

Crown Devon Fairy Castle Pattern

Fairy castles have captured imaginations of children and the inner child of adults ever since photographs and illustrations of Ludwig of Bavaria's fairy castle at Neuschwanstein achieved popular recognition. Stories about princes and princesses living in fairy castles have been around even longer and continue to strike a responsive chord, as the Diana phenomenon attests.

Fairy castles should not be confused with fairies when investigating design influences on British ceramics. The fairy revival had begun in Britain soon after the cessation of WW1 hostilities when the British sought refuge in fantasy from the horrors of war and the decline of the Empire. Fairies as an adult decorative theme however had had their day by the time Fairy Castle designs became popular in Britain. Daisy Makeig-Jones' reign as Queen of the Fairy Revivalists with her wonderful Wedgwood Fairyland designs was well and truly over by the 1930s.

Fairy tales, never the less, continued to enjoy popular support amongst children, and fairy stories accompanied by illustrations from artists such as H. J. Ford, Arthur Rackham, Harry Clarke, Kay Nielsen et al continued to sell well in the third decade of twentieth century.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the Fairy Castle patterns produced by Fieldings were derivative of illustrations by Norwegian painter Kay (pronounced Kai) Nielsen. Neilson had gained fame in his own country as a decorative artist and illustrator strongly influenced by the Art Nouveau movement and the profiled composition techniques of eminent Swedish fairytale artist, John Bauer. Nielsen's beautiful 1914 illustrations of Nordic mythology in 'East of the Sun, West of the Moon, captivated readers, illustrators and designers alike.

So, are Nielsen's illustrations the source of the Crown Devon patterns? The answer is that no-one knows for sure. One way in which to canvass the odds is to compare examples of Nielsen's treatment of castles with Fielding's designs.

When one looks closely at Nielsen castles, it becomes clear that they have more than a passing resemblance to King Ludwig's Neuschwanstein castle in Bavaria. A fantastical imitation of a medieval castle, Neuschwanstein is set with towers and spires and is spectacularly sited on a high point over the Pöllat River gorge.



Early photograph of Neuschwanstein Castle under construction



Kay Nielsen illustration from 'East of the Sun, West of the Moon. Note the bridge and rendition of trees



Neilson Castle from East of the Sun, West of the Moon



Marienbrücke Bridge as seen from the castle



Neuschwanstein Castle today

Like Neuschwanstein, many of Nielsen's castles are perched atop hills overlooking gorges, and on occasions, as in the second illustration above, we see other structures similarly placed.

Next, it is useful to examine the way in which Nielsen renders foliage, trees and topography. His trees are very much in the Art Nouveau fashion rendered in a stylistic, flowing manner with a 'weeping' quality. Topography is represented in a fantastical way, much like the enchanting outcrops one sees in parts of Thailand and China.

Nielsen's bridges continue the fairytale theme and are usually arched with three support points, whereas the famous Marienbrücke bridge from where Ludwig used to survey his castle is a typical iron structure of the time.

In comparing the Crown Devon fairy castle patterns with both the real thing and Nielsen's renditions, there are obvious similarities. The rendition of the gatehouse in the Fieldings pattern is similar to that of the gatehouse at Neuschwanstein. There is a winding path from the main castle, as there is in Nielsen's illustrations, and there are deep gorges, as there are in both real life and in Nielsen's work.

Perhaps the most striking of similarities is that of the execution of the topography, foliage and trees. There is a conspicuous resemblance between Nielsen's treatment of foliage and trees and the Crown Devon representations. There is an overall similitude in how topography is represented, and even the colour of the turrets on the Crown Devon full pattern is identical to that of Nielsen's turrets.

Finally, when one examines the overall style of the Fielding Fairy Castle patterns they present as highly derivative of Art Nouveau fairy tale illustration. The composition of the patterns owes much to the pre Deco period, while the richness of the colours and enamels are very much in the Sybaritic style of Art Deco. There is a strong probability that Nielsen's illustrations may have been the starting point for the design of the Fairy Castle patterns. Add some compositional refinements by the Crown Devon team and the setting of the pattern on both high quality lustre and matt grounds and you arrive at a recipe that made Fieldings the undisputed King of the Castles.

But who designed the Crown Devon Fairy Castle pattern? Was it Fieldings Design and decorating Manager, Enoch Boulton, or was it someone acting under Boulton's instructions? In Ray Barker's first book, some 'jottings' on page 103 indicate that he believed it was freelance designer and modeller, Cyril. S. Lancaster who produced the original Fairy Castle drawings. No evidence is offered to substantiate this claim, however it deserves to be taken seriously. It is not known whether Cyril Lancaster was a member of the Lancaster family that operated Lancaster and Sons in Hanley until 1944, but design and



Crown Devon Mattajade Fairy Castle Bowl



Pattern 2405 – Small pattern with fine underglaze colours and gilded and enamelled pattern definition



Carlton Towering Castle 1933 – 37 Matt ground in autumn tones with stylised castle



Grimwades Fairy Castles Pattern with the castle featured on the lid



Full Pattern in Ruby Lustre ground with underglaze colouring and enamelled highlights



Fairy Castle abstract design on an Art Deco shape

modelling is a specialist potteries vocation and it may be the case that he learned his trade in the family firm.

