

Royal Tara thimbles

Galway Ireland

I haven't done a topic on Irish thimbles for a while. It is going to be a small topic as Royal Tara weren't a prolific thimble producer. We can't lose these thimbles only made in the 1980s.

Royal Tara was established in 1951 by Kerry O'Sullivan in Galway, Ireland (Eire). Kerry was a gold medal winner from the College of Ceramics, Stoke on Trent. He housed the manufactory in a Georgian mansion Tara Hall that had once belonged to wealthy merchants. The mansion was converted to house the kilns for all the merchandise being produced by Royal Tara.



Tara Hall

The wares that were produced were tableware and gifts.

According to de Smet, in 1971 Royal Tara was taken over by local businessmen. They focused, amongst other things, on limited collectors' pieces and turned the business around, using traditional Celtic designs. By concentrating and promoting old Celtic designs, their sales rocketed, and their quality goods were sold worldwide – to the United States, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Canada. Such was the quality of their fine bone china that highly desirable goods were produced.

They began to produce thimbles around 1980, when the collectable thimbles market was burgeoning.

The thimbles are made of fine bone china.

Royal Tara is the only Irish thimble maker to produce fine bone china thimbles. The others are made of Irish porcelain. Fine bone china gives a clear white china thimble which shows off any applied design or motif.

Another distinguishing feature of Royal Tara thimbles are the widely spaced indentations on the apex.

None of the Royal Tara thimbles are handpainted. Their designs are decal (transfers).

All Royal Tara thimbles have two 9ct gold handpainted rims - one around the apex – the second at the rim.

Shapes varied only slightly over the life of the Royal Tara thimble manufactory. Their original shape is a traditional straight-sided thimble. The second shape has a flared shape, with a slight bell-shaped flare at the rim. A third produced is hexagonal-sided.

The Irish national emblem is the shamrock (three-leafed clover) and is a predominant Royal Tara design.

Their typical shamrock design on their gifts and tableware is the trellis shamrock, which as the name suggests, has a trail of shamrocks around the china. All Royal Tara shamrock thimbles produced replicated this trellis effect on their thimbles.

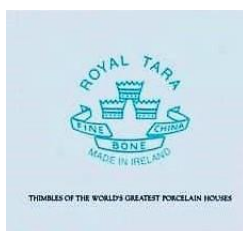
You will notice that shamrock thimbles are produced in several shapes.

Their thimbles have a range of different maker's marks inside. The earliest mark is colourful in two tones: a tan image of Tara Hall, with small amounts of green, with the accompanying lettering in the same two colours.



initial maker's mark

In August 1980 Franklin Mint issued a set of 25 thimbles: Thimbles of the world's porcelain houses. Royal Tara was included in this set – and yes – their thimble featured shamrocks: the trellis shamrock that Royal Tara made famous. Each thimble has an accompanying leaflet. Looking at the Royal Tara certificate, the maker's mark of three crowns is different from those found in the thimble. This mark doesn't appear in this thimble and the illustrated mark hasn't ever appeared in Royal Tara thimbles.



Franklin Mint's Thimbles of the world's porcelain houses certificate for the Royal Tara thimble

A second set was issued by Thimble Collectors Club (TCC), in 1985. This set contained 50 thimbles. Their set is The Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Great Porcelain Houses (confusingly similar to the 1980 set). The distinguishing feature of this set is that the decoration consists of the maker's 'hallmark'. The Royal Tara thimble bears their two-toned maker's mark on the outside. Like the earlier set of 25, there is an accompanying leaflet for each thimble. The leaflet replicates the design of Royal Tara thimble maker's mark.



Thimble Collectors Club's The Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Great Porcelain Houses certificate for the Royal Tara thimble.

Another maker's mark encountered in Royal Tara thimbles is this blue or green backstamp. The additional information contained in the blue mark is "handmade ...". An almost identical mark is in green (or green and gold) but mentions rather "Handcrafted ...". These two marks also incorporate a band of Celtic design, above the lettering Royal ...



most commonly found Royal Tara maker's mark – R: no mention of IRELAND underneath

The following maker's mark is found on the 'Laura' thimbles. Shamrocks are incorporated in this maker's mark.



Laura thimble maker's mark

Thimble Collectors Club (TCC) included two Royal Tara thimbles in the monthly thimbles that were issued to their members. They too were accompanied by a certificate.



US club certificate (British certificates don't show the maker's mark)

Royal Tara cardboard thimble boxes bear the same mark as these thimbles.



Royal Tara thimble box

De Smet has an entire page illustrating Royal Tara thimbles. I have included them throughout this topic**. As I had never encountered these thimbles before I was a bit sceptical of their origin, until some of these thimbles began to appear for sale on the second hand market. It does seem a departure for Royal Tara to move away from their Celtic designs – maybe this was dictated by collector demand?

If you specialise in Irish thimbles within your collection, I hope you will share Royal Tara thimbles not featured here.

