

# A history and price guide to miniature shoes

by Zita Thornton

Modern, ornamental shoes made from porcelain or resin, have become a collectable favourite in the last few years. However, a fascination with miniature shoes goes back thousands of years. Miniature sandals have been found in Egyptian tombs and fashioned from ancient Persian pottery.

When shoemaking became a highly skilled, decorative craft in the seventeenth century, shoe makers expressed their skill in miniature too. Until the nineteenth century, miniature shoes, as exquisite in their detail as their full sized counterparts, became tokens of prosperity and love and symbolised a desire to share worldly goods, hence the tradition of hanging boots on the back of a newly wed's car.

The emergence of porcelain brought the fashion to aristocratic circles when elegant but expensive porcelain or enamel versions were exchanged. In the nineteenth century the love of novelty encouraged the manufacture of miniature shoes in a wider variety of materials such as leather, wood and brass and brought the custom within the reach of sentimental Victorians of all classes. The less sentimental looked for a function in their ornamental shoes and in this they were continuing a tradition that had its roots in ancient times. The Romans had oil lamps shaped as a foot in a sandal, and perfume containers as hob nailed boots. An ancient ancestor of the stirrup cup was a drinking vessel called a rhyton, which was sometimes made in a boot shape. Victorian gentlemen had shoes fashioned as gin flasks, umbrella handles, paper knives and ink wells, as well as all the paraphernalia associated with smoking and snuff taking such as snuff boxes, match holders, tobacco jars, ashtrays and pipe stops.

Women had jewellery shaped as shoes, a fashion which continued into the twentieth century with comb handles, bonbonnières and needlework accessories such as pin cushions and thimble holders. Miniature shoes were used around the house too for cruet sets, vases, boot warmers and to mould ice creations for table centres.

When the growth of railways from 1840 onwards allowed travel to resorts in Britain and beyond, souvenirs, often made as miniature shoes, were collected. We find these from North America, Holland, and Germany. In the twentieth century, shoes have been used as advertising symbols, for instance by Heineken beer, a throwback to their link with prosperity perhaps. One American firm found a novel use for miniature shoes in the 1950s and 60s. They were made in plastic and presented in a miniature shoe box as a gift token which could be redeemed for the real article in participating shops.

A collection of original miniature shoes would be as varied in origin as in design. Over the centuries they have been made in countries from the east, such as China and Japan, from Europe where Germany and Holland were particularly large producers and from North America where today there are many collectors. They have been produced in an equally wide variety of materials too and examples can be found in glass, china, wood and metal such as pewter and silver. The Central Museum in Northampton, in Guildhall Road, has a collection of miniature shoes on display as part of their boot and shoe collection. It illustrates the whole breadth of ornamental shoes and includes ashtrays from India and Turkey, good luck charms in blue and white faience, snuff boxes made from wood including yew, ice moulds, inkstands and even shoes made from unlikely materials including coal and bread.

Almost every glass company since the early 1800s produced glass shoes. They have been made in every type of glass and not just in clear glass but in every shade of green, including the yellow/green of nineteenth century vaseline glass, so called because of the pharmaceu-



*Christies Oak, Country Furniture, Folk Art and Works of Art 1st November 2000. Sale results from the left: 19thC Dutch carved shoe snuff box next to carved wooden knitting sheaf with miniature clog inset in handle £235. 19thC teeen shoe snuff box carved with foliage £352. NB shoe on lower level with applied metal scrolls was withdrawn from sale. Pair of pine painted snuff shoes unsold.*



*1900 green glass shoe edged in gold (worn) \$62.50. (£44.64) Brass Armadillo.*



*Japanese porcelain shoes \$60. (£42.85) A Moment in Time.*



*Unusual realistic miniature shoe made in plastic to be presented as a gift voucher and redeemed for the real item in a shop 1950s-60s \$85. (£60.71) Access Antiques*



*1945 high heeled shoe brooch and matching earrings in gold, sold at Sotheby's New York for \$750. (£535)*



*Christies Oak, Country Furniture, Folk Art and Works of Art 1st November 2000. A mixed collection of teeen including a mahogany shoe snuff with pique decoration 3.5in long and a carved ebony boot 5.5in long. £352.*



*Elfinware shoe covered in tiny applied flowers \$150. (£107) Unlimited Ltd.*

tical ointment it resembled, and in dark jewel shades of amber, dark blue, the red of Victorian cranberry glass and even in black. There are examples in the marble colours of slag glass where white mixes with green or amethyst. From the 1820s, the Americans gave us press moulded glass and soon glass shoes were within the reach of everyone in England, made by firms such as Sowerby, Davidson and Greener. Collectable American glass shoes made by Gillinder and Fenton in the 1930s – 1950s are heavily decorated with diamond and geometric cuts or stylised flowers. Fenton glass shoes have the head and shoulders of a cat peeping over the top.

