



5 MINUTE EXPERT

Bridget McConnell on collecting antique thimbles

What kinds of thimbles do people collect?

People collect all kinds - that is the pleasure, you can find interesting items in all sorts of different materials and at all prices.

And what kind of piece might appeal to the entry-level collector?

Do not buy modern thimbles, unless you know the artist and want to encourage their work. Start with a good-condition late 19th-century silver thimble with a clear pattern you like.

Can you give some idea of the range of prices that collectors in this area of interest might expect to pay?

£5 for a 19th-century brass example, up to 18th-century Meissen porcelain for £5,000. A similar price range to stamp collecting, I believe.

Starting out, should would-be collectors go to fairs, auctions, specialist dealers - or take their chances online?

I suggest that you begin by buying a book. I have written *The Story of the Thimble* and *The Story of Antique Needlework Tools*, which are illustrated guides for collectors. Then start going to antiques fairs, Portobello Road antiques market, as well as specialist dealers, to get the feel for condition and authenticity before you go online.

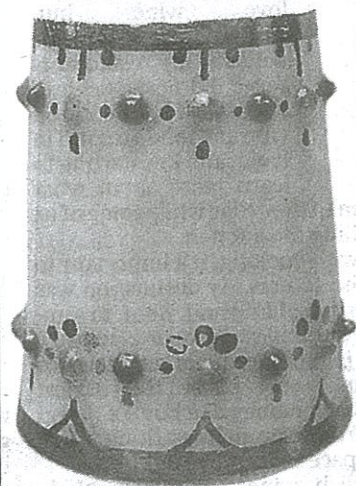
Are there traps and pitfalls? Are there any fakes or replicas to watch out for?

There are always fakes and replicas in any collecting field

of value. Get used to handling the real thing by visiting a specialist dealer.

Do you have a personal favourite thimble or thimble maker?

My favourite thimbles were made in Paris from the end of the 18th century to 1840 and were known as Palais Royale, made from mother-of-pearl with a tiny pansy in enamel on



Collectors' item: a Worcester jewelled design from about 1880

the front. "Pansy" translates in French to *pensée*, so the pansy is a kind of code for "Think of me".

The thimble was the one gift that a gentleman could give to a lady, without compromising her reputation. Hence the range of sentimental messages that are found on them: "Forget-me-not", "Remember Me" and "From a Friend" are just a few.

Bridget McConnell's website is thimblesociety.com; email antiques@thimblesociety.com