SOME ADVENTURES OF RUPERT

A History with Market Values

by Zita Thornton

Rupert Bear has been appearing on the printed page for 85 years, yet his popularity shows no sign of waning. A Rupert annual is still produced each year, and last month alone 456 Rupert books were offered for sale on eBay.

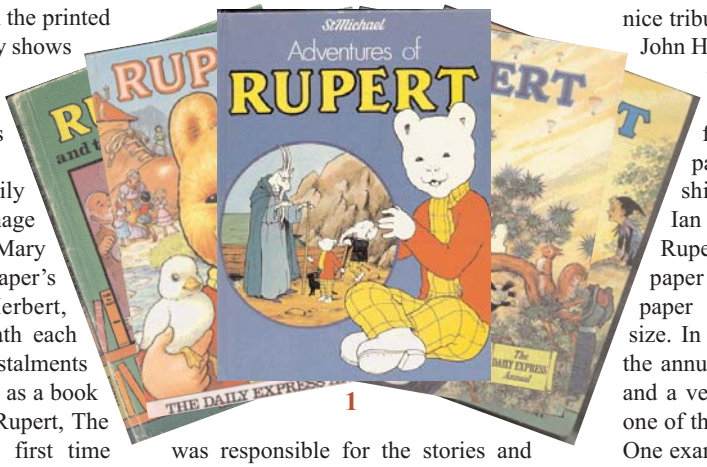
Rupert first appeared in The Daily Express newspaper in 1920. His image and the stories were created by Mary Tourtel, the talented wife of the paper's deputy editor. Her husband, Herbert, added some of the rhymes beneath each picture. One year later, thirty six instalments of the cartoon strip were published as a book with the title 'The Adventures of Rupert, The Little Lost Bear'. This was the first time Rupert had appeared in book form, and marked the start of a long tradition of books about the famous bear. Original early Rupert books now sell for several hundred pounds each and even the recently reproduced facsimiles have become collectors items already.

In 1924, a series of Rupert books reproducing previous newspaper stories was introduced as 'Rupert Little Bear's Adventures'. One of these, the second in the series, has been sold through Comic Book Postal Auctions for £484, including buyer's premium.

These books showed Rupert in full colour for the first time and we can see that he originally wore a blue jumper with trousers and matching scarf in white and grey checks. Interestingly, it was his pal Bill Badger who wore a red jersey with yellow trousers.

The next series of Rupert books was the one shilling 'Little Bear Library Books' with their distinctive yellow covers, produced in 1928. The 'Monster Rupert Books' followed in 1931. These pre-war books were produced again in later decades, but the reprints are worth far less than the original editions. For instance, a Monster Rupert from the 1930s series is offered for sale at £800 by Stella and Rose's books, but the reproduced series from the 1950s and 1960s can be found for between £30 and £100.A series of eighteen 'Little Bear Library Books' were reprinted for sale at Woolworths between 1973 and 1975 and now sell for £3-£6. Yet another Rupert series was published between 1948 and 1960. The 'Adventure Series' books, totalling fifty in all, are now worth between £20-£30 each.

Mary Tourtel retired in 1935 and was succeeded by Alfred Bestall. Rupert's output became so great, however, that it would have been impossible for him to cope on his own. Bestall



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was responsible for the stories and illustrations for the Rupert annuals which we so associate with Rupert Bear. As an aid to continuity, he had a team of illustrators and made the decision that Rupert's trousers should have exactly six stripes.

Although Rupert had appeared in 'The Daily Express Children's Annual', sometimes using a pop-up format, the first annual of his own, 'The New Adventures of Rupert' was published in 1936. The format used the Mary Tourtel tradition of verses beneath pictures. Only the cover of Rupert hanging onto the tail of a kite was in colour, and it took another four years before colour was introduced in annuals in general.

Alfred Bestall took Rupert around the world, introducing Origami, new friends and, in 1950, the colourful endpapers. Bestall's association with the annuals ended abruptly in 1973 when the traditional brown face of Rupert on the cover was changed to white without his knowledge, losing all the subtle shadings of the brown. He was incensed and a dozen proofs with the brown face were published as an apology. These are now so rare that they hardly ever come up for sale.

