

Porcelain Stamp Boxes (excluding Goss China boxes)

TYPES OF PORCELAIN: Hard Paste, Soft Paste, and Bone China

True porcelain (or hard-paste porcelain): A high-fired ceramic ware that exhibits translucent properties and is composed of white clay (Kaolin) and a type of feldspathic rock (Petunse). Kaolin is refractory and binds a piece together while in the kiln and Petunse fuses into a natural kind of glass that gives it its smoothness and brilliance. True or hard paste porcelain is usually fired at 1450°C. This is the same type of porcelain invented at Meissen and was the first close re-creation to porcelain coming from China at the time.

Artificial porcelain (or soft-paste porcelain): Termed 'soft' because of its ability to be cut with a file (hard paste porcelain cannot), this type of porcelain is actually also composed of the same materials as hard paste, but is fired at a softer temperature in the kiln, at around 1200°C. Because of this lower kiln temperature, soft paste porcelain tends to be more granular and porous since the component materials do not vitrify (fuse together) as is the case of hard paste porcelain. Additionally, the surface is somewhat less white or brilliant and has an almost silky or marble-like feel to the touch. Historically, soft paste porcelain was first made in Italy in the late 16thC (Medici Porcelain), but its real revival was in mid-17thC France. In the UK, the first factory to make soft paste porcelain was Chelsea (ca 1743).

Bone China: This is the same as hard paste porcelain (kaolin + Petunse), but with added bone-ash (ashes from burned animal bones, mostly cattle). Bone ash contains lime and phosphoric acid, which helps in fusing all of the ingredients and allows for a more stable final product, even at the lower temperatures required for soft paste porcelain. Bone china was first introduced at the Bow factory in England in 1750 and was quickly imitated by Chelsea (1755) and Lowestoft and Derby (ca 1770). It is rarely produced in other countries of Europe or the US and is also known as English China.

MARKS ON PORCELAIN

Most antique ceramics bear a maker's mark or back stamp which usually denotes the manufacturer and occasionally includes the artist's initials, signature or logo. The vast majority of marks on porcelain are stamped in ink whereas some are impressed or incised. Additionally most marks are underglaze. Over glaze marks tend to be those of distributors, exporters or retail chains. There are some very useful websites which list copies of marks and their manufacturers which helps to trace most manufacturers of the boxes which have a mark (see references at end of article).

Dating porcelain boxes is much more difficult. The Country of Origin was required to be shown next to the porcelain mark on all imports to the USA after 1891 (The Act of Congress (Tariff Act)). This led to most European and Japanese wares bearing the Country of Origin. In addition, porcelain from Japan marked "Nippon" (the official name of the country Japan) is usually made before 1921 as after that date the USA required this to be changed to "Japan". In addition some manufacturers' marks changed shape, colour or design over time allowing some further dating to be done.

MANUFACTURERS

The most numerous boxes in most collections are from **Limoges**. Many people think that Limoges is the name of a company but this is not the case. Any porcelain piece made within the city of Limoges in France and of the kaolin clay found there can be marked "Limoges". The manufacture of Limoges boxes started in the 18th century and continued strong until the late 19th century. The tiny detailed boxes were used for everything from pills, snuff, beauty patches, and even secret notes. When they were first made there were no other types of containers being used, so when you wanted to carry something around -- you needed a little box.

Common marks on Limoges boxes include: "Peint Main" which means completely hand painted, no transfers or decorative sticker used. "Decor Main": means transfers were used - but placed there by hand. The mark of the factory in Limoges that casts and fires the porcelain to make the white

porcelain blank or whiteware is under the glaze or impressed into the porcelain. The maker's mark is often just *Limoges France* in various scripts and colours. A decorator's mark will be over the glaze. Decorating companies often have a stamped or printed mark, but some hand write marks. Individual artists and small studios normally hand write marks. Porcelain painting was a very popular hobby around 1900, and a lot of porcelain was decorated and signed by hobbyists.



