

Porcelain half dolls and the latest market prices

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9 Half Dolls, 3 3/4" to 5 1/2" high, 5 marked foreign, 2 "Chocolate Girls", lady with posy of flowers (restoration to hands). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £650. ABP: £764.



Two porcelain half dolls both approx 5" high, first carrying a tray with breakfast items (one of the chocolate girls), second doll with jointed arms by Bruno Schmidt impressed number 3593, Germany pre-1918. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £375. ABP: £441.



Half doll lamp shade, shade made from sea shells, half doll dressed in period head dress with bird on her wrist. By Kistler. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £350. ABP: £411.



2 half dolls, porcelain, hand painted, possibly French circa 1920s/30s height 3 1/2" & 3" number indistinct to back of one. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £270. ABP: £317.

Despite the fact that they are hard to identify and value, half dolls made from the crudest ceramic to the finest porcelain, are a popular collecting area. Made in their thousands during the early twentieth century as an amusing, decorative frivolity, they are widely available from antique fairs, internet auctions and specialist doll retailers.

The first porcelain dolls that appeared in Britain had padded skirts supported by a wire frame and were used to keep Edwardian teapots warm. They were referred to by manufacturers, as 'tea busts' or 'tea warmers'. Soon after, they moved into the bedroom and found a place on the dressing table decorating all kinds of accessories including powder puffs, pin cushions and brushes to sweep up loose powder spills. Some, especially later models, have the addition of a pair of kicking legs. Occasionally a whole figure would be made to recline across the top of a lingerie or nightdress case. The finest porcelain half dolls were those made by the German company Dressel and Kister, near Dresden, in an area renowned for its porcelain manufacture.

The dolls, first produced in 1903, are complex and finely painted. They have arms made from separate moulds, posed away from the body. Their fingers are often all separate. Individual strands of hair have been painted onto their hairstyles and their eyebrows and their eyes are lined.

Unlike so many half dolls which are unmarked, Dressel dolls show the manufacturers trademark of a blue reverse question mark, sometimes with the addition of sun rays or dots around the top and may also include the painter's initial. Most Dressel and Kister dolls were unclothed, leaving it to the retailer to dress. They have been found in use on lampshades, jewellery boxes, powder puffs and pincushions. Dressel dolls moulded with garments are much rarer. The most common Dressel doll has grey hair, in the style of the late eighteenth century, embellished with tiny roses or a wreath of grapes and leaves. She may be holding a rose or a bunch of grapes.

Half doll manufacturers took their inspiration from portraits and paintings. A popular subject was the eighteenth century dancer Marie Anne de Cupis, portrayed in a painting by Lancret 'La Camargo Dancing'. The friend and confidante of Marie Antoinette, Princess Lamballe, was another popular subject for half dolls.

From the 1920s a bob hair cut was introduced with contemporary clothing and children started to be used as models. Painted in brighter colours than the previously used pastels, they can be found wearing Dutch bonnets and often a whimsical expression.

Another German company, Goebel, famous today for its production of 'Hummel' figurines, made half dolls from 1917 until the mid 1930s. Despite incomplete records we know that they made a huge variety of dressed and undressed dolls. There were at least forty-eight different figures in five sizes, many used for tea cosies. Sometimes they have an incised trademark of an intertwined G and W, but often the paper label, which was more commonly used for identification, has been lost with time.

Some of their dolls had no hair, waiting for a wig to be glued on to the head. There were bisque and glazed examples and one popular technique was to paint a set of lower eyelashes. Examples have been found with arms jointed at the shoulder with elastic.

Unlike Dressel and Kister, most Goebel dolls do not have separated fingers, only the thumb is separate. The range included a series of dolls in national folk costume produced in 1923 and a historic series marked with the names of the characters they portrayed, and child half dolls include those wearing a Dutch hat in shades of blue, reminiscent of Delft pottery. During the 1920s the company made a distinctive set of 'egg head' flapper dolls with painted instead of moulded features.

In the 1950s, relatively late for the production of half dolls, Goebel introduced a new mark, of a V with a bee inside it. These have been found used as napkin holders.

There were other German companies that produced porcelain half dolls. They included Schneider, using an entwined G H mark, and its rival Heubach. Half dolls produced in Japan and by the American Fulper Pottery satisfied demand at this time.

There have always been reproductions produced, quite legitimately, of designs from popular manufacturers. Herend was a Hungarian porcelain factory that was known to do this. Porcelain artist Elaine Kewin currently reproduces Heubach and other half dolls. These are clearly marked with no intent to deceive.

