

# Horn and bone thimbles

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 19<sup>th</sup> 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: 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian ox horn

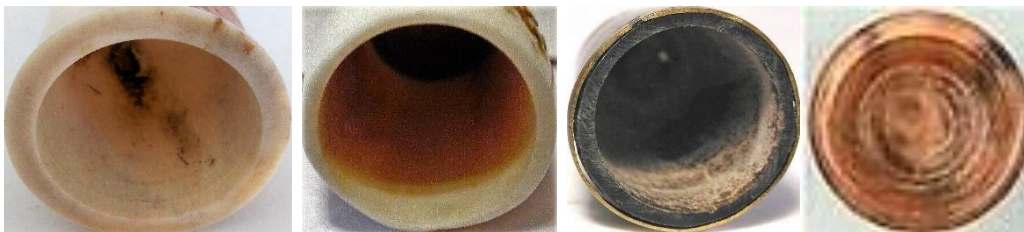
In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there have been many cow bone or bovine thimbles made of a very pale colour, almost resembling ivory (and can be mistaken for ivory once their labels have been lost).

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.

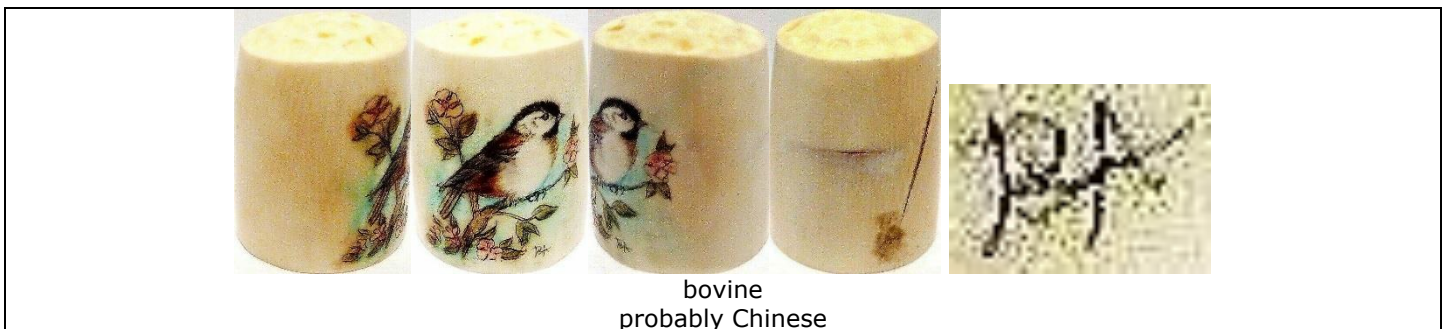
Thimbles made of animal tooth or tusk, which include elephant and whale ivory, hippo etc - are not included in this topic.

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**

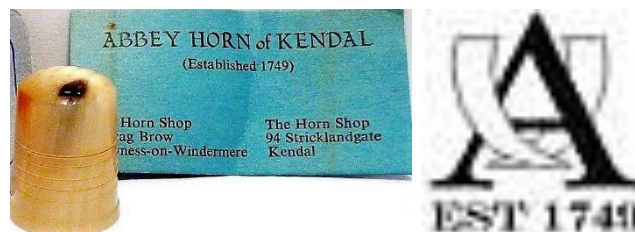


bovine  
probably Chinese

### 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](http://www.abbeyhorn.co.uk)



range of colour in natural horn

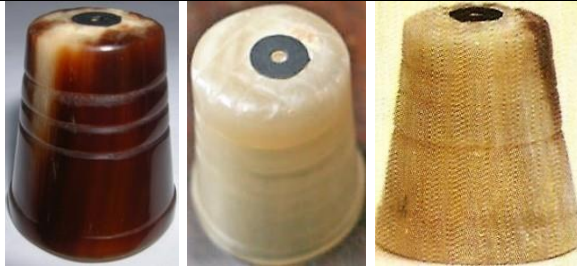




smooth apex



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



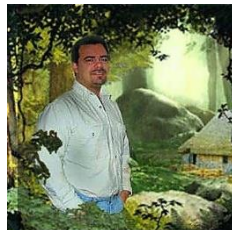
range of colours in natural antler – the apex is made from the same material

