

Irish Dresden thimbles

Irish Dresden began in Dresden, East Germany. This was in 1895 when Anton Mueller, of Volkstedt, began making ornate porcelain figurines with fine lace. The factory name was Muller Volkstedt, which gives us the Irish Dresden blue backstamp of "MV" with a crown (this is often confused with the initials looking like "MZ") on their figurines. Their figurines were decorated with cotton tulle or lace net, which was first soaked in a liquid porcelain. When the figurines were fired in the kiln, the porcelain stiffened the filigree of the tulle and the original tulle burnt away. Muller died in 1937.

The factory was destroyed by bombing during World War II, whilst owned by Anton's son Hermann. Hermann died during the war. The original moulds were discovered in the ruins of the factory basement by his descendants, who rebuilt the factory.

These were Oskar and Johanna Saar. She was the niece of Hermann Mueller who then emigrated from East Germany to Ireland for a new life. They settled in the village of Dromcollogher (Dromcolliher), in County Limerick in the south west of Ireland in 1962. They started manufacturing porcelain figures again and founded Irish Dresden. In 2009 the business was declared bankrupt, but it was re-opened again in June 2015 by Sabina Saar Best, the daughter of the original Irish Dresden Saar family.

Irish Dresden thimbles began to appear for sale in 1985 – featured in the mail order catalogues of *Scotland Direct/The Thimble Guild* in Scotland, Feldmann's *Die Vingerhut Post* of Germany and *Thimbles Only* of California, amongst others. Interestingly, in a recent search thru the catalogues of Thimble Society of London, they never offered an Irish Dresden thimble for sale in over nearly 30 years of their print catalogues.

The lace is formed over white porcelain thimbles, some entirely covering the thimble. The thimbles have the traditional Dresden lace details and are then handpainted, using oil-based ceramic paint - and 24k gold paint when required. There is then a final firing. The latest date I can find for sales of Irish Dresden thimbles by the TTG is 2009, tho these may have come from leftover stock. I have included sales dates where this information is available, but the thimbles were never dated.

Irish Dresden thimbles didn't feature in either the 25 Franklin Mint Greatest Porcelain Houses of the World set (1980) nor the 50 set of TCC's Hallmarked Thimbles of the World's Great Porcelain Houses (1985). Neither were there any Irish Dresden thimbles issued to the members of the Thimble Collectors Club.

Being handmade, this probably wouldn't have been possible for Irish Dresden- to produce the huge number of thimbles required by TCC or Franklin Mint? I can't find any details on how big the runs were of Irish Dresden thimbles. Does anyone know?

I don't know if this current factory is producing thimbles.

There are basic designs, but it is difficult to ascertain if they were named by Irish Dresden. I have tried to classify the thimbles by the main designs, in the various colours of each design: blue – green – pink - yellow. Black lace is quite rare on Irish Dresden thimbles.

As they were all handmade, there will be variations within each delicate lace design and as we know as collectors, there are handpainters and then there are handpainters.

Being lacy, these delicate thimbles will easily attract dust or grime, which will affect their colours. The lace can also fade over time.

Original prices ranged from as low as £7.75 to £34.95 or up to US\$24 each.

If you have these designs in other colours, or any design not recorded here please would you share a photo?



Registered ® Irish Dresden backstamps in blue – all are hand lettered

Occasionally the word "Ireland" is included

One example shows an additional small shamrock mark

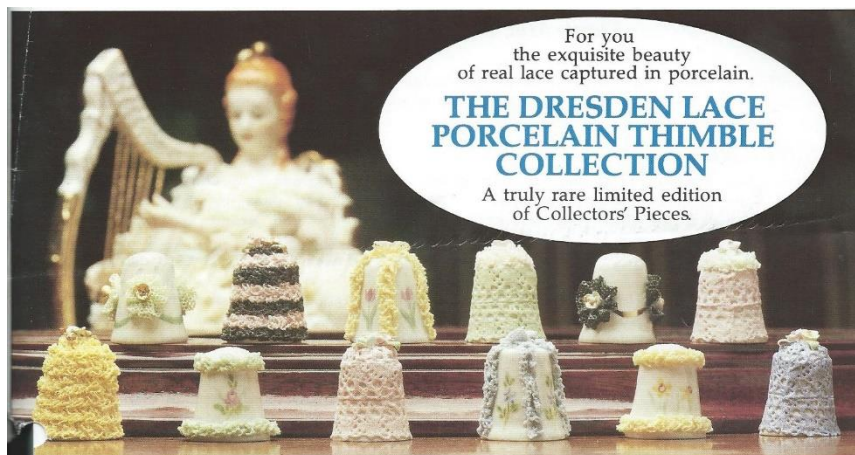
Irish Dresden thimbles have never borne the MV mark. This mark is only found on their figurines.