Price Guide

The complexity of the mould, the quality of the painting and the detail of clothing affect the value of half dolls. Half dolls with arms close to the body made from two-piece moulds are the least costly. More valuable are dolls with hands on hips or hair, showing some separation between arms and torso. The most valuable are those with outstretched arms requiring great skill and many moulds to assemble the fragile pieces.

Half dolls with delicate and precisely painted features are worth more than crudely painted examples. Hats with feathers, ruffles on dresses, ornate hairdos and interesting accessories such as small animals, flowers or flower baskets add to the value.

Rare half dolls are highly desirable. Perhaps the most sought after is 'La Belle Chocolatière', by Goebel which portrays a Viennese waitress in seventeenth century costume holding a tray with a chocolate pot, cups and saucers, after a painting by Swiss artist Liotard, used to advertise Walter Baker's chocolates. Expect to pay £30 to £60 for a fine but simply moulded porcelain half doll. More complex dolls, larger sizes, unusual or very attractive examples can reach £150 or more.

Half-Dolls Price Guide by Sally Van Luven and Susan Graham is available from Hobby House Press, www.hobbyhouse.com for \$22.95. ISBN 0-87588-670-1.



6 Half Dolls, lady with various items, numbers to include 4409, 6349, 9248 (mandolin AF), heights range from 5" to 3". Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £250. ABP: £294.



Collection of 3 pin dolls. Heads. Including one for safety pins Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £100. ABP: £117.



3 porcelain lamp shade half dolls, approx 4" high Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £80. ABP: £94.



Three lamp shade half dolls, two in porcelain, one in composition, 4", 5", 6". Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £55. ABP: £64.



4 1/2" high half doll with jointed arms, impressed to back 3613 Made in Germany. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £35. ABP: £41.



Collection of eight half dolls all measuring 4" to 5" high, all numbered (top row left to right, 460, indistinct, 12757, 698, 13945, 13453, second row l to r, 12775, indistinct, impressed 'Germany 16990', 21639) (8) Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £210. ABP: £247.



Collection of Half Dolls varying in height from 6 1/2" to 4 1/4", numbers to include 10807, 15522, 14469 (AF), Germany, 13373, 12031, 16747, 13839, 13370 (AF), 13373 (AF) (8 items). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £95. ABP: £111.



9 Half Dolls, three with legs, varying in height from 2 1/2" to 3 1/4", all dressed in their original clothing, one with hand sewn skirt, various dates & makers (9) Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £70. ABP: £82.



3 porcelain Half Dolls 4 1/2" to 3 1/4" high, 2 with articulated arms, numbers to include 3887 Germany, 3613 Made in Germany. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £55. ABP: £64.



Collection of three half dolls, 2 1/2" and 3 1/2" high, no visible mark. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £35. ABP: £41.



Collection of 7 Full Model Half Dolls to include boy playing concertina, seated child, nude lady, a dog milk cover with beads, bird etc. number to include 4951, others unmarked or no visible numbers (8 items). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £175. ABP: £205.



Three half dolls with legs, yellow dressed doll number 2348, standing doll marked 12727, impressed Shamrock (AF). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £90. ABP: £105.



1930's Powder Puff Half Doll & Bowl in the form of a car, orange slip, yellow wheels & driver complete with original swans down puff by Goebel. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £60. ABP: £70.



Full Model Pin Doll Powder Puff, Half Doll Powder Puff, Head Powder Puff, Circa 1920s (3). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £50. ABP: £58.



Pair of Dresser Dolls by Cauldon (small rim chip to inside of male bowl). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £30. ABP: £35.



Collection of 9 Half Dolls ranging in height from 6" to 3 1/4", numbers to include 14946, 7273, 12762, 7974, 19739, 22008/31, 10843 (9 items, 1 AF). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £115. ABP: £135.



Collection of six half dolls, 5 1/2" to 3 3/4" high, fully clothed, no visible numbers. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £85. ABP: £99.



Collection of 8 Half Dolls, 3 with legs, various dates & manufacturers, all dressed, no visible numbers (8 items). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £60. ABP: £70.



2 Goebel Half Dolls, 4 1/2" & 3 1/2", 4 1/2" (base AF), both marked with crown over W G (2 items). Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £50. ABP: £58.



Porcelain half doll tea cosy 6" high, broad brimmed hat & orange bodice, cosy cover distressed, ceramic half doll tea cosy, jointed arms, cloche hat, approx 5", doll with parasol & bag. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £40. ABP: £47.

3 Pin Half Dolls, various dates & makers, no visible numbers, one with legs. Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jan 06. HP: £25. ABP: £29.