**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](http://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



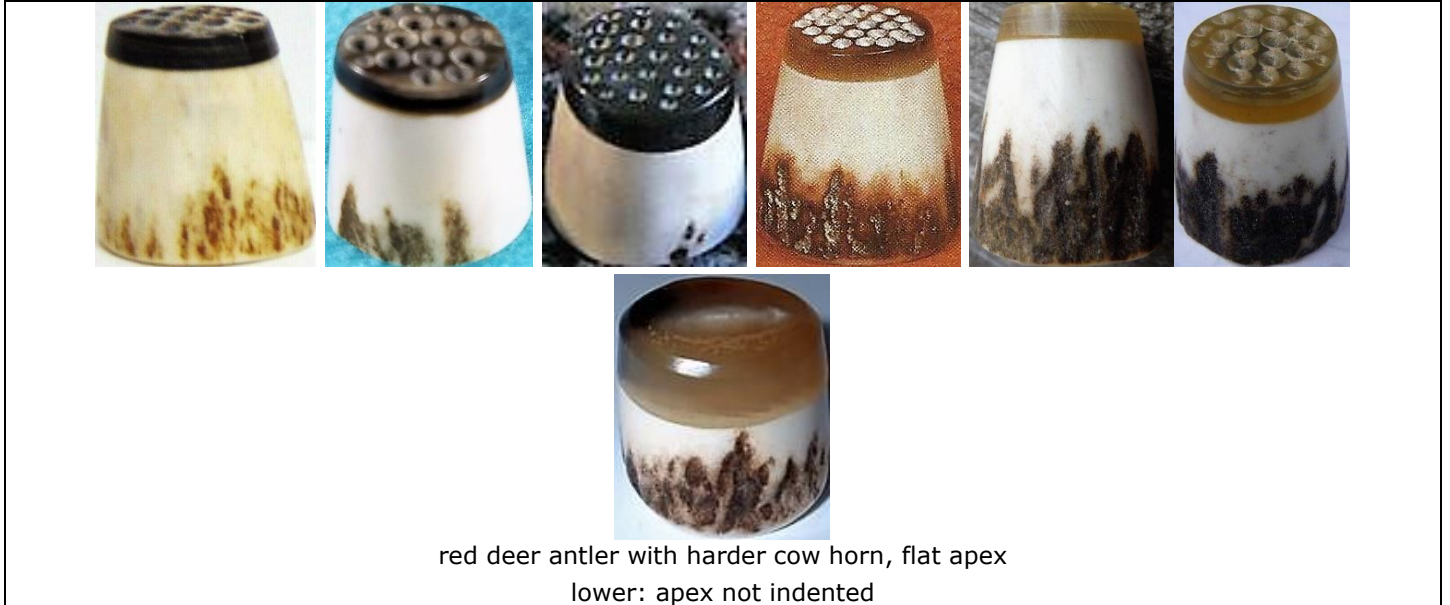
stag antler and heather

## 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

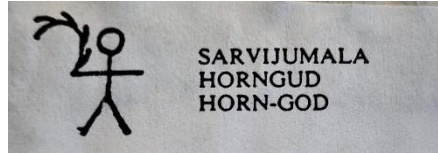


reindeer  
very skilful pierced carving


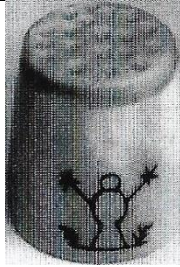