Some examples of Limoges marks

Limoges stamp boxes which have metal clasps and hinges generally have two or three compartments for stamps. The compartments may have decorated slopes inside, and the inside of the lid may also be decorated. Several of the stamp boxes have a quill feather or envelope decoration on the clasp.

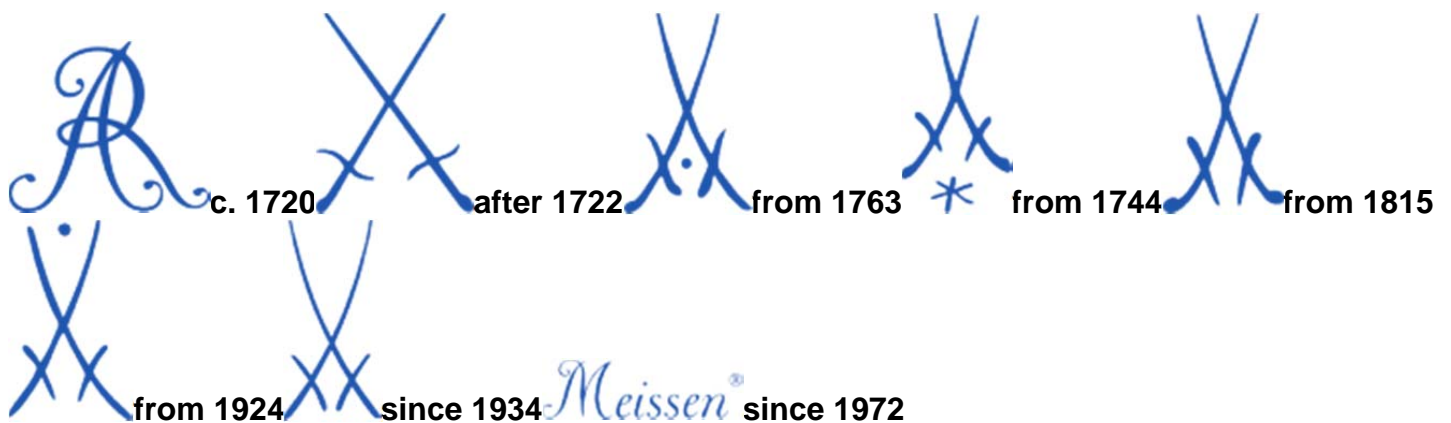


Another design is the “butter dish” type which is all porcelain – a cover which lifts off to show three compartments for stamps.



Meissen porcelain was the first European hard paste porcelain that was developed and production at Meissen near Dresden started in 1710. This is one of the most famous porcelain manufacturers still in production today. Meissen was one of the first factories to develop an underglazed mark in cobalt blue which was forgery proof. The cross swords mark, with dots or asterisks added from time to time, remained largely unaltered until modern Meissen from 1972.

The “crossed swords” are still painted on by hand today.





This Meissen stamp box with hand painted romantic scene and gilded interior dates from around the mid 19th century.

Dresden was a centre for artists, painters, sculptors and poets in the 19th century. Meissen porcelain was produced 15 miles away and most Meissen china was sold there. The work of Dresden decorators often rivalled that produced in Meissen and in 1883 four prominent ceramic decorators registered a blue crown Dresden mark. Over 40 shops sprung up and flourished up until 1945. The blue crown mark, Dresden, a brown rose, or a Bavarian coat of arms can all be found on Dresden china. Some examples of Dresden marks are below.



