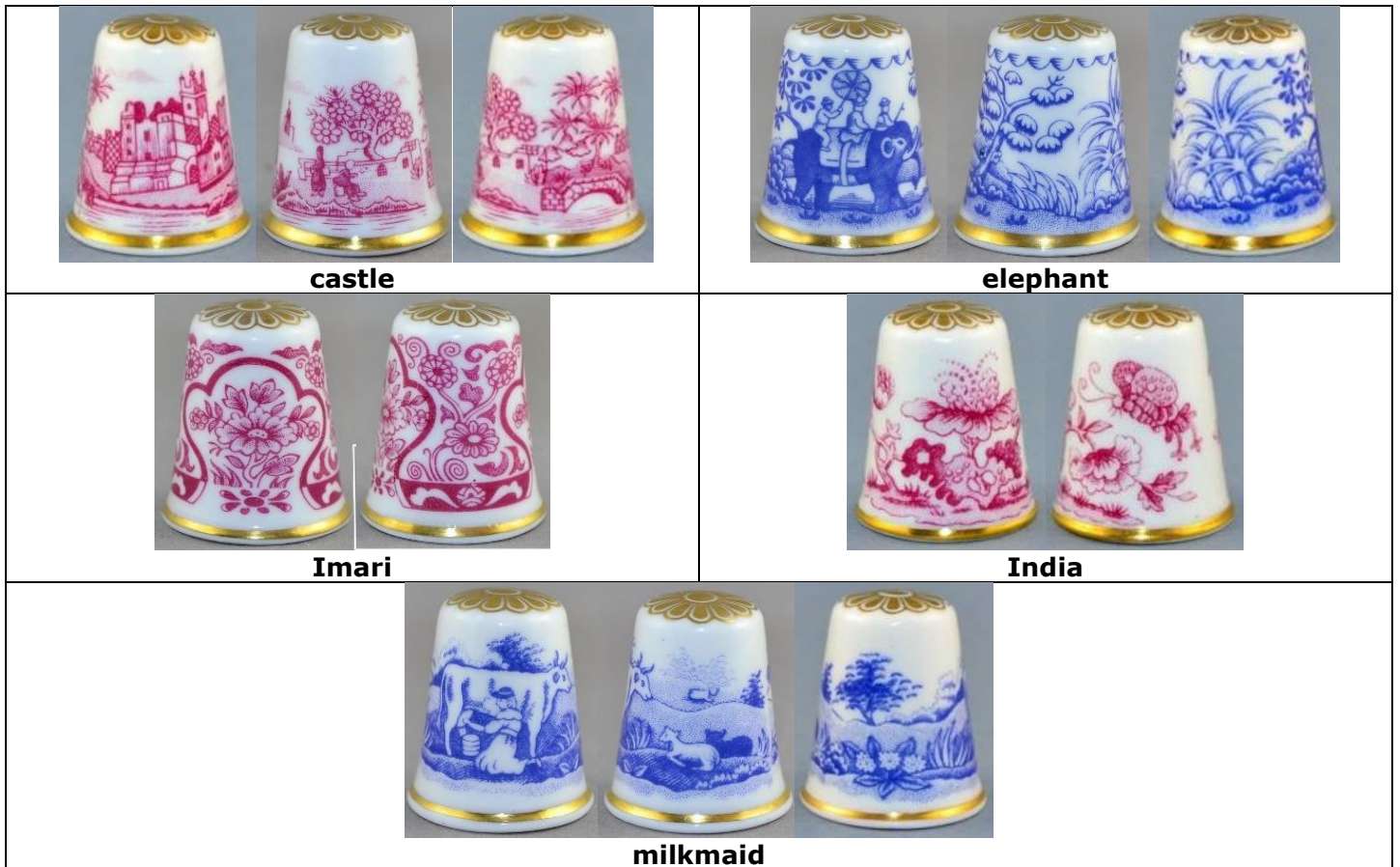


'Flying pennant'



**250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Spode**

the accompanying paperwork states this set was made to celebrate the Spode 250th anniversary  
the thimbles aren't marked with this date or a name  
limited to **1000** sets  
apex 2  
**1976**





**willow pattern**  
with and without gold rim

**Other**



**Couples**  
in two cameos  
apex 2



**Cupids or cherubs pair**  
white and turquoise bands  
note that the body is **ridged** with a stepped band  
apex 2  
1977



**Floral girls**  
four scenes  
apex 2



**'Girl at Well'**  
Franklin Mint's Porcelain Houses of the  
World  
1980  
from set of 25  
apex 1



**Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Great  
Porcelain Houses**  
1985  
apex 2  
from set of 50



**Kite flying**  
trailing ivy on verso  
apex 2





**Painting**  
apex 2



**Palms**  
in two cameos  
apex 2



**Trade Winds – a Sailing ship**  
monochrome black with stylised waves  
in rows at rim  
apex 2



**Umbrella girls**  
four scenes  
apex 2



**The Woodman**  
apex 2  
no gold rim  
does this belong in a series?



**Yorkshire rose**  
apex 2  
does this belong in a series?

## References

Belford, Roz *The Spode story* Collector Circle Gazette, vol.6, no.4, spring 1982  
Thimble Society of London, no. 1, winter 1981

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This listing of Spode 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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