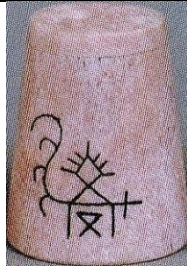


## Tuotteet Oy Lauri Rovaniemi Lapland Finland

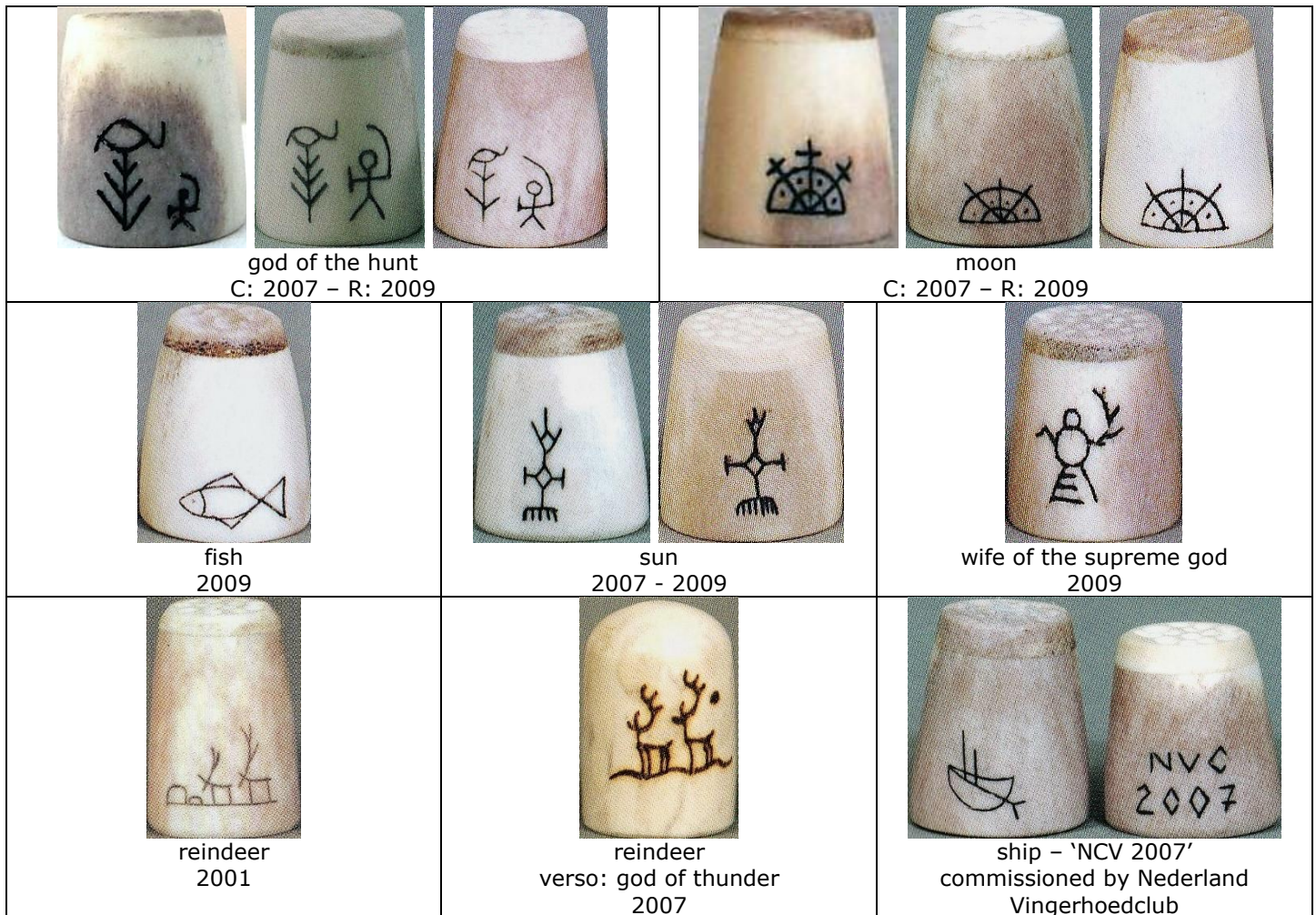
Lauri Products Limited's thimbles are made from reindeer antler. They are pyrographed with Lapland motifs, created in 1980s with 25 different motifs: for the tourist market. Most have a different part of antler as apex.