John Harrold became the official Rupert artist in the 1970s. He illustrated the cover of the 50th annual in 1985 with Rupert and all his friends, including Alfred Bestall. The annual contains a story from each of the previous five decades and Rupert is shown holding aloft a copy of the original annual. At around £15 it is a nice tribute to the Rupert annuals series.

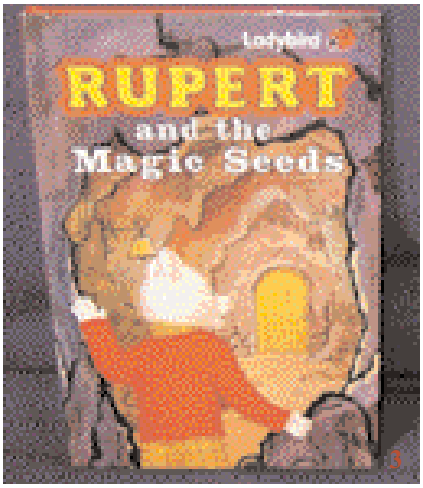
John Harrold brought humour and fine detail to the drawings, whilst continuing the tradition of including Rupert in every frame. He also introduced games pages and has had a successful partnership with writers John Henderson and Ian Robinson.

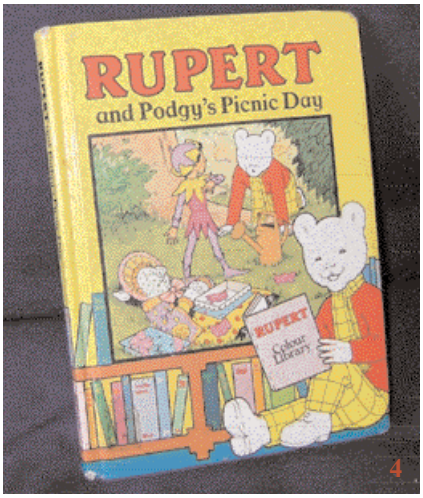
Rupert maintained a presence in the newspaper throughout the war, even though paper shortages had severely reduced its size. In 1942, paper stocks were so low that the annual had paper covers instead of board and a very restricted print run. This makes it one of the most difficult annuals to find today. One example was sold last month on eBay for £510, but the price has been known to rise to £750. Even a limited edition facsimile published in 1994 is now worth £120.

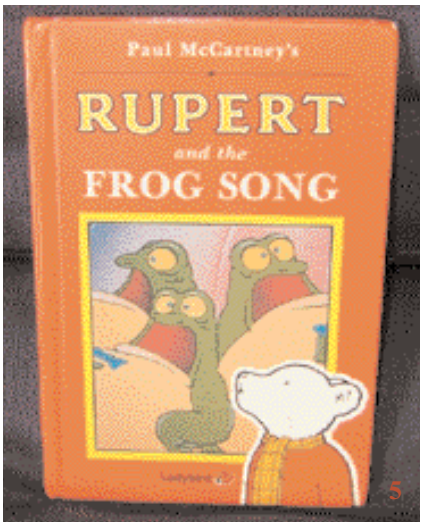
The prices of the other Rupert annuals are greatly affected by condition. Rupert annuals were well read by children who wrote their names at the front and filled in the magic painting pages. Early annuals from the thirties and forties are worth up to £150 in very good condition but only around £50 in poor condition. Those from the next two decades are worth between £10 and £68 whilst the more recent from the 1970s are £7 to £12.50.



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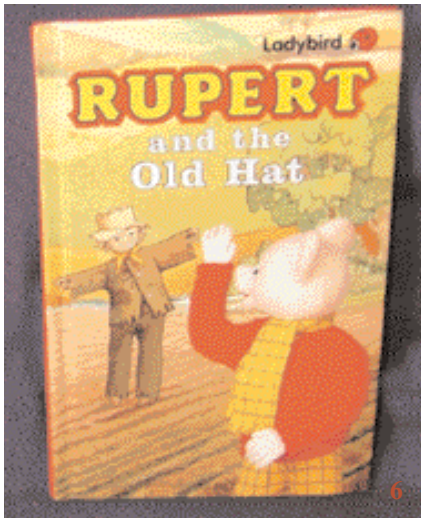