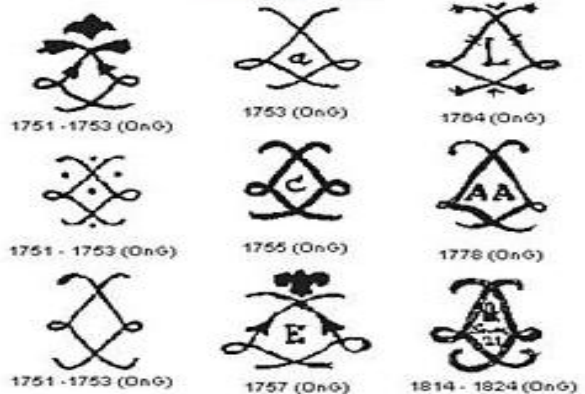


An ornate painted and gilded Dresden box

Sèvres was originally founded in 1738 at Chateau de Vincennes, France by local craftsmen from a nearby porcelain factory in Chantilly. The factory moved to Sèvres in 1756 where it is still in operation. From the beginning Sèvres created finely-detailed, gilded and handpainted decorative arts. In the early days the lower temperatures needed to produce soft paste porcelain (frit porcelain) allowed a rich palette of colours to be applied for decoration. Latterly, hard paste porcelain, new techniques and new enamels came in. The marks on Sèvres are a "Double Louis" or Crossed "L" underglaze in blue, containing a date letter and the word Sèvres.



Sèvres Crossed "L"'s Mark - "Double-Louis"



Examples of Sèvres marks and a 3 compartment Stamp box

French faience or majolica ware is a type of earthenware of a high quality. Originally popular in the 17th and 18th centuries it fell out of fashion until a resurgence of popularity in the mid 19th century. Perhaps the best-known faïencerie (as these potteries were called) is Quimper whose depictions of Breton figures on their wares have remained popular. This example is attributed to Fourmaintraux Frères Faïencerie, end 19thC.



Other examples of European porcelain manufacturers' stamp boxes:

Elfinware from Germany which was exported to America post WWII and sold in dime stores and gift shops many of the pieces were decorated with raised flowers.



Erdmann Schlegelmilch, Germany. One of the marks used by this manufacturer is often referred to as the 'beehive' mark, which in reality represents a banded shield used first by the 'k.k. Ärarial-Manufactur Wien' (Royal Porcelain Manufactory) in Vienna (Austria). 'Beehive' marks are extremely ambiguous and problematic because over the years many European porcelain manufacturers 'borrowed' it or invented their own variation, thus making identification very difficult. In case of the beehive used by *Erdmann Schlegelmilch* though it is easily identifiable as it included a dot. See Left below. Later mark to the right.



Used from 1891



Used from 1902

Denmark - Bing & Grondhal, founded in 1853 and still in operation today after merging with the Royal Porcelain Factory in 1987. They now trade as Royal Copenhagen. The Bing & Grondhal trademark contains three towers which are taken from the City coat of arms of Copenhagen. Marks are easy to date (see their website). <http://www.jamiri.dk/Bing-Grondahl-mark.htm>

This stampbox has an elegant mistletoe decoration on the lid.



1915-1947

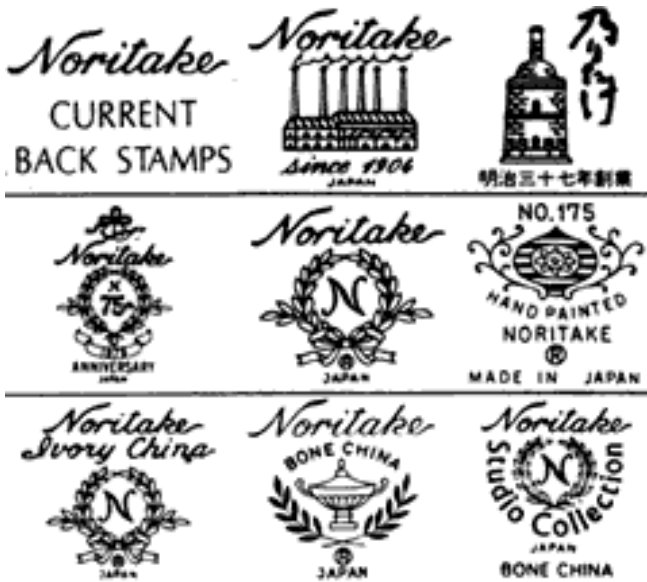
B&G Kjøbenhavn Danmark (Green) B&G (Blue); The J in Kjøbenhavn is flush with the other letters

