



The Museum is very lucky to have a genuine 'Nuremberg Kitchen'. This is the traditional English name for a specific type of doll's house with just a single room, a kitchen. The city of Nuremberg was the centre of the nineteenth-century German toy industry. In German it is known as a Puppenküche, literally a "dolls' kitchen". Nuremberg kitchens date back to at least 1572, when one was given to Princesses Dorothea and Anna, daughters of Augustus, Elector of Saxony. These one-room kitchens seem to have been almost always thought of as girls' playthings. They reached the height of their popularity in the 1800s. At first they were assembled by craftspeople working at home, but later on they were manufactured in large numbers in factories.

Nuremberg kitchens were often associated with Christmas. In many German families, they were only brought out to be played with at Christmas time, when they served as part of the traditional holiday decorations and a seasonal toy. It was popular to give little girls items for their toy kitchens as Christmas presents or on their birthdays. They often evoked nostalgia as family antiques. The purpose of Nuremberg kitchens has usually been explained by historians as to teach girls lessons in house-keeping and cooking. However, they were not meant to provide girls with practical training in the skills of homemaking. Instead, they were intended to generate wonder and amusement, to make kitchens seem magical, and thereby inspire girls to anticipate and desire their traditionally expected future roles as homemakers.

We don't know whether our model was made in Germany or in England, but it was certainly very skilfully made, with much attention to detail. The wooden caption screwed onto the front tells us it was 'presented by Miss Edith Hammerton of Marlow, in whose family it had been since 1796'! Mothers would pass on their childhood kitchens to their daughters, a widespread practice by the nineteenth century, which is the reason we have this model today, more than 225 years old. Nuremberg kitchens that might have been very up-to-date when first made would be old-fashioned after decades of being handed down as a family heirloom. Our model is a fascinating contrast with a glossy, fitted kitchen of the 21st century.

Most surviving Nuremberg kitchens are a single room with the front wall and ceiling missing, rather like a miniaturized stage set, allowing convenient access to the interior and an unobstructed view of the minuscule items within. Often the side walls flair out from the back at wide angles, creating a trapezoid floorplan and presenting a more dramatic display of the contents. The fittings are usually arranged symmetrically, with a cooking range in the centre of the rear wall (a raised masonry hearth with a chimney in early versions like ours, or a metal stove in later ones), with cupboards, shelves, and other storage furniture to either side. They often house an abundant collection of pots, pans, and dishes filling or even overflowing the space. Some of these might have been lost from our kitchen over the years, but there is still a good quantity remaining.

So who was Edith, the last owner? She was the daughter of gentleman James Humphrey Hammerton, a cement manufacturer and commercial agent and his second wife Jessie Spooner. Edith was born in Brixton in 1857, so she cannot have been the first owner of the kitchen. James and Jessie had four daughters – Clara, Agnes, Edith and Ada – who would all have played with the kitchen in the mid-19th century. Edith moved to Great Marlow with her parents in the 1880s and after her mother died in 1891 she cared for her father in his house in Glade Road until he died in 1898. Newly independent at 41, she worked as a dressmaker for many years at Homeleigh in Beaumont Rise, with one live-in maid for company. By 1939 she had retired and was living on private means. She died in Marlow in 1949 aged 92.

Can we trace the history of the kitchen further? It is probable that it was passed to Edith by her mother, Jessie, whose parents were William Spooner, a London draper, and Catherine Hodgkin, originally from Edenham, Lincolnshire. They had two sons and six daughters, all born in the early 19th century, so the kitchen would have been very well used at that time. However, to find someone who could have played with the kitchen when it was new in 1796, we must turn to Edith's grandmother, Catherine Hodgkin, born in 1789 to a farming family in Lincolnshire. She would have been seven when the kitchen was given to her – exactly the right age to enjoy it – and she had four sisters to play with it too. So we are very grateful to Miss Edith Hammerton of Marlow whose family had treasured the kitchen since 1796.

Della Fitzgerald, with thanks to en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg_kitchen