One of the most popular examples of china shoes are the blue and white faience Dutch clogs from Delft which were bought as souvenirs. The introduction of transfer printing in the mid 1800s allowed photographs to be added to china shoes and increased their popularity for this purpose. Many of these were made in Germany and exported to other parts of Europe. Some examples were faintly lustred in pink. Souvenir shoes made by W.H. Goss are popular with collectors today and include the coat of arms of the town where they were bought. Goss stopped production in 1929 but other companies such as Arcadian and Shelley continued into the thirties.

Delft were not the only company to make clogs. The French firm of Quimper and the Dutch Gouda pottery made them too, both characterised by their brightly coloured decoration. Ornamental shoes are generally highly decorated. Porcelain has been hand painted with floral sprigs with further applied flowers. The American Elfinware shoes, which originated from Germany in the 1920s to 40s are thickly encrusted with tiny flowers and moss which almost resembles piped icing. Victorian majolica has been given a sand glaze, Chinese shoe bonbonnières have turned up toes with gilded and moulded borders as well as painted floral decorations. Add to this list shoes from our own Wilkinson pottery and earthenware examples from the Italian company Nove and you can see that a collection of miniature shoes would be as varied in origin as it is in design. Once you start looking you will be amazed at the sheer variety around.

Some of these examples that I have included are from auction sales large and small in the last few months. However, miniature shoes are often part of a mixed lot of small pewter or treen articles or several different needlework accessories, so you may find yourself with items that you don't particularly want. One of the best sources of ornamental shoes I have found has been the small local antique fair, where you can buy individual pieces at the most reasonable prices. Another good source is the Internet, which gives access to American suppliers who offer an enormous range of styles with many examples for less than £20. Although their prices are listed in dollars, their sites allow secure payment by credit card but remember that although antiques are free of import duty you may have to pay VAT on goods over £18. However, for hard to find American examples this would be worth doing. [www.tias.com](http://www.tias.com) is a portal to dealers, many of whom offer miniature shoes. Information on calculating import taxes can be found on [www.hmc.gov.co.uk](http://www.hmc.gov.co.uk)

#### Recent prices for miniature shoes

Silver plated pincushion with other needlework accessories £132, Phillips.

Chinese silver shoe with another item £190, Bonhams.

Nineteenth century wooden snuff boxes in mixed lots with other treen items sold for £250-£350, Christies.

Nove faience shoe painted with sprays of flowers from late nineteenth century estimated £80-£120, Dreweatt Neate.

Pin cushion in cast metal estimate £20-£30, Taylors.

Cut glass lady's shoe £10-£15, Eastbourne Auction House.

American Fenton glass shoes with cat, Gillinder glass shoes. \$20-\$35 each (£14-£25) from American suppliers.

Elfinware shoe from US dealer \$150. (£107)

Arcadian military boot £35, Goss and Crested China Club.

Lancashire clog, souvenir of British Empire Exhibition 1924 £24.50, Goss and Crested China Club.



Victorian pewter pin cushion, sold with other pewter items at Sotheby's New York \$500. (£357)



Pocket knife resembling a shoe engraved A W Wadsworth and Son Germany \$41.50. (£29.64)



Majolica shoe with sand glaze from 1900 \$35. (£25) A Moment in Time.



Gillinder glass shoe \$25. (£17.85) Antiques, Collectibles and Stuff.



Hand painted Delft Dutch souvenir shoe. A Moment in Time.



Gouda pottery clog from Holland \$89. (£63.57) Brass Armadillo.



Fenton glass shoe, cat peeping out of the top 1930-50 \$35. (£25) Hope's Time and Again.



Hand painted porcelain shoe with applied flowers. \$49.95. (£35.67) Lewis & Clark Antiques.



Wilkinson clog with chintz band from 1930s \$49.95. (£35.67) A Moment in Time.



Shoe used to advertise Heineken beer \$23. (£16.42) Rasperrys.



Victorian gold, engraved stick pin which was estimated to sell for between \$85-100 (£60-70) at Sotheby's New York, more than doubled its estimated price.