Rosenthal porcelain. The first Rosenthal company - a porcelain decorating business - was set up by Philipp Rosenthal near Selb, Bavaria in 1879. In 1890 the factory moved to Selb and a year later a factory was established for the manufacture of white porcelain. Art pottery departments were established in 1910 and in 1920. Because Philipp Rosenthal was a Jew, he was forced by the Nazis in 1934 to leave the company, but the company continued to expand before, during and after World War II. By the time of the centenary celebrations in 1979 Rosenthal employed around eight-and-a-half thousand people.



Japanese boxes, made for the American market

Noritake (Morimura Brothers) Japan. 'Noritake' as well as 'Nippon' are brands and products produced or sold by the Morimura Company of Japan. In 1876 Baron *Ichizaemon Morimura IV* formed a trading company called *Morimura Kumi* (Morimura Brothers) with offices in Tokyo, and a retail and wholesale office in New York for the export of traditional Japanese products such as chinaware, curios, paper lanterns and other gift items. Beside running a china decorating facility of their own during 1878 to 1884, the Morimura brothers also bought and distributed porcelain blanks to be decorated by independent porcelain decorators in nearby regions. The quality of the Early Noritake wares varied with the skill of the individual decorators. In 1904 *Nippon Toki Kaisha Ltd* was formed. The factory was located in the small village of Noritake near Nagoya, the centre of Japan's ceramic production, on the main island of Honshu. The first Japanese registry for a Noritake back stamp is reported as 1908 for use in Japan. From 1911 goods started entering the USA marked Nippon with a maker's mark of an "M in a wreath". This mark was used between c 1914 until 1940. As mentioned earlier, from 1921 the USA law required country of origin to be Japan or "made in Japan". The box in the photo is prior to 1921 as it is marked "Nippon".



Acra China, Japan. We could find no information on this maker of dragon-ware porcelain marked in rust red with a corn wreath enclosing the words ACRA China, Japan. This appears on decorative tea sets, china boxes and wares such as ash trays made for export to the USA after 1921. Dragon-ware is used to describe porcelain with a raised decoration that depicts an oriental dragon or serpent made using a form of moriage pottery. The term moriage refers to raised slip decorations applied to a piece of porcelain or pottery. Slip is the special thick liquid clay from which porcelain and pottery is made which gives it a three-dimensional appearance which you can see on the lid of this stamp box.



American Belleek porcelain was made from the 1880s to the 1930s in Trenton, New Jersey. During this time the area around Trenton was the only major porcelain industry in America. By 1920 some 48 potteries operated in the area with their workforce said to buy as many as 7000 cheese cakes in their lunch hour on a daily basis. Decline was caused by a number of factors - fierce competition from imports, the reluctance to modernise, and consumers turning to modern materials such as plastic. Finally a successful lawsuit by the Irish company prevented the name "Belleek" being used. The American Belleek mark is a painter's palette plus initials and the word Belleek.



"Palette mark" from 1889 - 1906

British made stamp boxes in porcelain (non Goss)

Wedgwood did not make a stamp box as such though one of their small rectangular boxes is often sold as a trinket/stamp box. Similarly it seems Grafton did not make a specific stamp box either but are known to have produced a five sided lidded box which could well have been used as a stamp box.

One below made by **Hammersley and Company**, china manufacturer at Longton, Stoke-on-Trent. They operated from 1862 until 1970 when they were bought by Carborundum Ltd (who owned Copeland (Spode)) merging with Royal Worcester in 1976 to become Royal Worcester Spode Ltd.



This article describes some makers and their marks and is illustrated with some of the stamp boxes we have.

References

Most of the major manufacturers have websites giving some history of production and marks to help identify their wares.

Other useful websites:

www.porcelainmarksandmore.com

www.gotheborg.com

www.collectorscircle.com

www.marks4antiques.com