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	
			
		horngod 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

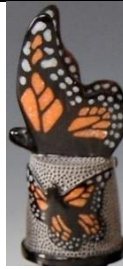
**Kevin Pourier USA**



buffalo horn  
dragonfly  
inset abalone  
2016



buffalo horn  
magpie  
inset MOP  
2016-2018



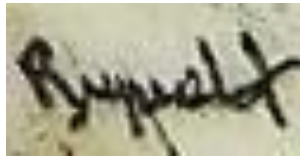
buffalo horn  
monarch butterfly  
inset orange sandstone  
2016



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



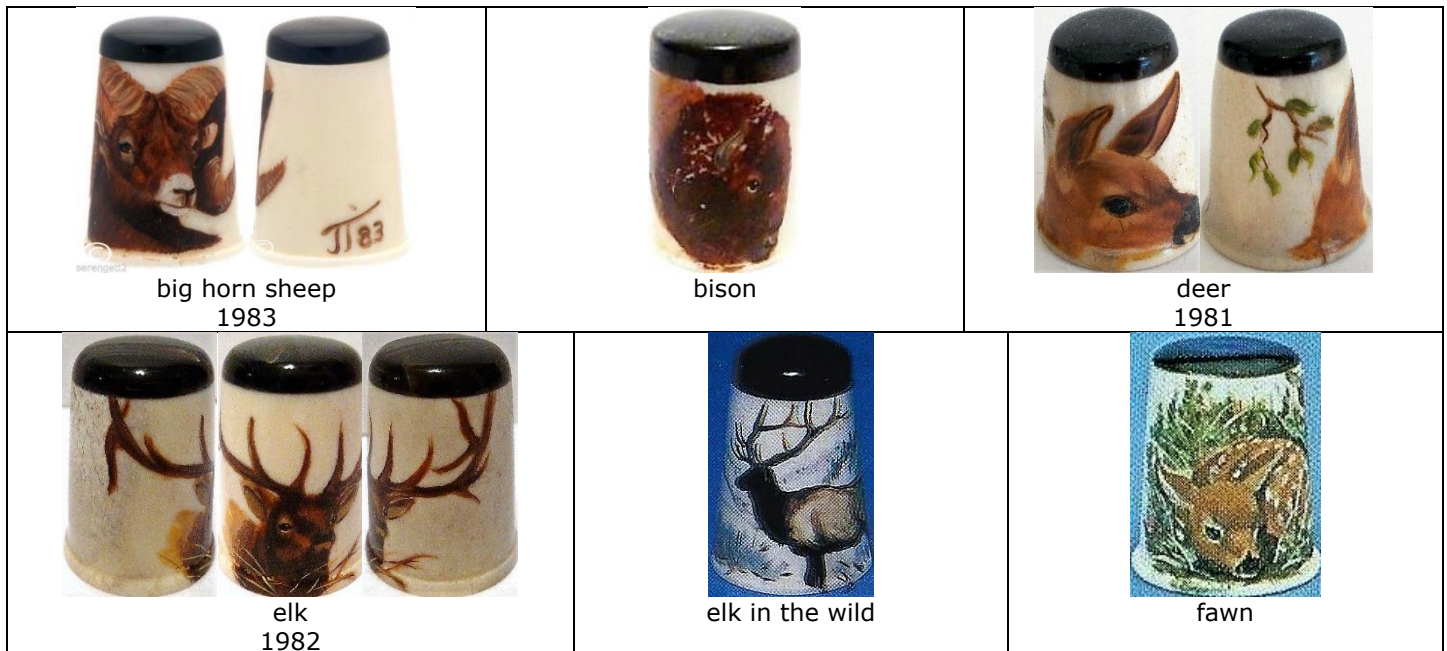
**Janet Thompson Montana South Dakota USA**

