
Opening Extract from...

The Rupert Companion

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THE RUPERT COMPANION

A HISTORY OF RUPERT BEAR

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EGMONT

Flying to the 'land of the Kinkajous', 'Rupert's Mysterious Flight', 1929 (top); a Handley Page 'bombing machine' (left); travelling in a reindeer-drawn sleigh, 'Rupert and the Snowman', 1924 (right). Opposite: a series of six storybooks by Mary Tourtel, published in 1925 by Sampson Low, Marston and Co.

takes him to the 'land of the Kinkajous' (rainforest mammals originally from South America) where the novel sight of an aeroplane causes great commotion. Rupert is set a series of tasks by the Kinkajous' toucan king, who we recognise as the later bird king, given a new realm by Alfred Bestall. Once again, Rupert is helped by the Wise Old Goat, who locates him by means of a mysterious 'magic box', and sends a fairy on a soap bubble to bring Rupert safely home.

Although the story possessed traditional elements, Rupert's aeroplane introduced a remarkably modern dimension. In the 1920s, aviation was still in its infancy. Aeroplanes had been developed during the First World War, for reconnaissance and then as bombers. By the mid 1920s, converted planes, such as the Handley Page, were making regular journeys from London to Paris and Brussels. The *Daily Express* reported on these flights, with a *Sunday Express* 'special correspondent' giving an eye-witness account of a flight over London from Cricklewood in a Handley Page 'bombing machine'. Strange as it may seem, this could well have been Mary Tourtel. An enthusiastic flyer, she was aboard a record-breaking flight in 1919, in a Handley Page that flew from Hounslow Heath to Brussels in two hours and thirty-five minutes. *Flight* magazine described these pioneering craft in October 1919: 'Both the London–Paris and the London–Brussels machines used by the Handley Page Company are of the 0/400 type, modified, of course, to accommodate passengers instead of the "eggs" which this type used to lay on the Huns during the War. As many as eighteen people can be carried, fourteen inside the cabin and four outside. As used for the Paris and Brussels services, however, ten passengers are carried with their luggage . . . The passengers' cabin is comfortably fitted out, wicker seats being provided along each side. Through windows in the side of the cabin an excellent view is obtained of the country over which the machine is passing.' Aeroplanes were to feature in other Tourtel stories, such as 'Rupert and Dapple' (1933), where another medieval monarch sends Rupert and Mr Bear home in a 'special royal plane'.

Technology of a different kind made an early appearance in 'Rupert and the Snowman' (1924). When Rupert makes a Christmas wish, he and Bill fly on the back of a reindeer-drawn sleigh to Father Christmas' stores, together with a snowman they have built, who comes to life. After helping to pack toys into Father Christmas's sack, Rupert returns home and goes to sleep. The next day, he finds a surprise waiting at the foot of his bed:

When Christmas morning comes
at last,
Rupert wonders what he'll find.
Oh joy! There is a wireless set,
And of the newest kind.

He sprang up from his bed at once
to try the head-phones on.
'Oh, Father Christmas, thanks,'
he said,
'For such a lovely one.'

The next story to appear in the *Daily Express*, 'Rupert and Bingo' (1924–25), begins with Mr Bear putting up an aerial for the new radio set. The family listen to an evening broadcast and discover the identity of a stray dog that Rupert has befriended:

That evening Rupert listened-in,
Mummy and Daddy too,
To all the music, tales and news.
Then came a message through–

'Stolen or strayed, a collie dog;
If found, please write straightway'
An address they gave, and said
they'd fetch
Their dog without delay.

The first advertised radio broadcast in Britain was in 1920, featuring a song recital by the Australian soprano Dame Nellie Melba. In November 1922, the BBC launched the first daily radio service. The Bear family were clearly 'early adopters' and Father's Christmas' present represented cutting-edge technology.

Even more advanced was the Wise Old Goat's magic box. This device, which looks a bit like a light-box, was used in several stories to locate Rupert when he had gone missing: in 'Rupert's Mysterious Flight', the magic box is employed to find Rupert in the land of the Kinkajous; in 'Rupert and Prince Humpty-Dumpty' (1931), it reveals he is being held as a playmate for the unfortunate prince; while in 'Rupert and the Magician's Umbrella' (1934), it shows Rupert being held prisoner in a dark cellar. Plugged into the mains, the magic box clearly transmits a picture of some kind – familiar enough to us, in the age of the webcam, but revolutionary coming only three years after John Logie Baird first demonstrated a prototype television at the Royal Institution. Commercial broadcasts were not to start in Britain until 1932, and televisions were not widely available until after the Second World War.