L-R: square Irish Dresden lettering all over cardboard thimble box - square cardboard thimble boxes with MV trademark – this faux leather thimble box's label would be from 1980s, also showing the MV trademark



A taste of what's to come as you read further



Original first advertisement for twelve Dresden thimbles (note the word Irish is not mentioned here)
From Scotland Direct in the 1980s



Irish Dresden factory – Dromcolliher



Sabina Saar Best and staff – 2015
photo: *Limerick Leader* 23 June 2015



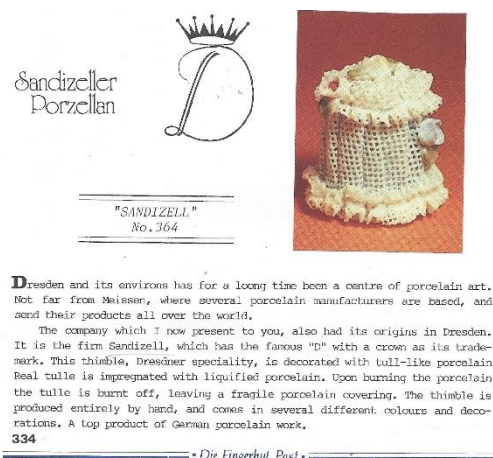
Dresden



Irish Dresden with backstamp for a similar figurine

For completeness these are examples of the figurines. The use of lace in both is amazing

Do not confuse Irish Dresden with those thimbles with a **Sandizell backstamp**, which were also made with porcelain lace. These were produced in the 1990s in Germany. If your lace thimble has a "D" with a crown atop, as the backstamp, the thimble was not made in Ireland. From the outside the thimbles look identical to Irish Dresden thimbles.



Sandizell thimbles

L: Die Vingerhoed Post - C: L. Samaripa – both R: ebay

All over lace

Some have tiny complementary-coloured porcelain flower buds atop – others are incorporated within the ruffled, layered pastel lace body. Some of the colours have been layered with white. Getting the lace perfectly aligned with the rim would be a challenge but the best artist would get this right. The lace has also been applied with different types of ruffles over the years – pleated or with folds.

Marketed by The Thimble Collectors' Guild in March 1985 as "The Countess Thimble" in blue, "Wedding Cake" in pink in November 1985, "Duchess" in January 1986 in green.



blue

photo 2nd R: Adrienne de Smet



green



green

Christmas robins with holly



pink

some interspersed with white rows
bottom: uneven application of lace layers



yellow (in all its shades) with mainly gold flowers atop
lower: for sale by TTG in 2003 as "Lemon Lace" which have variegated flowers

Ballerina

The lace tutu stands out from the thimble and the bodice and shoes are handpainted in a matching colour, with the right arm raised.

The gold painted rims are wavy.

Marketed by The Thimble Collectors' Guild in in July 1985 as "Dresden Dancer".



blue

C left: very 'bunchy' tutu
C right: turquoise blue with matching top
R: small posy above the lace skirt



green



pink

C right: for sale by TTG in 2003
R: very wide skirt



purple



yellow

Banded

Like the all over lace thimbles but more intricate to apply? Small porcelain buds affixed on the apex.



Bow

The lace ribboning around the rim culminates in a bow. Being hollow, lace bows are always fragile
Each has a different handpainted flower.



blue

rose posy

marketed by The Thimble Collectors' Guild in April 1985 as "Dresden Rose"



blue

commemorating Koningin (Queen) Elizabeth II's 60th birthday 1986
with Dutch text "60 jaar 21 April 1984" on verso

commissioned by Kay Sullivan for sale thru *De Vingerhoed*
limited edition of 250

R photo: De Vingerhoed



green

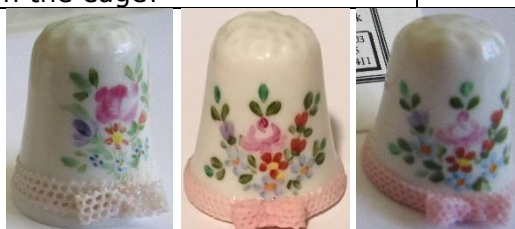
shamrocks

bows are not on the edge?



green

rose posy



pink

rose posy

R: for sale thru TTG in 2003
as "Summer Rose"

Double lace bands

Some of the bands of lace are quite fluffy. Handpainted



blue
"Christmas 1988"
gold painted indentations on apex



blue
rose
apex has gold painted indentations



green
"1987" for Christmas
apex has gold painted indentations



green
roses
apex has gold painted indentations
some lace thicker than others



yellow
daffodils
some have green on apex
daffodil bud on verso

Holey lace

The lace is flatter (a single layer over the body of the thimble) than the other all over lace patterns, which shows off the type of lace being applied. Some of the colours have added white collars or crowns. Getting the lace perfectly aligned with the rim would be a challenge but the best artist would get this right. Some examples have poor joining of the lace around the centre of the thimble. Handpainted flower buds applied on the apex. Some sellers on ebay describe this type of decoration as "wedding dress".

Marketed by The Thimble Collectors' Guild in in October 1985 as "Dresden Wedding Cake".

