

Boscastle Pottery thimbles

Cornwall

It is time to return to Cornwall – the British county that produces the finest china clay on earth.

This means that pottery is a major Cornish industry.

This includes the Boscastle Pottery in Boscastle, which was established over fifty years ago in either 1962 (sign at the pottery) or 1967 (according to the Digital Museum of Cornish Ceramics).

There is a secondary name of Camelot Pottery.

This name is included on a blue plaque embedded in the workshop wall.

Boscastle Pottery



Boscastle Pottery

The owner and potter is [Richard Irving Little](#) – he goes by the name of Irving. He has now been joined in the pottery by his son Tim.

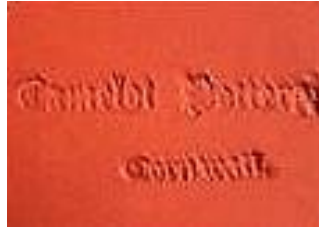
Together with his wife Nanette Little, the three of them run the pottery and the pottery shop.



Irving Little at his pottery wheel, in his workshop at Boscastle



a blue Boscastle Pottery plaque on the pottery wall



Camelot mark found on Boscastle Pottery homewares

Their primary production is making household wares in all the hues created by Irving and Tim Little.

	
	
paperweight Irving 1988	plate
souvenir	vase

For other pottery topics see
Peter Blanshard pottery thimbles
Poole Pottery thimbles
Tony Bouchet agateware thimbles (Jersey)

Boscastle Pottery thimbles

As far as I can establish, Irving began to produce thimbles in 1980 and continued to produce dated thimbles until 2020. 40 years is a long time in modern thimble production.

The thimbles from Boscastle have never been available for sale thru any of the mail order catalogues. I have only ever seen them for sale on ebay.

When I first encountered these pottery thimbles, I thought the primary design was of bare trees.

Boscastle Pottery specialises in a technique known as **Mocha ware**. This is achieved by using a "Mocha tea", which is applied to the clay slip. The tea runs thru the slip creating a fern-like (or tree) pattern. The tea contains a staining agent. Traditionally this was tobacco but nowadays coffee is used, or various chemical recipes are used.



ferns in black that identify Boscastle Pottery thimbles

Because of this process, no two items are ever the same. The various colours swirl in never-ending patterning. Those of you familiar with the agateware thimbles of Tony Bouchet of Jersey, may see a similarity?

The ferns are usually black but there are always exceptions. And no two are alike, both within a year date of from year to year.



The fern pattern unusually creeps over the apex – the centre thimble has blue ferns.

Each year there seems to have been an unlimited number of differently coloured thimbles made. Initially the shades achieved were pastel and whatever the base colour is, they usually include white or clay colour in the design.

In shape, they are widely flared, the surface is sometimes glazed, sometimes matt. That's the potter's prerogative.

They are always dated, usually lettered on the apex of the thimbles. At first the colour of the clay showed thru as a terracotta date, with even a tinge of bronze on occasion. Once the potter used a white clay, the date lettered is white to match the inside of the thimbles.



broken later thimble showing the beautiful white Cornish clay

On at least one occasion, Irving used his initial alongside the date – and on others 'Irving' is inscribed across the apex or alongside the rim of the apex.
Yet at other times the name Irving is stamped into the clay.



Irving signature inscribed on dated apex 1996-1999

There are no maker's marks inside the thimbles.

Initially the Boscastle thimble sizes were quite small, measuring about one inch (254mm) in height. The current size is larger at 1.25 inches (317mm) and there is an exhibition size, which measures two inches (508mm) high and two inches (508mm) wide!!



three sizes of Boscastle thimbles – L: small (1980-1986) – current size – R: exhibition size



the small sized early matt thimbles had a brown inner glaze (1980-1984) – after that, the glaze is white

The apex on most of the thimbles is smooth i.e., no indentations. Exceptions seem to occur regularly – see 2013 and 2020.

In 2011, the Littles added little creatures to the surface of their thimbles. Initially these were a mouse or mice, where their long tails trail around the thimbles. The mice were all made by hand. Even these vary in their detail. The annual thimbles from 2013 were available in both mouse and traditional thimbles.



being handmade even the mice have different features

Next Irving began to affix dragons – these are moulded so they are all identical in the size of the wing span.

This is a symbol to indicate there was a takeover of a local pottery by Boscastle in 2014.



2014 dragons have the same wingspan



a collection of about 120 Boscastle thimbles

I have noticed that as some of the thimbles age, the thimbles have begun to **craze** (fine lines). This is evident on thimbles for sale on ebay

I am currently missing the following years: **1982 – 2010 – 2015 – 2016 – 2019**. Were they issued? Please help and share if you have one of these dates in your collection.

