

The Crowned Heads of Germany

By Pauline Fitzsimmons and Joan Turco

Photographs by Fitzsimmons and Turco

Who are the Crowned Heads of Germany? Those fascinating porcelain perfume bottles wearing crown stoppers on their heads, of course! Produced in Germany from before the turn of the 20th Century to about 1939, these wonderful whimsies were the stars of a presentation that featured over 200 unique crown top perfume bottles in 127 slides.

The presentation began with a definition of terms relating to the four parts of a metal crown stopper - the crown, plate, tube or post, and cork sleeve. Different sizes and shapes of crowns were shown, including the unique barrel-shaped stopper from the Dutch perfumer, J.C. Boldoot.

After bottles were filled with perfume, they were sealed with a viscose plastic over the cork or crown. This cellulose product was similar to modern day shrink-wrap.

The production of porcelain was described as a lengthy process involving many artisans. The jobs of the sculptor, mold maker, caster, fettler, kiln loader, glazer and painter were briefly described with examples of good and poor workmanship. The first firing of a piece produced a bisque (matte) finish. A vitreous (glassy) finish was produced by dipping the piece into a glazing vat and firing it a second time after which it was painted and fired a third time. Gold or silver trim

was applied last and then it was fired again - the fourth, and final, firing. When noses, hands and other details of the design were lost, the molds were reworked or replaced, which resulted in only 20 to 100 copies of an item being made from a single mold.

There are three methods of identifying manufacturers of crown tops - an incised trademark, finding the bottle pictured in an old factory catalog or matching a model number to the series of model numbers attributed to a certain factory. The first two - an incised trademark *and* catalog identification - are the most reliable. The third method - matching model numbers - is not always accurate because there was some overlapping of model numbers by different factories.

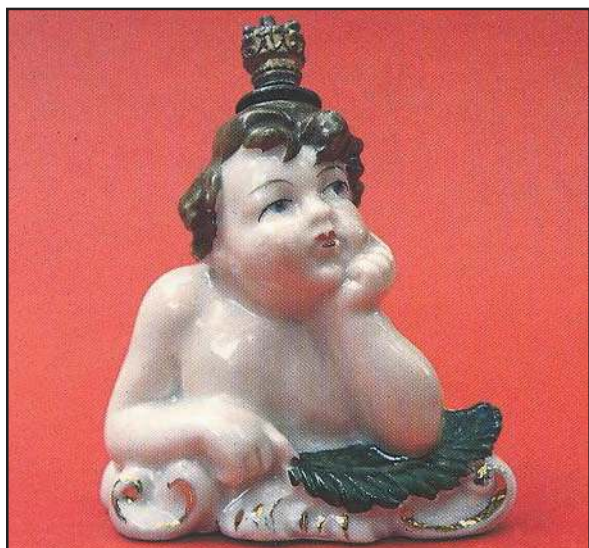
There were five major companies that produced porcelain crown top perfume bottles:



German porcelain designers had a unique talent for creating whimsical crown tops that have continued to charm collectors over the decades.



Mickey Mouse made his debut in November 1928. Mickey on the left is stamped *Made in England* while the Mickey on the right is stamped *Foreign (Germany)*.



Angels and cupids are appealing subjects for crown tops as illustrated by this Leonardo da Vinci angel.



A 1924 catalog page advertised the "Radio Kid" (on the right) as a figurine, salt and pepper shakers and as a perfume bottle. Adapting molds to produce different items was an effective cost-saving procedure.



These members of the mysterious "Strange Family" were probably produced by the Schafer and Vater Company.



For some collectors, the "Crowned Heads of Germany" are truly the royalty of their collections.

- The Sitzendorf factory's trademark is a crown over the initial "S." Sitzendorf bottles have 5-digit model numbers in the 20,000 series.

- The letter "G," with two vertical lines through it, is the Schneider trademark. Schneider used 5-digit model numbers in the 14,000 to 16,000 series.

- A crown over the initials "WG" is the well-known Goebel trademark. Their model numbers begin with the letters "XF."

- The Hertwig Company did not use a trademark on their bottles. They used model numbers in the 4,000 and 5,000 series. However, other factories also used these series numbers. Finding these bottles on an old factory catalog page would be the only sure way of identification.

- The Schafer & Vater Company (S&V) did not use a trademark on their bottles and were not even consistent in putting model numbers on them. Also, their numbering system is too scattered to rely on for identification. The surest way to identify an S&V bottle is to find it illustrated in an old factory catalog.

Not all bottles can be identified - ink stamps and paper labels wore or washed off the bottles over time, destroying valuable clues to their identification. Also, some companies kept poor records, or no records at all, of what they produced.

While Germany was by far the largest producer of porcelain perfume bottles, other countries may also have produced crown tops. Bottles depicting Dutch people show a distinct painting style (i.e., nostril dots, giving them a "Miss Piggy" appearance; and mouths painted with a straight line with dots for upper and lower lips) that differs from German manufacturers. Some bottles with a Dutch theme are numbered in the 800 to 900 series and/or have "Delft" printed on the bottom. There is a possibility that the Wade porcelain company in England may have produced some bottles. The word "Wade" has been found incised on the end of stopper posts. During WWI (1915 to 1918), imports from Germany were suspended, bringing Japan into the production of perfume bottles.

Many crown tops were produced for the souvenir market and were sold to fair organizers, souvenir shops, dime stores and other retailers. Examples illustrated are marked: Mt. Tom, Holyoke, Mass.; Exposition Coloniale of 1931; Stratford-on-Avon and a Florida orange. A British import law passed in 1926 required that the word "Foreign" appear on all imports into the United Kingdom. "Foreign" was stamped on the bottoms of German perfume bottles intended for export to Great Britain.

Categories for collecting, or organizing, a collection include: Art Deco, children, pairs, whimsies, Pierrots, Pierrettes and clowns, ladies, Orientals, Egyptians, mythological and religious, animals, objects and combos. Combos are combinations of a perfume bottle paired with another vanity item (i.e., powder box, trinket box, pincushion or figurine).

The last topic to discuss is reissues,

reproductions and crown top impostors. As with most other desirable antique items, reproductions and recasts from old molds are appearing on the market. Closely related to porcelain crown top bottles are porcelain flask heads with mercury glass stoppers. Most of the flask head bottles were made by the Heinz Company. The German Doll Company has recast flask head bottles from original Heinz Company molds, but they are distinctively different from the old bottles. The new models are bisque while the old ones are glazed. The stoppers are blown glass without the mercury and the colors are subtle as opposed to the vibrant colors of the old ones. The new bottles also bear the German Doll Company's Roly Poly stamp. Another German company is also producing new perfume bottles from original molds. However, these new models have the old model numbers and the original old anchor trademark on the bottoms. Interestingly, in the 1980s, U.S. customs decided that foreign names were "decorations," as long as the piece was marked with a paper label saying, "Made in..." Items can legally be stamped with an old name or mark as long as the country of origin is designated on a paper label.

Crown top impostors include: liquor bottles, vases, snuff bottles and naughty squirters. The presentation ended with a demonstration of the "drenching truth" about naughty squirters being identified as perfume bottles.

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The French characters, Pierrot and Pierrette, were derived from Pedrolino, a character of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, a classical form of improvisational theater (1500s to mid-1700s).