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







fox



goslings



hummingbird  
L: 1983



owl



panda



squirrel



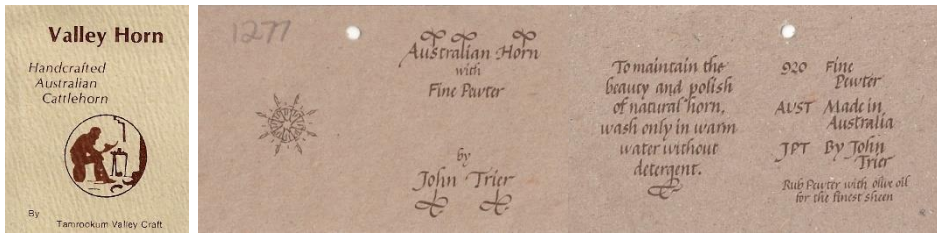
Siamese



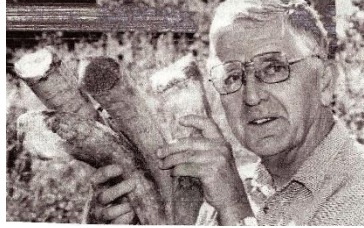
plain horn  
on horn plinth

**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 19<sup>th</sup> century scrimshaw



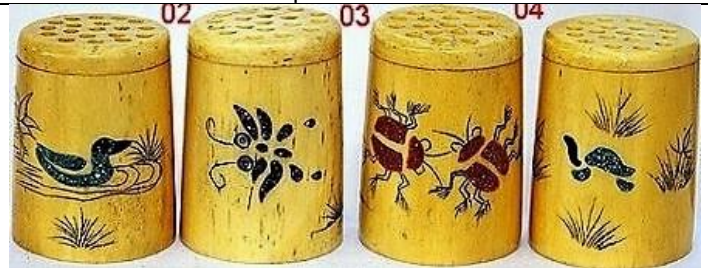
handpainted mountains



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 2<sup>nd</sup> hand market

**Finland**



reindeer with gold apex  
b&w photo



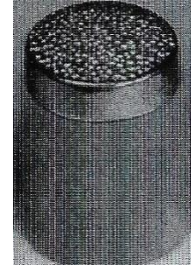
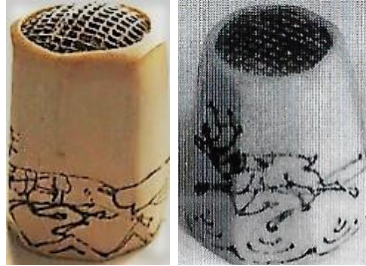
reindeer with Lap symbol  
b&w photo



moose  
b&w photo



scrimshawed reindeer  
hexagon shape with steel apex  
1920s



reindeer with gold apex  
b&w photo



reindeer with steel apex  
late 19<sup>th</sup> 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)**



early 1900s  
lovely patina



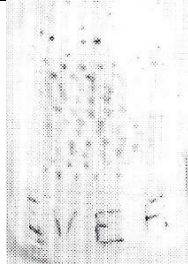
reindeer  
1987



sterling silver apex  
1820s



horn  
1800s child's



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



bone fingerguard  
inscised '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



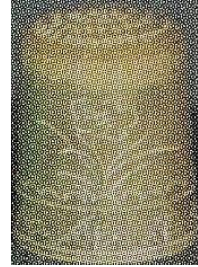
water buffalo horn  
Kay Sullivan March 1987



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

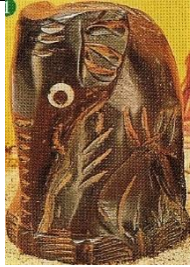
## Nepal



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

## Paraguay



horn

## Philippines



water buffalo horn (Carabao)  
TTG February 2008



**Russia**



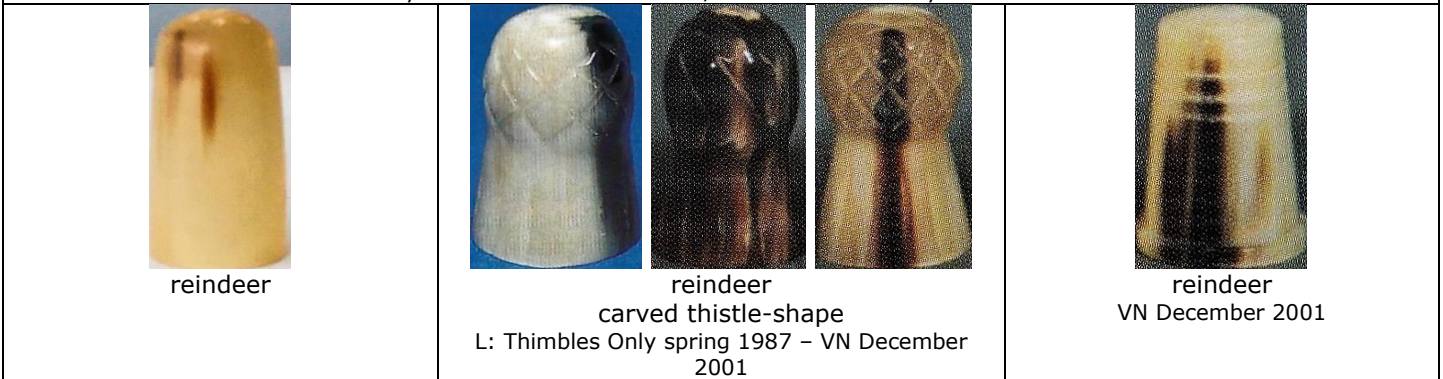
deer hoof  
R: Cyrillic lettering хибины (Khibiny)

