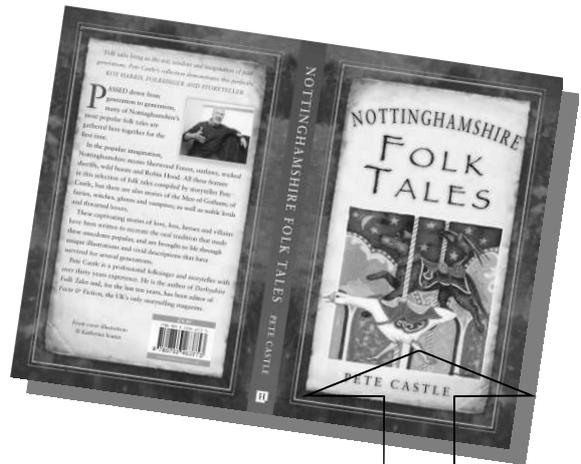


THE ILLUSTRATOR'S TALE

by Katherine Soutar-Caddick

The series of county folk tales books continuing to be published by The History Press has garnered praise from all quarters. If and when they eventually finish anyone who has them all will have a valuable resource—a collection which probably can't be bettered in its scope or completeness. Not only do they provide a matchless source of stories, they look good! And that is partly down to the eye-catching cover designs which are all done by Katherine Soutar-Caddick. If you compare them you see that there is a basic layout into which she inserts a picture inspired by the stories. I asked her how she goes about the design process, but first a bit of history.



After finishing my BA(hons) in fine art glass, I ended up working in a psychiatric hospital, running art activities and eventually leaving to train as an art therapist at Goldsmiths University in London. After completing the course I found I was overqualified for my old job and that art therapy jobs were as rare as rocking horse droppings. I had started working on illustration almost as soon as I finished college and had amassed quite a portfolio so it was suggested by friends that I send them to card companies and see if anyone was interested in publishing them. 10 years later I was producing and selling prints and cards for shops and galleries around the country and when I became involved with running Festival at the Edge the other piece of the jigsaw was in place. I also sold my work at the festival and began to attract interest from storytellers. Tim Bowley commissioned me to illustrate his book 'Seeds on the Wind' and work also came from Amy Douglas and Mike O'Connor and it was through Mike that I came into contact with The History Press. They were casting about for an illustrator to give the covers of the folk tale books a unified feel and Mike showed them the CD cover I had done for him and was very complementary about his experience working with me (thanks Mike!) and as they say... the rest is History (Press).

So, asked to write about painting I dither about for a while, faced with trying to convey in words something that would usually involve getting my sketchbook out and lots of pointing. However, here goes.

It all starts with the text, the entire text. The Folk Tales series is unusual in that I am given a completely free hand when it comes to decisions about choice of story and theme for the cover work. It's a wonderful freedom and a terrifying prospect at the same time. To explain a little: an illustrator usually receives a brief which will contain quite specific instructions as to what is expected of them. I just get an email in my inbox with the text attached and a deadline.

So with the choice of an entire book full of tales in front of me I sometimes feel like a child in an old fashioned sweet shop. With so very many colourful and tasty options, where do you start?

Well, by reading the text of course. It will take me a day or two and a certain amount of wandering back and forth amongst the chapters and paragraphs to make the notes that take me on to the next stage. I will note page numbers and scribble down quotes or place names.

Next thing is research. Now if I could take off with my camera and photograph every location I'm interested in it would be brilliant but my inability to drive and the time pressures mean I often do most of my research on the net. I will trawl for locations mentioned, for background to stories that have a

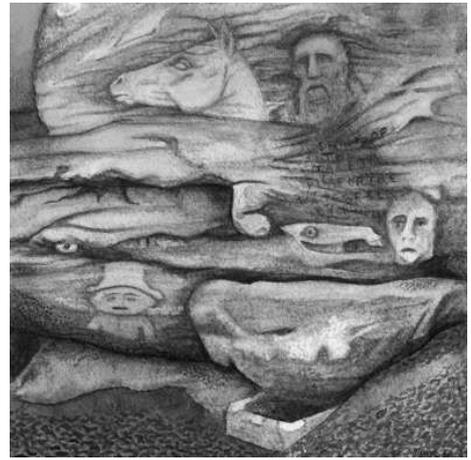
historical element, and for source photographs for particular characters and objects in all the stories I'm interested in. This usually results in several ideas about the cover vying for my attention like bouncy puppies and there is a period of squinty eyed head scratching while I try to figure out a way to put every shiny brown eyed one of them into one picture. Sometimes this can work. The covers for Cheshire (right) and Dorset are a result of this process and I'm quite pleased with both of them. But more often I find that after spending several days trying to shoehorn themes together without success I have to admit that one strong central image is what is called for. It is important to bear in mind that the image when printed on the cover itself will be pretty small so needs to be relatively easy for the eye to travel around.

Now is the time to prepare a lovely piece of watercolour paper. I tend to use a fairly heavyweight one as it means I don't have to stretch it, as for some reason, which may just be sheer laziness, I have never been all that keen on stretching paper. I tell myself it's because I like the way the paint pools in unexpected places when I'm working wet in wet but it may, as I said, just be laziness! I draw the elements of the composition in lightly with pencil and often tweak them about again at this stage, not too much though as too much rubbing down spoils the surface of the paper and it won't take the paint so well then.

For painting in I use either watercolours, Inktense blocks or sometimes a mixture of both (with occasional twiddling with watercolour pencils in the final stages). They differ in their behaviour quite a bit, with watercolour more open to being mixed on the page and pushed around, splished with water or interfered with by twiddling around little bits of kitchen towel (an important trick of the trade, I can say no more!) Inktense are sticks of solid ink, a medium I have only discovered fairly recently and though they share some of the qualities of watercolours they are also fantastic for building up subtle layers of transparent colour which once dry are waterproof so never get muddied by the addition of further layers (see London Tales (right) and county Donegal (the harp, over —>)).

For background elements I like to work wet so I will paint one section at a time, using masking fluid to protect any detail that needs to be painted in a lighter colour later. I will wet the whole area using just plain water first and then gradually float and drop colour on and generally play around until I get the effect I'm looking for. Then I wander off and have a cup of coffee (and check out facebook) while I wait for that section to dry so I can move on to the next. Detailed elements and characters tend to be built up more gradually, sometimes using Inktense and watercolour together to get depth and detail. Some pieces are given extra texture by using watercolour pencils on them once dry in the final stages.

There is one last process to go through once the piece has been scanned and sent back to me, and that is to add highlights and sometimes a bit of atmosphere using Photoshop. I am no Photoshop



expert and the idea of working entirely on a computer like some of my compatriots in illustration fills me with puzzlement. I love my materials, their smell, their boxy newness when first opened and the feel of them in my fingers, but there are a few things, a glint in the eye for instance, that can be given a crispness that is quite seductive after you have done everything else by hand. It is fabulous for misty effects as well.

So painting and primping all finished I send my offspring off to the publisher and hope they receive it well, and they have thus far. I have also had some lovely feedback from individual authors for which I'm grateful as you do always wonder.

There are many titles to go before I say goodbye to this rather lovely job and I plan to have an exhibition of many of the works towards the end of next year. If you would like to keep up to date with my work and follow the progress of future titles you can find my page on facebook at:

www.facebook.com/KatherineSoutarCaddickArtist or follow me on Twitter @kate_dancingcat. I would love to hear from you.



Two stages of the 'Wexford' cover. (Looking incredibly like husband Bill!)

One of the joys of these pictures is the vibrant colours which Katherine talks about above. It's very difficult to do them justice in black and white.