

In England during the late 1700's everyone who was anyone was going nuts for all things Chinese. At the time trade with China was heavily restricted, the Chinese allowed very few items to be exported to the West, and as a result they were valuable and highly sort after. It didn't take long for copies to start to be made, and soon many could afford to get that Chinese style! This also coincided with the rise of the Potteries, the area around Stoke had become a centre for ceramic production. The businessmen who ran the companies were never slow to seize upon an opportunity, and soon began copying the designs of the expensive Chinese imports. One thing they struggled to copy however was the fine Porcelain used by the Chinese potters. Eventually however a company called Spode developed a technique that had the fine translucent qualities of Porcelain, and a high manufacturing success.

The Blue and White Willow pattern was designed by a man called Thomas Minton, though Spode went on to purchase the designs. The combined them with their Bone China, and a design classic was born. To aid in sales, a romantic fable was developed to explain the elements of the design.

“Once there was a wealthy Mandarin, who had a beautiful daughter (Koong-se). She had fallen in love with her father's humble accounting assistant (Chang), angering her father. (It was inappropriate for them to marry due to their difference in social class.) He dismissed the young man and built a high fence around his house to keep the lovers apart. The Mandarin was planning for his daughter to marry a powerful Duke. The Duke arrived by boat to claim his bride, bearing a box of jewels as a gift. The wedding was to take place on the day the blossom fell from the willow tree.

On the eve of the daughter's wedding to the Duke, the young accountant, disguised as a servant, slipped into the palace unnoticed. As the lovers escaped with the jewels, the alarm was raised. They ran over a bridge, chased by the Mandarin, whip in hand. They eventually escaped on the Duke's ship to the safety of a secluded island, where they lived happily for years. But one day, the Duke learned of their refuge. Hungry for revenge, he sent soldiers, who captured the lovers and put them to death. The gods, moved by their plight, transformed the lovers into a pair of doves”