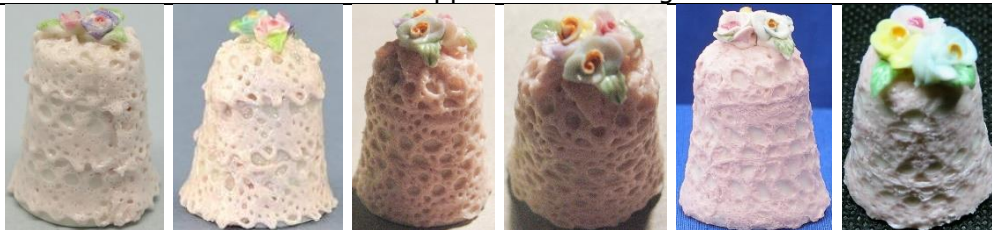


blue



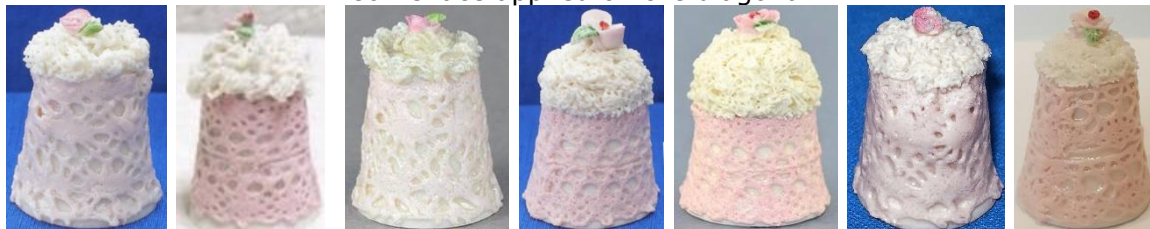
green

mostly white collars
some lace applied on the diagonal



pink all over

some lace applied on the diagonal



pink and white

white collars of differing depths – R – poor lace joint

Pleats

The lace is applied in vertical pleats with bands of white at the apex and rim. Small porcelain flower buds affixed on the apex and sides. This design is similar to the German Sandizell thimbles.

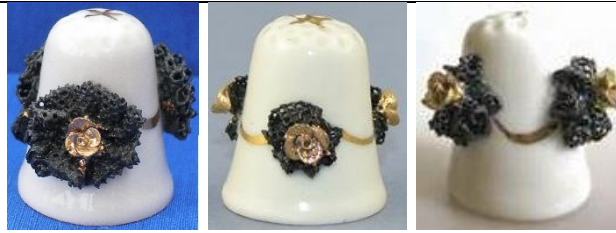


pink

Posies

Three posies are affixed around the thimbles in the middle, leaving the apex bare. Contrasting small flowers are added into the rosettes of lace.

Marketed by The Thimble Collectors' Guild in in April 1985 as "Wedding Bouquet".



black
different extra additions



blue
gold flowers at centre of flowers



green
some with green on apex



pink
no gilt lines joining the bouquets
this has been described as wedding bouquet – marketed as such by the TTG

Single lace band

Handpainted all round.

Marketed by The Thimble Collectors' Guild in in June 1985 as "Lace Frill".



pink
pink roses all round – rich ruffles

Swags

The lace is applied in swags or scallops all round at the middle, leaving the apex bare.



green
with handpainted shamrocks - different extra additions

Vertical ribboning in panels

The lace ribboning drapes down the thimble in four ribbons and culminates in a bow on the apex. Some of the bows are less than perfect – and some of the lace is quite thick? Lace bows are fragile too as they are hollow. Getting the lace perfectly aligned with the rim would be a challenge but the best artist would get this right. Each has a different handpainted floral accompaniment.



blue
forget-me-nots
some have gold painted lines joining the flowers to the bow
some of the flower centres are painted pink
2nd 3rd from L: bows aren't really there as bows
two on R: for sale thru TTG in 2004 & 2009



green
shamrocks



green
Christmas '1986' with holly
for sale thru TTG again in 2003



green
pink roses
C: '1986'

L: roses Christmas with date '1985' issued by The Thimble Collectors Guild in Scotland – marketed as "Christmas Cosy"



pink
pink roses
R: extra embellishment below the roses



yellow
pink tulips
both R: for sale thru TTG in 2003-2004

Other lace designs



green
gilt Claddagh symbol nestling amongst lace

Non-lace designs

Some of the thimbles have gold rims – and no lace. Most of the other Irish Dresden thimbles don't have gold rims.



holly



similar handpainting to that with a lace bow



blue porcelain flowers affixed around rim



porcelain flowers
handpainted pink bow



porcelain flowers affixed with gold rim

References

Paddy Puntis *Irish Dresden thimbles* TCI Bulletin summer 2013

Contributors

Linda Bennett | Joanna Blackie-Sew Many Bits | Ann Cooke | Adrienne de Smet | Micky Garvey | Mary Agnes Mosher
Wanda Ralston | Linda Samaripa | Ana Maria Werner & Hellmuth Leal

This listing of Irish Dresden 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 TO SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE

© **Sue Gowan**
May 2017