They are quality thimbles, well made and if you collect china thimbles, please consider adding some of these for your collection.



range of Royal Tara table and giftware
figurine – Irish harp - jug with Irish flowers - mug and teacup with Book of Kells designs

Other Irish thimbles topics

Belleek thimbles

Irish Dresden thimbles

Royal Tara Celtic design thimbles

Shamrock thimbles



trellis shamrock
hexagonal



trellis shamrock
flared rim
'Ireland' banner on verso



trellis shamrock
flared rim



trellis shamrock
Thimbles of the world's porcelain
houses (Franklin Mint 25 set)
traditional shape



trellis shamrock
traditional shape
missing gold trims



small sprig of trellis shamrock
Thimble Collectors Club

Book of Kells thimbles



blue with red Celtic pattern
green and gold maker's
mark



yellow-gold with green
Celtic pattern



green with yellow Celtic
pattern



green with red Celtic
pattern



Celtic patterns
Thimble Collectors Club
green and gold maker's mark

Irish commemorative thimbles



Dublin millennium (988-1988)
flared rim

Irish floral thimbles



Harmony
hexagonal shape
blue maker's mark



Floral
hexagonal shape



Christmas
holly

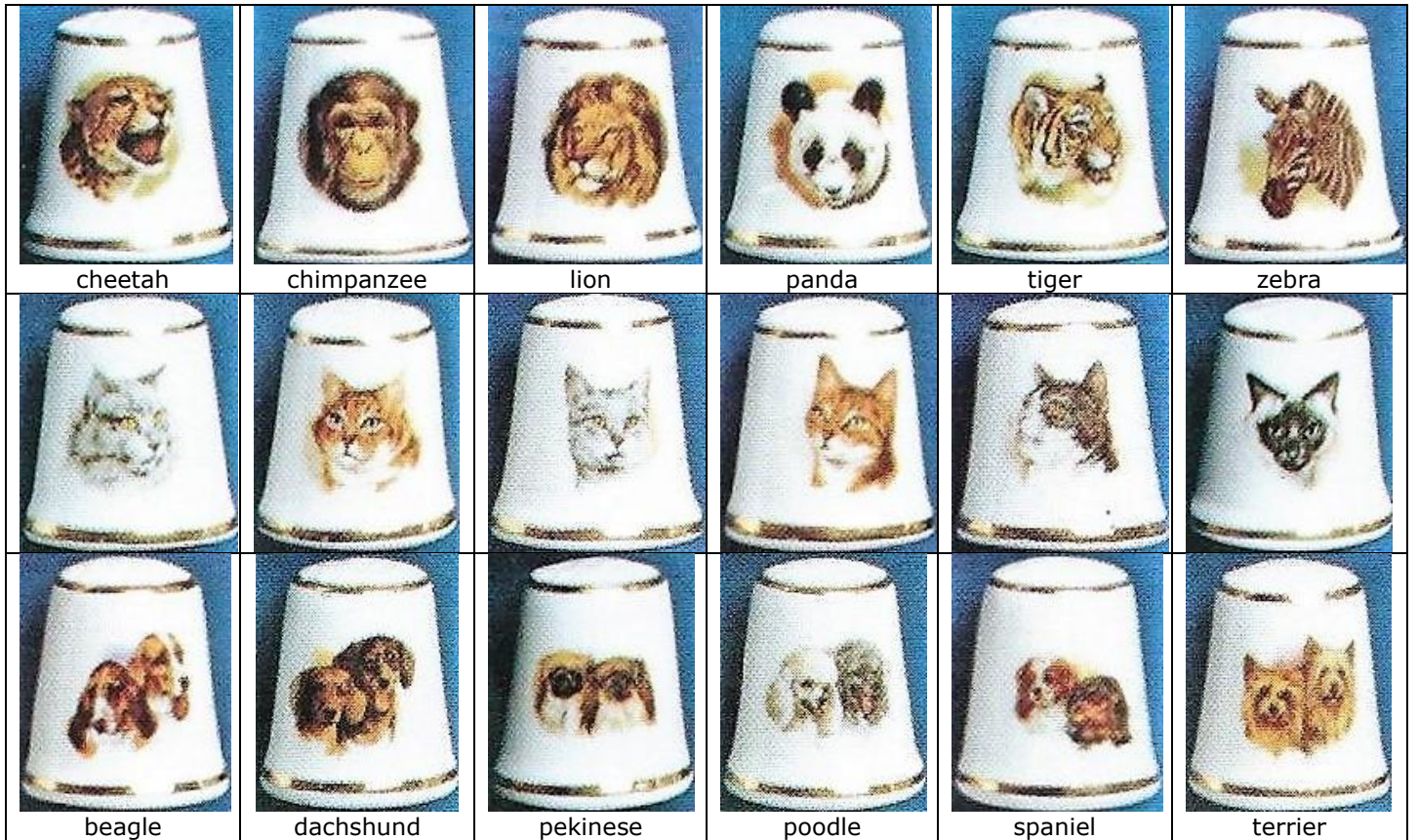


Laura
trellis shamrocks with flowers hexagonal shape
single blue trim
green maker's mark



Other Royal Tara designs thimbles

Animals thimbles**



Miscellaneous designs thimbles



The Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Great Porcelain Houses (TCC 50 set) traditional shape - showing the traditionally wide-spaced indentations on the apex (L)

References

Adrienne de Smet. De vingerhoed in het kunstambacht. 1998
<https://www.royal-tara.com/>

Contributors

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This listing of Royal Tara 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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