

## Fantazia and Fantasia

The first time Fantazia appears in the Crown Devon pattern books is as Lustre pattern L100, produced in the early thirties after Enoch Boulton joined Crown Devon as design chief. The pattern is described thus, “*Fantasia; printed in black, enamelled in assorted colours; stippled pink, orange lustre ground; gold print and relief enamels; mother of pearl and gold bead inside; best gold edge; black bead outside*” This is a rather curious pattern description, and I have never seen an example of Fantazia in an orange ground. That is not to say that orange lustre examples do not exist, but, as you will discover, Fantazia is a sublime design evocative of night not day. Once you uncover its true origins it is difficult to fully appreciate it on any other ground but a rich blue glaze.



Carlton Ware Fantasia  
on a matt ground

The crown Devon pattern, I believe, has long been named Fantazia to distinguish it from the Carlton Ware Fantasia 3388, 3388, 3389, 3400, 3406, 3421, 3427 patterns that came out somewhere between 1931 and 1936 (If one is to accept the standard rule-of-thumb dating system used for W & R wares.) Yet again, we are confronted with the perennial question of who copied from whom, but in this instance the debate over origins extends well beyond that of the clichéd Fieldings versus Wiltshaw and Robinson discussion.

There is a body of opinion that suggests that Enoch Boulton, design manager at Carlton Ware until late 1929, was responsible for the Carlton Ware Fantasia design. It is also surmised that when he assumed the top design role at Fieldings in 1929 he took a large portfolio of designs and pattern ideas with him, amongst which was the Fantazia patterns.



Carlton Ware Fantasia on  
a blue lustre ground

The above are very reasonable propositions to put, particularly when one examines the upsurge of design activity and release of new patterns and shapes that ensued shortly after Boulton's arrival at Crown Devon. It is difficult to imagine that his prodigious output in the first year of his tenure at Fieldings was all conceived at the Devon Pottery, and it is highly likely that he did indeed bring a portfolio of designs over from the 'opposition'.

Nonetheless, any attempt to unravel the origins of specific Crown Devon or Carlton Ware patterns ever presents as an open and shut case. Fantasia is certainly no exception, for Carlton Ware collector and researcher, Harvey Pettit, weighs in to scupper our neat little theory. He claims that Boulton's successor at W & R, Violet Elmer, stated emphatically to him that she designed Carlton's Fantasia patterns. While this was not a deathbed confession, so to speak, it needs to be taken into account when practicing the inexact science of attributing patterns to particular designers.



Pattern 2441 Crown Devon  
Fantasia circa 1933

Another approach we can use to settle matters of origin is to establish which company was first to take the design to market. Our task, however, is not made easy as we must wrestle with the inexactitudes of our two main players' record keeping. In W & R's case a pattern number starting with 33 could have been produced anywhere from 1931 to 1935, or it could have actually been 1933. We know with some certainty, however, that the Crown Devon pattern 2441 was released in mid 1933, if the dating on surviving

Crown Devon pattern books is accurate. And so, rather than settling the matter, it is beginning to appear that Fielding's Fantazia came to market at roughly the same time as W & R's Fantasia. Could this be so? Could Violet Elmer and Enoch Boulton have stuck on the Fantazia/Fantasia idea independent of each other?

The above suggestion is not as preposterous as it first seems when one places the issue in the context of the major decorative design influences in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Those decades are now remembered as the golden age of gift book illustrations, and it is well documented that the Queen of the Fairy Revivalists in popular ceramics, Daisy Makeig-Jones, borrowed heavily from gift book illustrations to produce designs for her famous Wedgwood Fairyland series.



In a search for design inspiration, other designers followed suit and scoured the works of illustrators and artists like Andrew Lang (the "Colour" Fairy Book series), Henry Justice Ford, Edmund Dulac ("The Tempest" and others), Kay Neilsen ("East of the Sun West of the Moon", "The Giant who had no Heart in his Body", "Three Princesses of Whiteland") and Gustav Dore ("The Legend of Croquemitaine"). The work of other famous illustrators and artists such as Aubrey Beardsley, Arthur Rackham and our chief and final protagonist in the Fantazia story were also fertile grounds for ideas.