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

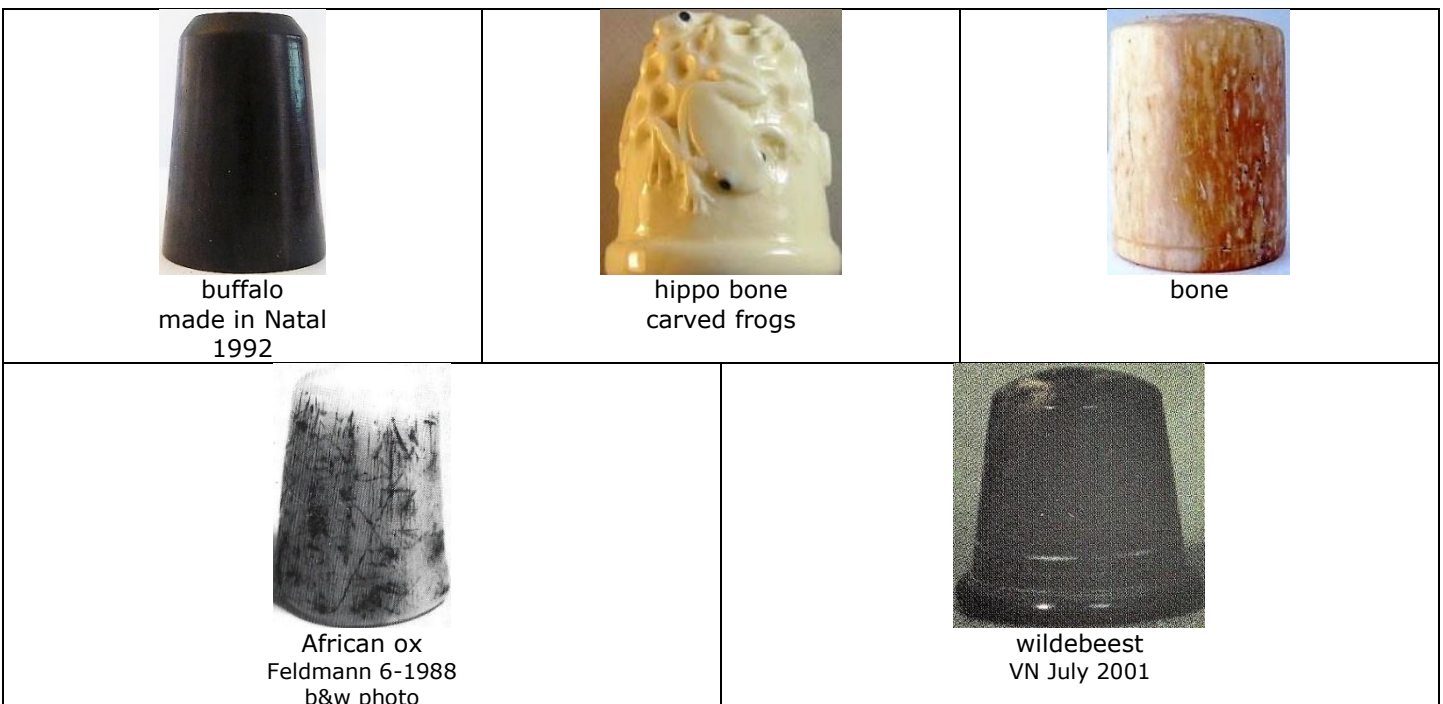


reindeer

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  
18<sup>th</sup> 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