No thimbles have been produced since 2020.

dated Boscastle Pottery thimbles



1980
blues
date lettered at rim with cursive 'Y'
small size



1981
blues
date lettered on apex
small size

no photo

1982



1983 - i
grey - dark blue
matt finish - small size



1983 - ii
blues
matt finish - small size



1984
three of the many different colours on offer
matt finish - small size



1985
blues green - terracotta
matt finish - small size



1986 - i
blues
matt finish - small size



1986 - ii
mocha
gloss finish - bigger size



1987 - i
olive greens pale yellows
gloss finish – bigger size



1987 - ii
dark terracotta
gloss finish – bigger size



1987 - iii
ochres greens



1988
darker colours
gloss finish – bigger size



1989 - i
six of the colour range available
gloss finish – bigger size



1989 - ii
chocolate browns and yellow



1989 - iii
pale greens yellow



1990
creams – which highlights the ferns



1991 - i
tans – golds/pale yellows/olive green blue
gloss finish – bigger size - flash used



1991 - i
pale terracotta - blues



1992 - i
deep blue/olive greens
gloss finish – bigger size – no
flash used



1992 - ii
creams



1993- i
pinks mocha
gloss finish



1993 - ii
some of the colours on offer
gloss finish – flash used



1993- iii
blues pale yellow
gloss finish



1993- iiiii
blues
gloss finish



1994 - i
pale pinks pale yellows
gloss finish
(same thimble – with and without flash
the colours are somewhere in between)



1993- ii
Blues ochre
gloss finish



1994 - iii
pale pinks pale ochre
gloss finish



1995 - i
deep blue/ochre yellows/brooding greens
gloss finish – no use of flash



1995 - ii
blues
gloss finish



1995 - iii
yellows
date palely lettered on apex
gloss finish



1995 - iiiii
terracotta blue yellow
roughish finish



1996 - i
different coloured ferns on darker bases
flash used



1996 - ii
blues yellow
gloss finish



1997 - i
olive greens
date inscribed on apex as '19 Irving
97'
R: flash used



1997 - ii
mocha
pale apex
date inscribed on apex as '19 Irving 97'



1997 - iiiii
yellows pale blues
date doesn't show thru white clay



1997 - iii
caramel cream



1998 - i
three colours
two are marked '19 Irving 98'
flash used



1998 - ii
golds black pale blue
gloss finish



1998 - iii
pale blues pale ochres



1999 - i
pale pinks pale yellow
date inscribed on apex as '19 Irving 99'
matt finish



1999 - ii
palest pink
date is very pale



1999 - iii
mocha pale pink
gloss finish



1999 - iiiii
swirled muted multi-colours
date marked with '19 Irving 99'
(same thimble - with and without flash
the colours are somewhere in between)



1999 - v
blues
gloss finish



2000 - i
soft greens
(same thimble - with and without flash
the colour is somewhere in between)



2000 - ii
yellows apricot



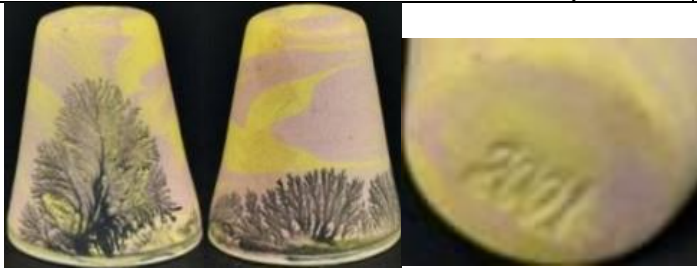
2000 - iii
pale rainbow shades



2001 - i
pink
(same thimble - with and without flash
the colour is somewhere in between)



2002 - i
pink



2001 - ii
yellows pink
date doesn't show thru white clay



2002 - ii
his favourite colours of greens and pinks
(same thimble - with and without flash
the colours are somewhere in between)



2002 - iii
pale apricot yellow



2003
deep blue with band of yellows
(same thimble - with and without flash
the colours are somewhere in between)



2004 - i
three of the colours produced during the year
flash used



2004 - ii
lemon yellow grey



2004 - iii
pale pink pale ochres



2005 - i
pale green
date doesn't show thru white clay



2005 - ii
seven of the colours used – all so different
flash used



2005 - iii
strong blue to pale blues



2005 - iiiii
mauves thru pink



2006 - i
swirled colours of greens and orange
(same thimble – with and without flash
the colours are somewhere in between)



2006 - ii
swirled colours of mauve



2007 - i

swirled colours of blues and pale yellow
(same thimble – with and without flash
the colours are somewhere in between)



2007 - ii

blue ferns on white and pale blue
it's rare to find the ferns in this colour



2008

three palish shades from this year
flash used



2009

pale blue

no photo

2010



2011 - i

a mouse added on the apex allowed Irving to
experiment with the date placement
L: 2011 date is stamped into the mouse on the
apex – centre: standard
R: the date appears at rim



2011 - ii

a selection of ten of Irving's 2011 shades – the two mouse additions will have the date placed off the
apex (as shown above)
flash used



