

Wimpole thimbles

During the 2011 excavation of Mr Ratford's house near the Home Farm, Wimpole, a total of three thimbles were recovered. They tell an interesting story because of their date range, determined on stylistic grounds, and their size.

Thimble 1 (Small Find 49)

Probably the oldest thimble was SF49. This seems to be a brass thimble, judging by its patina, with the following diagnostic features. (see www.ukdfd.co.uk/pages/thimble.html for a descriptive article and the full list).

- (a) Beehive shape (see Figure 1a)
- (b) Tonsured crown (i.e. indentations do not fully cover the crown)
- (c) Spiral indentations (see Figure 1b)
- (d) Manually produced indentations
- (e) Rimless body

These features all suggest a date in the 14th to 16th century range, according to the article.

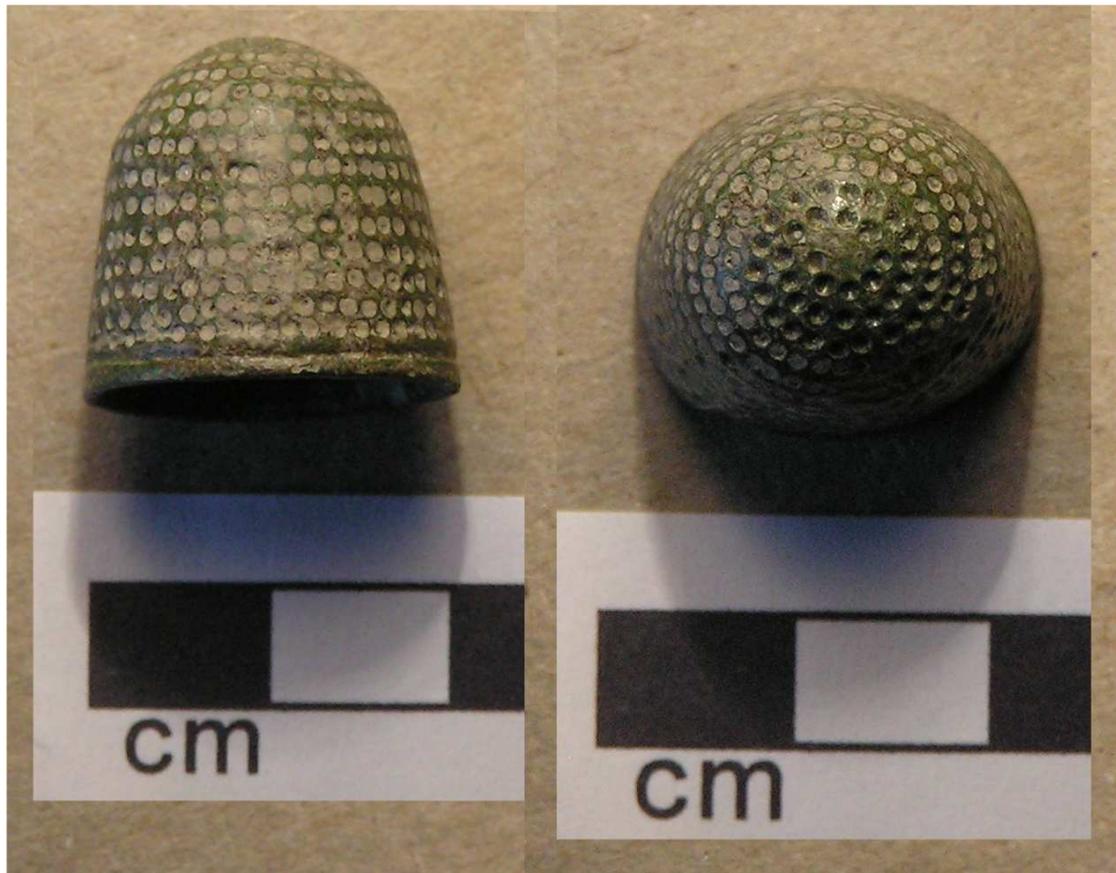


Figure 1. (a) Left hand side - view of the beehive shape, the manual irregular indentations and the scribed band around the base. (b) right hand side - view showing small tonsured crown and spiral indentations.

The base diameter is approximately 21mm (it has been slightly crushed) while the overall height is also 21mm. The size suggests that it was most likely to have been used by adults.

Thimble 2 (Small find SF37)

The second oldest, and smallest, thimble. This also seems to be a brass made thimble, judging by its patina, with the following diagnostic features:

- (a) Waffle-shaped crown (see Figure 2a)
- (b) Straighter sides with a flatter top (see Figure 2b)
- (c) Concentric ring indentations on the body; their even nature suggests they were mechanically produced
- (d) Fully rimmed base

These features all suggest a date in the 17th to 18th century range, according to the article.



Figure 2. (a) Left hand side - view of the waffle shaped crown. (b) right hand side - view showing the upright sides and flatter crown, the regular concentric rings of indentations and the pronounced rim around the base.

The base diameter is approximately 16mm (it has been slightly crushed) while the crown is 13mm diameter. The overall height is also 16mm. The size suggests that it may have been used by children (although a small female finger could possibly fit).

Thimble 3 (SF55)

The third thimble is quite different to the other two. SF55 is another small thimble which, judging from the black corrosion products and worn appearance, may be made from silver. The very worn crown also supports this view (silver is a relatively soft metal and some silver thimbles were made

with steel crowns to overcome this weakness, this thimble is non-magnetic). There do not appear to be any mint markings, although the amount of corrosion would probably conceal them if they were small. Conservation may disclose them later. It is also decorated and has the following diagnostic features:

- (a) Concentric rings on worn crown (see Figure 3a)
- (b) Sides and top similar to SF 37 (see Figure 3b)
- (c) Concentric ring indentations on the upper half of the body only; their even nature suggests they were mechanically produced
- (d) Decorated lower half delineated by upper and lower broad but shallow grooves. Vertical fine hatch marks cover the decorated zone
- (e) Five thin ridges on the base band
- (f) Within the decorated half, there is a rectangular area defined by a laurel wreath-type decoration containing the words "FORGET ME NOT" which leads into a floral element (see Figure 4a and b)

These features suggest a date of the late 18th to 19th century for this thimble.



Figure 3. (a) Left hand side - view of the concentric rings on the crown. (b) right hand side - view showing the upright sides and flatter crown, the regular concentric rings of indentations reaching half way down the side and the pronounced rim around the base.



Figure 4a – rectangular cartouche and text

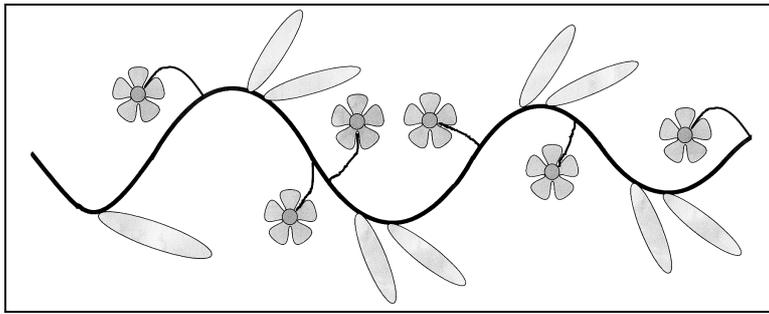


Figure 4b – floral design contained in the decorated band

The base diameter is approximately 15mm while the crown is 12mm diameter
Overall height is 21mm.

The date range suggested on stylistic grounds appears to support a late 17th/18th century date for both SF37 and SF55 thimbles. However, SF49 is probably much older and this suggests it may well have been curated as a family possession, handed down from one generation to the next.