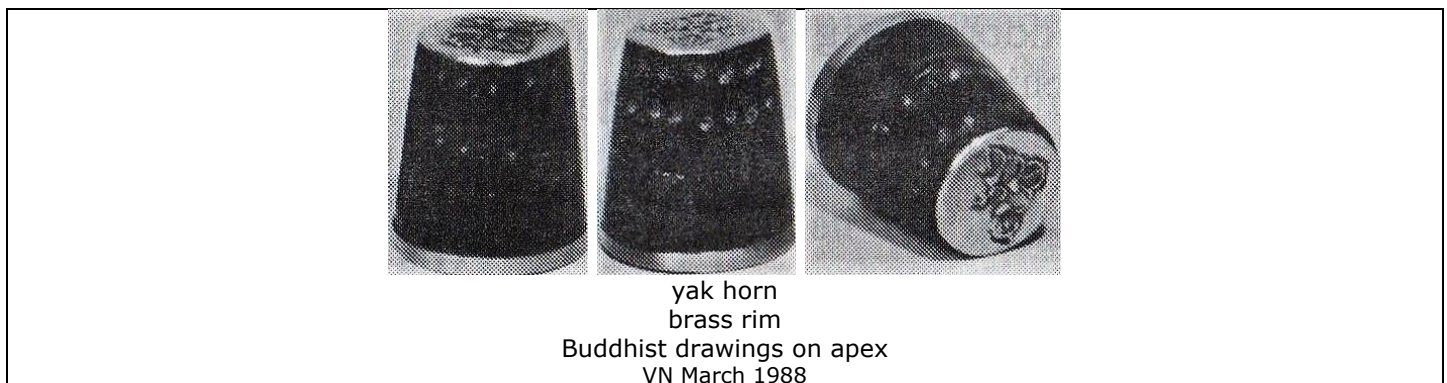
owl  
'THAILAND'  
inlaid eyes



elephant  
ivory eyes



**Tibet**





## Turkiye



camel bone  
handpainted



camel bone  
handpainted 'Kuradasi'



camel bone  
handpainted 'Turkiye'



