

# 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

## 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 'I'  
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



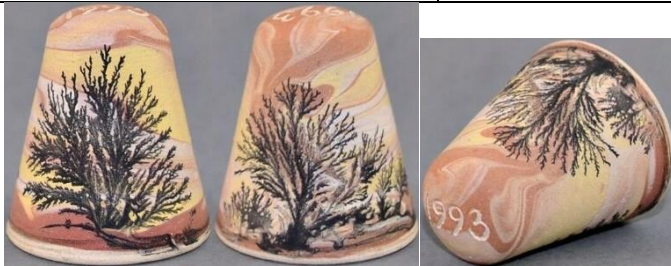
**1992 - i**

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 - iii**  
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



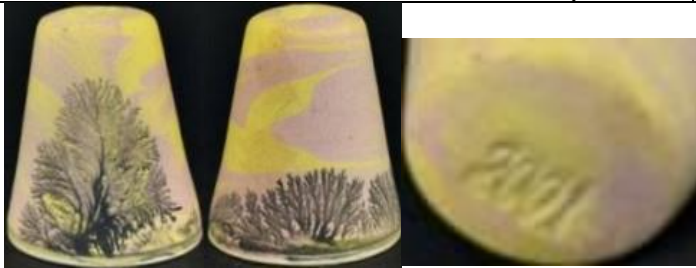
**2000 – iii**  
pale rainbow shades



**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

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## 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.

EMAIL [thimbleselect@bigpond.com](mailto:thimbleselect@bigpond.com) TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

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