If Lancaster produced the drawings, can Fairy Castle be directly attributed to him? Not necessarily so. The process from drawings to pattern was a complicated one involving many decisions on composition, balance, and, importantly, decoration. Enoch Boulton would have had considerable say on which grounds the final pattern would be featured, the type of transfer gilding featured, the transformation from drawing to an eye catching pattern and may have even discussed the process of producing the wares with Production Director, Ned Turner, and Works Manager and glazing specialist, Fred Turner. Reginald Fielding may have also had a say in the decision to go into production. So, it would be more accurate to state that the Fairy Castle patterns were the result of a committee of people whom, ultimately, made a commercial design decision. However, as the man responsible for transforming a drawing to its finished state, Enoch Boulton would at least have to share joint ownership of the pattern with Lancaster.

The Crown Devon Fairy Castle pattern was released in early 1933. In the 1930s, a number of potteries produced fairy castle patterns and it is not known which company initiated the trend, although the Crown Devon versions may have been the first to reach market. Carlton Ware produced a 'Towering Castle' pattern somewhere between 1933 and 1936, coloured with autumn tones on a matt ground. Grimwades also released a Fairy Castle pattern featuring a hand coloured transfer pattern with the castle in a frieze at the top of the pattern, and Royal Worcester launched a Fairy Castle design, available in both orange and blue lustre grounds. But it was the Crown Devon Fairy Castle that towered above all others in both quality and richness of design.

The Crown Devon wares featuring the Fairy Castle pattern were of the highest quality and were labour intensive. Designer Enoch Boulton and Works Manager Frederick Turner worked together for more than three years to ensure Fielding's glazes were both robust and appealing to the eye. In the manufacturing process for lustre Fairy Castle wares, for example, a transfer of the pattern was

applied before biscuit firing. Then, the main ground and underglaze colours were applied and a second firing took place. Enamel highlights, gold transfer and hand applied registering would be added and the item fired again. A lustre glaze would then be applied before the ware underwent a final firing.

The Crown Devon Fairy Castle pattern came in two designs: a full pattern that graced larger pieces and a secondary pattern to accommodate smaller pieces. The full pattern depicts a gatehouse and castle perched on the top of a hill. A path winds from the gatehouse to a three-turret bridge. A secondary castle appears on another hill on which a large abstract tree stands. Trees, shrubbery and foliage are treated stylistically and not to scale. The secondary pattern may or may not feature a bridge and features smaller castles emerging from forests of coloured foliage. Often, in both

patterns, an underglaze coloured and enamelled faux 'drip-glaze' effect appeared around the rim of the ware.

Pattern 2405, for example, featured two secondary patterns, one on the front and one on the rear of the vase featured overleaf. The main body of the design was determined by underglaze colouring and the pattern was defined with elaborate gold transfer work and delicately applied enamelling. The Ruby lustre example above receives its definition from a transfer fired into the biscuit followed by hand coloured infill. Rendition on some of the matt grounds is more 'freehand' in style and coloured with 'washes' that have less density.

The fairy castle pattern became a best seller in the 1930s and continues to be one of the most collectable Crown Devon post WW1 patterns. It was produced on a number of grounds, from pale blue, primrose and green in the matt finishes to orange, cobalt blue and ruby in the lustre grounds. It was also produced on the Mattajade ground. Some of the patterns on the matt grounds have a more abstract pattern rendition and are usually found on Art Deco wares such as the one illustrated on the previous page.

Fairy Castle patterns persist on contemporary decorative and novelty wares, having received a boost in popularity owing to the ubiquity of the Disney Fairy Castle, which, incidentally, was inspired by Ludwig's Bavarian masterpiece. Thus fairy castles have come full circle, and, while their appeal continues to generate new versions of this attractive theme, it is unlikely that we shall ever see new wares of such quality as the Crown Devon pieces of the 1930s.



Art Deco Serving Plate: Fairy Castle on a primrose ground

The only countries today that have the capacity to produce in volume such quality examples of underglaze colouring, exquisite enamelling and hand applied gilding are Thailand, China and some other Oriental pottery centres. While Wedgwood is now producing a limited quantity of its famous Fairyland lustre, it would be a dream beyond belief to hope for the resurgence of this beautiful work in other British potteries.