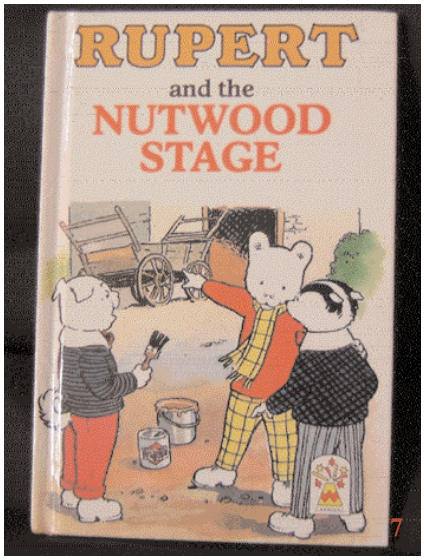


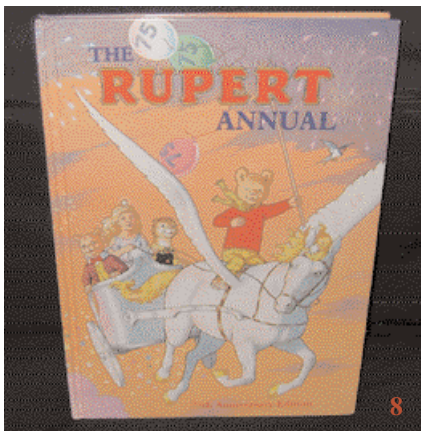
It was the endpapers of the 1958 annual, of a group of singing frogs, which inspired Sir Paul McCartney to produce 'Rupert and the Frog Song'. The Ladybird book with colour illustrations from his film, and the words and music for the song, was published in 1986 and is available today for £3 to £5.

A series of Ladybird books reproduced Alfred Bestall's original stories in 1989 and are widely available today, for between £3 and £5.

In the last two decades there have been many different types of Rupert books, including gardening, cookery and fun and games books. Publishers have included Purnell, Carnival, the BBC and Buzz Books. Mary Tourtel,







Alfred Bestall and John Harrold stories have all been reproduced. Examples of these books are all available from around £3 to £10.

In the early 1970s, a paperback comic containing two stories appeared. Originally priced 15p it would now cost £12 to £20. In 1983 Marvel Comics produced a 'Rupert Weekly' comic. It ran for a hundred issues then merged in 1984 with Storyland to become 'Rupert in Storyland', starting with issue number 26. The comic was no longer produced after 1985. Another Rupert comic was produced by Celebrity Publications in 1989, but it too had a brief life span of just one year. Individual issues of these comics can be found for £2 or £3.

1. (left to right)
***a**. Rupert and the Muddled Magic, one of the 12 Colour Library series published by Purnell, 1976 - 1977. **£4-£7**.*

***b**. Rupert annual 1981 designed by John Harrold. **£5-10**.*

***c**. Mary Tourtel stories reproduced by Marks and Spencer in 1981. **£4-£7**.*

***d**. Rupert annual 1973. The last cover designed by Bestall. **£8-£15**.*

***e**. Rupert annual 1972. **£5-£12**.*

2. Alfred Bestall illustrated Rupert books with stories such as these from 1935.

*4. 1987 Colour Library reprint of 1976/77 issue. **£3-£4**.*

*3. and 6. These Alfred Bestall stories were reproduced by Ladybird Books in 1989. **£3**.*

*5. Rupert and the Frog Song, published by Ladybird Books, 1986. **c£3**.*

*7. Rupert and the Nutwood Stage, published by Dragon Grafton books, 1986. **£3**.*

*8. Rupert annual 1975. **£8-£25**.*



Left: Recently written books based on Rupert, by Buzz Books, 1993-4.

Suppliers of Rupert books

Anglia Book Auctions
Many, many collectable books from all of the old favourites.
Tel: 01733 243895
Website: www.angliabookauctions.com.

'Stella and Rose's Books',
Monmouth Road, Tintern, Monmouthshire.
Over 1,500 Rupert books for sale.
Tel: 01291 689755
Website: www.antiqbook.co.uk.

'When We Were Young',
The Old Forge High Street, Harmondsworth Village, Middlesex.
Specialists in storybook collectables.
Tel: 0208 897 3583
Website: www.whenwewereyoung.co.uk.

'Comic Book Postal Auctions'
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