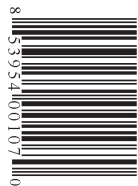


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Fairy lamps kept the night at bay with beautiful colors

BY MELODY AMSEL-ARIELI

For centuries, people burned oil lamps through the night to ward off the dark. Yet in the early 1800s, when small, safe, affordable candles were introduced, many switched to candle-burning nightlights instead. Shortly after, Samuel Clarke, a British candlemaker by trade, introduced clear, colorful glass lamps, each composed of base, flint bottom, candle dome holder, and decorative shade, as a way to promote his wares.

As his reputation grew, Clarke patented additional practical, attractive lamp designs featuring brightly hued, interchangeable porcelain, glass, tin, lacquered and bronzed domes, shades, and bases. Each, produced under the registered trade name "Fairy Light" and embossed with a fairy waving a light-tipped wand, was available in three basic sizes. The largest, simply known as "Fairy," was followed by "Pyramid" and "Wee" which featured the tiniest shade of all.

Through the years, Clarke commissioned highly respected British companies like Stevens & Williams, Taylor & Tunnicliffe, Royal Burslem, Royal Worcester, George, Davidson, Royal Doulton, Stuart and Sons, and Thomas Webb & Sons, to produce his designs.

The Clarke Pyramid & Fairy Light Company also designed a selection of chimney-type, double-duty, fairy lamp food-warmers "invaluable both in the night nursery and the sick room." This convenient, safe, economical model also bathed untold numbers of dark Victorian bedchambers and hallways with soft, inviting light. In fact, due to its strong, flicker-free, slow-burning flame, the company often advertised them as "Burglar's Horrors."

Though Clarke vigorously defended his British and American Fairy trademark and patents, he eventually extended licenses to companies in Russia, France, Belgium, Austria, and



Above: Combed pattern glass shade on clear stand, along with satin and hobnail-cut glass shades atop Clarke 'Fairy Light' bases, late 19th century, realized \$133 in 2007, courtesy Bonhams, www.bonhams.com

Right: "The Burglar's Horror", Illustrated London News, 1895, courtesy <https://www.fairylampclub.com/>

Spain. Numerous competitors also copied unlicensed Clarke's models.

Whatever their source, however, all candle-burning nightlights eventually became known as "fairy lamps."

Clarke's fairy lamp advertisements, often full page, full color, and highly detailed, appeared in major British publications of the day, including Pottery Gazette and the Illustrated London News. They reached readers farther afield as well. Allen's Indian Mail, a prestigious publication serving "British & Foreign India, China, & All Parts of the East," for example, advertised the fairy lamp as "...the most elegant and perfect night light ever invented."

In 1885, Englishman Frederick Shirley patented a new, exciting



invention at the Mount Washington Glass Works in New Bedford, Massachusetts — Burmese glass. This delicate creation, formulated with uranium oxide and traces of gold,

initially produced pale, lemony yellow glass. Reheating it, however, shaded

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Fairy Lamps

FROM FRONT PAGE

this pale shade into salmon pink, evocative of an exotic sunset.

Though Mount Washington Glass Works may not have produced Burmese glass fairy lamps itself, within a year it granted Thomas Webb & Sons, which specialized in engraved crystal and colored glass, permission to produce Burmese glass domes and shades in England. Many Webb fairy lamp domes and shades, advertised as Queen's Burmese Ware, bore a popular berries-and-leaves pattern enhanced with painted accents. Due to lack of original documentation and illustrations, however, sources of many Webb Burmese designs remain a mystery.

Webb fairy lamps, designed, named, and numbered by Jules Barbe from 1886 through 1888, boasted bright botanical themes. While others featured impressed or acid-etched identification stamps reading "Thos Webb & Sons, Queen's Burmese Ware, Patented," scores bore only flimsy paper labels.

During this era too, Clarke apparently granted The Phoenix Glass Works and the F. W. Kralert & Company the right to manufacture and market his fairy lamps in the United States. In addition, the Hobbs, Brocunier & Company, later known as the United States Glass Company, manufactured similar lights under the name of "Acorn Lamps." Yet American fairy lamps became most fashionable after Clarke, displaying thousands at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, exhibited them across the country.