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

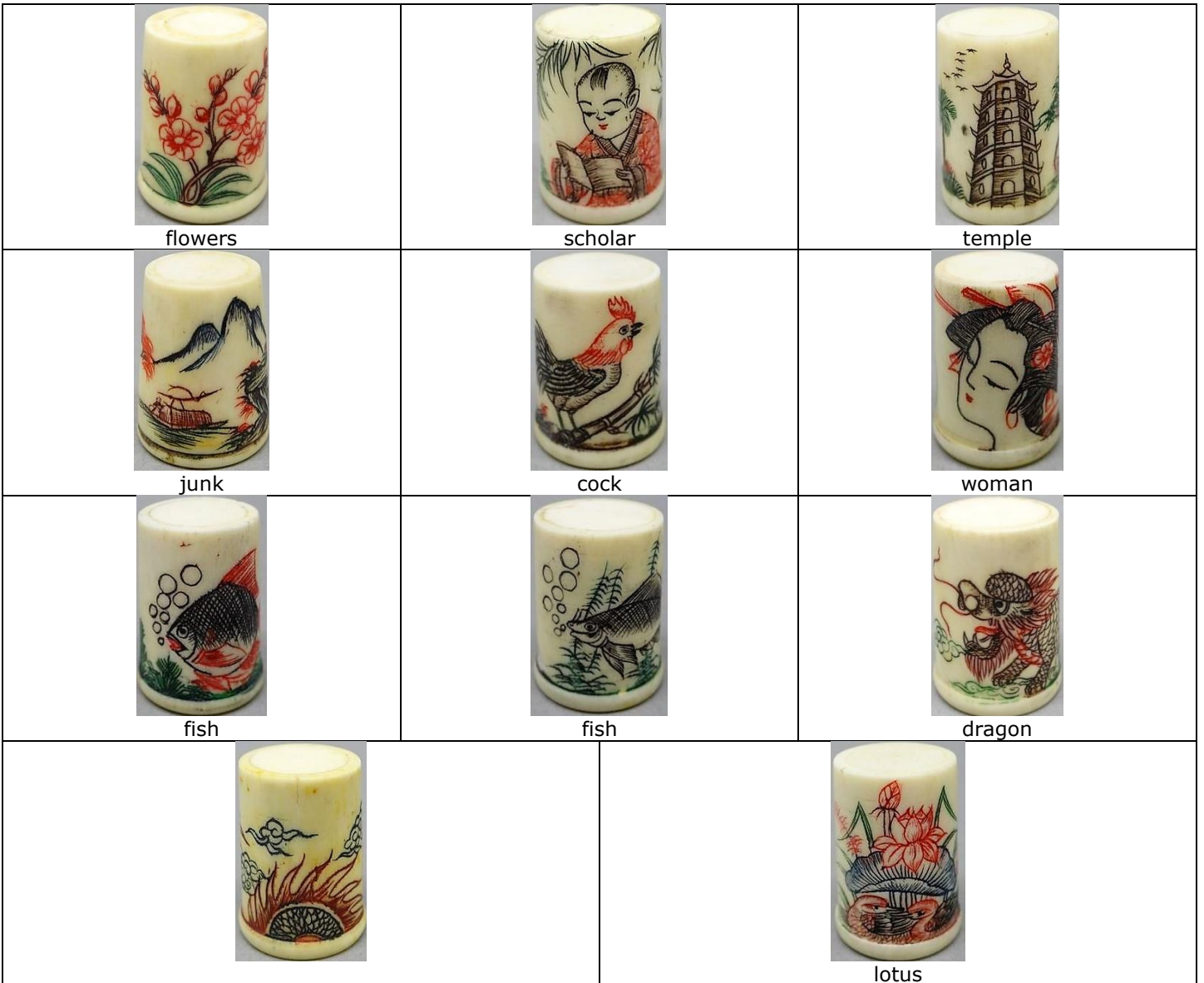
## Uruguay

Uruguayan thimbles are made of cow horn



## Vietnam

handpainted buffalo horn – probably all by the same artist





## 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  
19<sup>th</sup> century



cow



cow  
cross-hatched apex



flowers



mid 20<sup>th</sup> century  
gilt metal on apex



elk  
tailor's



handpainted bone



bone  
1820s



bone



bone  
turned 19<sup>th</sup> century



bone carved leaves



bone handpainted carved flower on apex



bone



bone carved elephant head



bone handpainted elephant diagonal indentations



bone



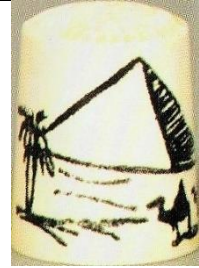
handpainted bison with hoofprints



bone painted birds TSL winter 2008



horn European TSL spring 2009



camel bone Dutch Thimble Club 2002



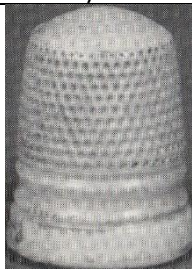
horn applied bull in ivory



cow bone



horn or bone TSL winter 2001



bone Vingerhoednieuws 31 1994



camel



**HORN SEWING TOOLS**



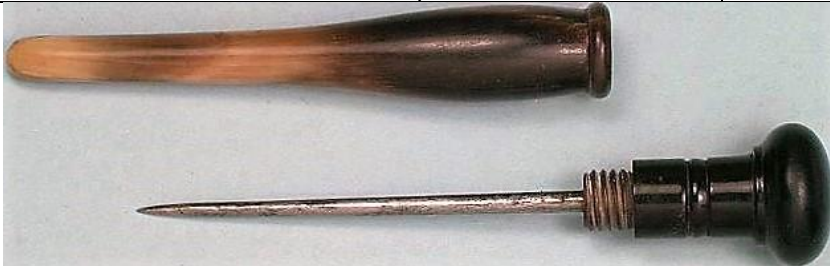
buttonhole cutter  
1790s



sewing kit  
18<sup>th</sup> century



tape measure  
1880s



stiletto  
1880s



thimble holder  
bone  
'Token of regard'



Caribou antler buttons  
Jer - Buckhorn Crafts Kingston WA

## References

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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