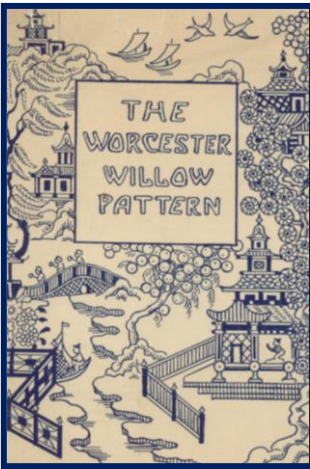


The Worcester Willow Pattern



It is not certain which English factory invented the Willow pattern as we know it, but it was inspired by blue and white Nankin Pattern porcelain imported into Europe from China around 1810.

Nearly every English factory has, at some time, produced a version of the famous design. Each version has the main features of, a prominent willow tree, two or three figures crossing a bridge away from a pagoda type building on an island, two flying birds, a fence in the foreground and usually an elaborate, wide, printed border.

Over the years a story was invented to explain the different elements that always appear in the pattern.

A wealthy Mandarin had an only daughter named Li-Chi. She fell in love with her father's secretary Chang. One day the Mandarin overheard the young couple making vows of love under the willow tree and sternly forbade their unequal match. The lovers contrived to elope, but as they tried to escape over the bridge to the gardeners' cottage, the Mandarin chased them. Chang dived into the sea and returned with a boat to rescue his love. The gods rewarded their fidelity with freedom and turned them both into turtledoves.

The Worcester version of the Willow pattern seems to have evolved from two sources. The Royal Worcester factory produced a bone china version in the 1870s which was made with a variety of different border designs and different colours. There were many different versions because they were made as special orders for the newly established department stores, both in England and overseas. In the 1880s the Grainger factory also made Willow pattern with a bamboo border in grey, green, blue or coral.

One earthenware version in the 1920s was made by Royal Worcester for Black cat cigarettes. Smokers saved cigarette coupons to purchase items of Willow tea ware. At least three different hard porcelain versions were also made for hotels in the 1930s.

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