We have now reached a crucial point in our search for the true beginnings of the patterns. Irish illustrator and stained glass artist, Harry Clarke's preference for both the movingly beautiful and the ghoulish, often along side each other, is a unique signature of his illustrations, a signature that can be identified in both the Crown Devon and Carlton Ware patterns. Thus, he can be identified categorically as the inspiration for the Fantazia/Fantasia patterns. The designs, particularly the execution of the stylistic birds around which the patterns are composed, are identical to Clarke's Thumbellina illustrations in Harrap's 1916 edition of 'Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Andersen.'



Clarke had an almost obsessive love of detail, which can be seen in his Thumbellina illustration above left. His Hans Christian Andersen plates and follow-up illustrations for an edition of Edgar Allan Poe's 'Tales of Mystery and Imagination' cemented his reputation as an illustrator of considerable note. A

critic wrote of Clarke at the time, "Never before have these marvellous tales been visually interpreted with such flesh-creeping, brain haunting, illusions of horror, terror and the unspeakable."

Now let us examine the Crown Devon and Carlton Ware patterns against Clarke's Thumbellina work. The main feature of the full Crown Devon pattern is a pair of highly stylised birds executed in the Art Nouveau manner with wings enamelled in red and tails enamelled in a striking green. The birds appear in a moonlit scene descending in flight and a gold crescent moon barely illuminates dark shadowy foliage outlined in gold. These features are identical in the Clarke illustration apart



from some compositional licence to give the pattern more colour and balance. Boulton added colourful bursts of flowers enamelled in greens, oranges and reds that rose skyward from the base of the pattern in the Crown Devon pattern. Notice how the flower design in the centre left of the Clarke illustration has been used as inspiration for the flowers on the Fantazia pattern.

In addition, Boulton has added features such as a drip glaze effect, using underglaze colours, enamelling and gold transfer relief to add a sumptuousness frame and depth to the overall effect. He sensitively augmented the Clarke illustration to produce an appealing, well composed pattern on his ceramic canvas. In other words, he represented faithfully the main themes of the Clarke's work, but applied more than a measure of imagination to produce a beautiful, eye catching decorative piece.

In comparing the Carlton Ware patterns to both the original design and the Crown Devon versions, the Carlton Ware patterns clearly come from the same source, but they appear 'heavy' and poorly composed. In the first example of the Carlton Ware patterns shown, the shapes of the Cyprus trees are similar to Clarke's illustration but they are clumsily spaced, with the proportions of the bird unsympathetic to its surroundings. The Carlton birds do not have the delicacy and line of the Clarke design or the Crown Devon patterns and, overall, there is a 'busyness' about the Carlton Ware patterns that makes them less attractive.

Boulton's designs for Crown Devon are beautifully balanced and, overall, are more faithful to the original illustrations. Different palates have been used to compose the Fieldings and W & R patterns and the design 'intelligence' of the patterns appears dissimilar. A comparable difference between lightness and heaviness of touch also appears when one contrasts Boulton's Fairy Castle designs with Violet Elmer's Carlton Ware Towering Castle designs. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to conclude that two designers were at work on the Fantazia patterns using an identical source of inspiration.

The question of whether the Carlton Ware and Crown Devon designs were the result of a simultaneous and unconnected burst of creativity by two designers cannot be answered in the affirmative. In the relentless competition between the two companies plagiarism was a common but not uncontroversial practice, and it is plausible that one designer copied from the other. What is clear, however, is that Fantazia is the brainchild of Harry Clarke, and while Boulton and Elmer were both inspired to copy it, the Boulton patterns are more aesthetically and decoratively appealing than their W & R counterparts.