



This fairing is from the Royal Vienna factory and made c1860, it is of higher quality, rare and not made for the fairground, price would be over £2,000.



'Twelve months after marriage', price £60



'Three o'clock in the morning', price £60.



Also from the Royal Vienna factory

Good humour, or overtly risqué collectibles? Victorian fairings revealed. Part 1

By Andy Graham



Conta & Boehme mark.

Imagine the scene. A lady lies seductively on the bed while two men discuss her virtues (or lack of them) and decide whose turn it is! The caption reads *After you my dear Alphonso*. Lucky Alphonso! Victorian Fairings are an up and coming area for the collector showing a slice of life in Victorian times and ranging from risqué humour to political statement.

If you visited a fair during the mid nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century you would have probably come home the proud owner of a little china figure now referred to as a 'Fairing'. They were given away as prizes at the fairground (hence the name) and were mostly about 3.5in long, 2.5in deep and 3in tall, mounted on a rectangular base with a caption. The word fairing ('fayring' or 'fairin' in old English) is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a present given at or brought from a fair' and it comes from the Latin 'fēria' meaning a holiday. Typical themes for fairings were generally risqué for the period. For example, marital scenes such as *Married for money* in which the wife lays in bed next to her husband (who is asleep) reading a book. Another risqué example entitled *Shall we sleep first, or ...* shows a couple sitting up in bed deciding whether to go to sleep ... or maybe not. Fairings are typically made from a white, glazed porcelain and were intended for display on mantelpieces.

The first fairing that any new collector will find is likely to be *The last to put out the light*. This fairing is so common that during my first month as a collector I purchased three of these. Numerous types of this same figure exist. Variations occur in the actual figure, colours, tablecloth, candle holder and the head and foot of the bed. The man or woman may also have their arms or legs positioned slightly differently. You will normally find that the candle has been broken off at some point in the figure's past. It is rumoured that this is for good luck. You should expect to pay around £50 to £60 for one of these but I have seen them being advertised for far greater prices (over £100). At auction it is likely that the successful bidder will pay about £30.

Fairings can be grouped into a number of key themes, one of which is marriage with examples such as *Married for money*, *Three o'clock in the morning*, *When a man's married his troubles begin* and *Twelve months after marriage*. I doubt it's necessary to explain all of these captions as the sentiment is still applicable today, but I do like *Returning at one o'clock in the morning* as it shows a man tripping over a chamber pot in

the middle of the night clearly inebriated and being chastised by his wife. All of these fairings are relatively common. I would expect to pay around £60-£80 for each of them from a respectable dealer.

English seaside postcard humour is evident in fairings with examples such as *Who is coming* depicting a man walking in on a lady on her toilet (this is the Victorian way of saying she is in the bathroom having a wash) and *Come along, these flowers don't smell very good* which shows a couple standing by some bushes complaining about the smell when on the other side of the bush is a little boy squatting. Price wise I would expect to be charged, in a retail environment, £200 and £160 respectively for good condition examples of these.

Although they depict quintessential Victorian English humour the ironic thing about these fairings is that they were, in the main, made in Germany by a company called Conta & Boehme of Pössneck in Saxony. Conta & Boehme exported in vast quantities to the British Isles, the United States and many other countries. In 1880, for example, they exhibited at the Melbourne (Australia) Exhibition. The company was established in 1790 and was still listed in the German trade directory in 1937 although the manufacture of fairings is believed to have stopped at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. But Conta & Boehme weren't the only makers of fairings. Other manufacturers include Ernst Bohme & Sohne of Rudolstadt, possibly Ackermann & Fritze also of Rudolstadt and an unidentified Japanese company. Conta &

Boehme however have become the Clarice Cliff of fairings and will command a far greater price.

To identify Conta & Boehme fairings look for a shield shaped mark that contains a small arm holding a dagger impressed on the base. This mark is usually found with an impressed four digit number ranging from the first series 2850 to 2899, and the second series 3301 to the 3380s. Earlier Fairings sometimes had the four digit numbers incised on the base. These will usually be found without the Conta & Boehme shield mark. Genuine Fairings have appeared with numbers outside these sequences such as *Oysters Sir?* which is numbered 2691 and I have some with only three digits. From the 1890s the shield mark may be printed or the 'Made in Germany' mark could be present, but just to confuse you even further, no four digit impressed or incised numbers may be present.

This article started with the description of quite a risqué fairing with the caption *after you my dear Alphonso*. This retails at approximately £350. Other examples of risqué fairings include *Did you ring Sir?*, *Did you call Sir?*, both of which show a maid walking in on a gentlemen either in the bath or in bed and are worth £220 and £750 respectively. *The landlord in love* shows a landlord harassing one of his tenants and carries an approximate value of £300 for an example in mint condition.

In part two of this article we will take a look at how fairings depicted politics and warfare, and how the rise in prices has created a market for reproduction and fakes.



'Returning at one in the morning', price £60.



Reproduction of 'Who is coming'.



Conta & Boehme: Returning from the ball'.



'The Daily News', price £180.



Very common fairing 'Last to put out the light', price £50.



'Some contributors to punch', price £500.

Victorian China Fairings by Derek H. Jordan. ISBN 1 85149 446 4. Price £35. This is a very useful book on the subject.