2011 - iii

variety of base colours all traditionally marked on the apex plus with the new mouse design just showing the date apex view



2012 - i

experimenting with different colours of fern
L: creeping onto apex C: blue R: standard



2012 - ii

variety of colours with a mouse – dates placed in different spots



2012 - iii

these ten colour varieties have the date on the apex – I love the flash of red on the upper R flash used



2012 - iiiii

pale pink
date doesn't show thru white clay



2012 - v

Irving experimented with mouse placements on these colour varieties
flash used



2013 - i

seven of the colours created – so striking especially the black with red band at upper R



2013 - ii
ochre

'Irving' lettered alongside **Roman** numerals stamped near the apex on mice thimble – first year to use
more than one mouse
defined indentations on apex
exhibition size



2013 - iii
 blended colours with blue apex
 lettered in **Roman** numerals stamped near the
 apex on mice thimble
 different 'Irving' stamp near apex rim
 indentations on apex
 exhibition size



2013 - iiiii
 cream
 lettered in **Roman** numerals stamped near the
 apex on mice thimble
 'Irving' stamp near apex rim
 indentations on apex
 exhibition size



2014 - i
 Irving added dragons to his mouse series for these
 six thimble colours



2014 - ii
 blues pink
 gloss finish



2014 - iii
 eight of the colours on his traditional thimbles with no embellishments

no photo

2015

no photo

2016



2017 - i

commemorating 50 years of Boscastle Pottery – '50' stamped into the centre of each thimble's apex with 'Boscastle Pottery' lettered around the apex rim – 'Irving' stamped into the apex edge
no fern designs on this group of four plain colours



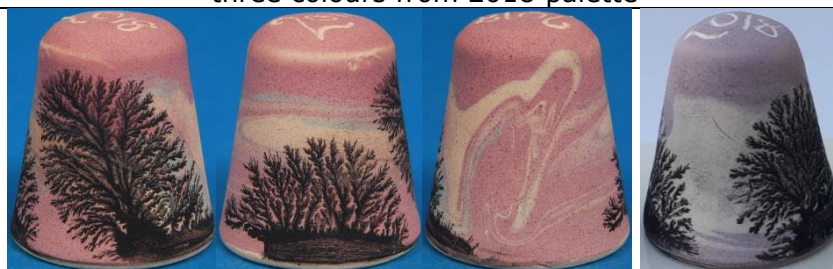
2017 - ii

thimble at R has a greenish fern in these traditional thimbles



2018 - i

three colours from 2018 palette



2018 - ii

pinks
gloss finish



2018 - iii

salmon
gloss finish



2018 – iii
 mocha salmon
 mouse affixed
 gloss finish



2018 – v
 greys salmon mocha
 mouse affixed around
 date lettered at apex
 gloss finish



2018 – vi
 beige
 date lettered on domed apex



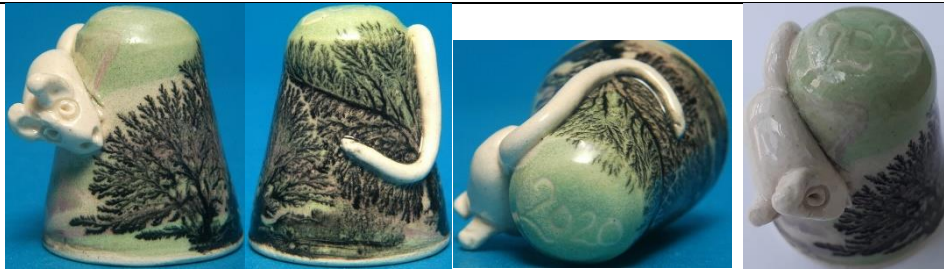
2018 – vii
 deep pink ochres
 mouse affixed around

no photo

2019



2020 – i
 blues pink
 lettered on top
 pink mouse affixed around
 gloss finish



2020 – ii
 pale green
 lettered on top
 mouse affixed around
 gloss finish



2020 – ii
 pale blue pink
indents on domed apex
 greenish dragon affixed around with three mice
 with more than one critter this is his exhibition sized thimble
 centre: date on side below mouse
 R: Irving signature



2020 – iii
 pinks
 mouse affixed around
 date lettered around rim
 gloss finish



2020 – iiii
 sand green
 fern dominates this side of thimble



undated
 unusual mix of colours – Irving mark - mark with tiny I and L inside R (for Irving's initials) at apex rim
 flat apex with distinctive indentations
 exhibition size with three mice affixed



range of five very large **exhibition** sizes with different dates
the exhibition sizes have multiple mice on them
all have indentations on the apex

Contributors

Yolanta Bogdziewicz | Pawel Brzyski | Lin & Bill Heggs | Jean Rose-Miss Mouse | Jean Taylor | Krystyna Zagajewska

This listing of Boscastle Pottery 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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