Clarke, a marketing genius, then designed a crown-shaped fairy lamp to mark Queen Victoria's 1897 Golden Jubilee, with the monarch reportedly acquiring 1,500 for her own personal use. Then as gas-lit and electric lighting became widespread, he introduced the "Cricklite" fairy lamp, a luxurious model featuring clear glass domes topped by decorative silk shades lit with either wick-wax or electric light. Some served as elegant flower holders or graced formal dinners and similar settings. Others brightened garden walkways, country houses, conservatories or, when grouped together, formed shimmering drawing room chandeliers. Though a number of other European and American candle and glass works continued producing similar pieces, decorative fairy lamps largely fell from use by the 1920s.

In the early 1950s, however, the Fenton Art Glass Company began producing candle-lit and electrified fairy lamps in alluring shades of opalescent green, blue, rose, and cranberry. Both the Pairpoint Glass Company and Gundersen Glass, a

Right: Samuel Clarke Glass Fairy Lamp, London, ca.1890, marks: molded S. CLARKE, PATENT, TRADE MARK, FAIRY, 6" x 7 "x 7", realized \$937.50 in 2019, courtesy Heritage Auctions, HA.com"



Right: Pairpoint Glass Puffy Fairy Lamps on mahogany bases, ca. 1900, 7 1/4", realized \$687.50 in 2015, courtesy Heritage Auctions, HA.com



Above: Fenton Hand-Painted Burmese three-piece Fairy Lamp, 7", courtesy Aging Gracefully Shop, Etsy.com



Above: Vintage Peach Blow 3 Piece Fairy Lamp, 7", courtesy Aging Gracefully Shop, Etsy.com

later incarnation of the Mount Washington Glass Works, followed with innovative takes on historic Burmese glass lamps. Then the Fenton Company, recreating Mount Washington's original formula, issued Burmese glass lamps of their own. These highly desirable collector items are often signed, marked, or bear original paper labels intact Fenton Company fairy lamps abound. The textural Hobnail lamp pattern, perhaps evoking the hobnails early Americans wore on the soles of their shoes, was produced in enticing shades like Custard, Lime Sherbet, Colonial Amber, and Strawberries on Milk Glass. Scores depict popular natural motifs like bluebirds, owls, cardinals, chickadees, thistles, holly berries, butterflies, pansies, roses, dogwood, violets, and ferns. Other Fenton lamp patterns, like Mary Gregory, Currier & Ives, Log Cabin, Basketweave, Santa, Spanish Lace, Persian Medallion, and Chou Ting, were available in a dazzling array of designs, shades, glass types, and finishes. Since both Fenton domes and bases were interchangeable, however, people did not necessarily purchase lamps with matching components.

The Fairy Lamp Club, <https://www.fairylampclub.com/> is a treasure trove for enthusiasts. It not only explores the history of major European and American lamp makers but also features full-color illustrations of a Samuel Clarke catalog, collections of Burmese, Cleveland-style, lithophane, and undocumented fairy

Left: Thomas Webb & Sons Queens Burmese three-piece fairy lamp marked "Clarke Trademark Cricklite," 6" tall x 4 1/2", courtesy <https://www.rubylane.com/>



Below: Hand-Painted Garden of Friendship Fairy Lamp signed Lynn Fenton, courtesy Aging Gracefully Shop, Etsy.com



Above: Clarke's Fairy Lamp Exhibit at the American Exhibition, London 1887, Pottery Gazette, courtesy <https://www.fairylampclub.com/>



Above: Vintage Mary Gregory three-piece Fairy Lamp, 8", courtesy Aging Gracefully Shop, Etsy.com

Lamps: Elegance in Candle Lighting," by Bob and Pat Ruf, depicts over 800 lamps, old and new, drawing on primary sources to explore their development from simple to sumptuous.

Fans may also consider joining one of the Facebook Fairy Lamp groups like Vintage Fairy Lamps and Antique Glass, Fairy Lamp Fanatics, or Victorian Fairy Lamps.

Below: One-piece opalescent, Drapery pattern Fairy Light, ca. 6" x 7", Fenton, 2002, courtesy Rubylane.com