Another sign of how changes in Mary Tourtel's world filtered through into that of her creation is the way in which horse-drawn carriages and carts gradually gave way to cars. In 'Rupert's Seaside Holiday' (1924), the Bears travel to Shrimpton Sands by train, but during the holiday Mr Bear hires a car (complete with a chauffeur in a peaked cap) to take them all to Mermaid Cove. At the end of the trip, they go back to the railway station in a horse-drawn cab. A horse-drawn buggy also takes Rupert from the station to Shrimpton Sands when he stays there as a guest of Margot's grandmother in

'Rupert and Bingo', 1925, showing the Bear family with their new radio set. Opposite: the Wise Old Goat consults his magic box, 'Rupert's Mysterious Flight', 1929; Rupert and his chums ask a motorist for help, 'Rupert Goes Hiking', 1932 (bottom).

such as 'Rupert and the River Rogues' (1989) and 'Rupert and the Stolen Snowmen' (1989–90). The artwork was coloured by Doris Campbell, who I went to meet in her Bournemouth home, delivering black-and-white frames and taking away completed stories. It was fascinating to talk to someone who had worked so closely with Alfred Bestall and who was largely responsible for the subtle and distinctive colours that had distinguished the Rupert Annual for so many years. She had a good working relationship with John Harrold, who would send her detailed notes on any new characters – agreeing costume details in advance, for example, so that the cover and inside colour schemes would match. Besides colouring Rupert, Campbell was a keen miniaturist, and produced exquisite framed likenesses of Napoleon and Elizabethan courtiers. She still enjoyed colouring work but found the Annual deadlines quite demanding. Although she coloured the 1992 Rupert Annual, by 1993 she had decided to retire and we turned instead to Gina Hart.

The 1992 Annual was the first book to contain my own stories. 'Rupert and the Falling Leaf' (1990) was particularly fun to work on, with John Harrold bringing some wonderful characterisation to the Balloonist, and some nice humour to 'Rupert and the Missing Snow' (1990–91), where Uncle Polar helps Rupert restore the North Pole. In terms of production, the book marked a significant departure from the Annuals of the Henderson years. These had been published by the *Daily Express* books department but produced by the Norfolk printers Jarrolds. They had effectively packaged the book for us, assembling colour artwork and attending to pre-press work on site. After Frank Parker's retirement, the new books' manager, Sue McGeever, took a more hands-on approach, and we started to assemble the artwork ourselves, delivering 'camera-ready' copy to the printer. The publishing arrangements changed too, as the *Daily Express* licensed the Annual for the first time. It was still under our editorial control, but the ultimate publisher became Pedigree Books.

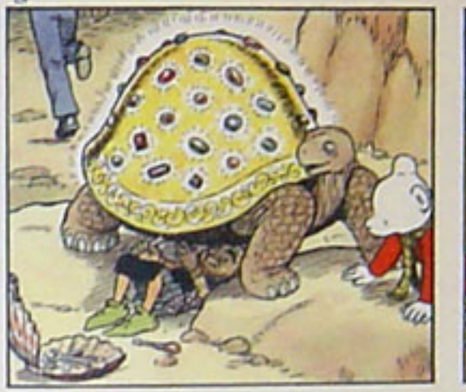
Relinquishing direct responsibility for distribution and sales seemed a big step at the time, but it was really a recognition of the changing nature of children's annual publishing. Fewer sales came through the news trade each year, and supermarket sales were increasingly important, together with booksellers, such as Waterstones and WH Smith. Possessing a stable of other characters and a dedicated sales team, Pedigree was far better placed to distribute the Rupert Annual in this market. Returns were drastically reduced, and sales stabilised. Pedigree's owner, Jerry Reynolds, took a keen interest in Rupert, but gave me a free hand in the selection of stories and the content of the book. He was delighted with John Harrold's artwork, if somewhat frustrated at having to wait for new cover artwork while John finished off a story for the *Daily Express*.

By the time the 1993 Rupert Annual was produced, Gina Hart had joined Doris Campbell in colouring stories. She was an experienced artist who had previously

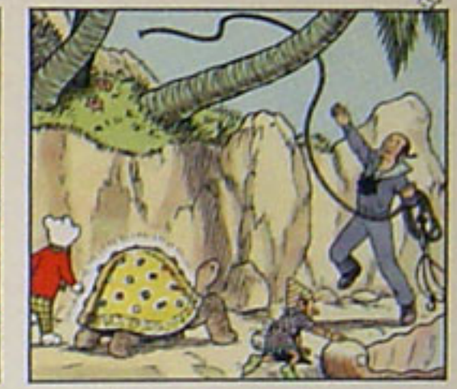
John Harrold, whose first story, 'Rupert and the Worried Elves', was published in the *Daily Express* on 14 October 1976. Opposite: 'Rupert and Old Tom's Trove', Rupert Annual, 1987; it was the first Rupert Annual to feature only John Harrold's artwork.

Rupert and Old Tom's Trove

RUPERT SEES THE HERMIT FREED



Says Sam, "I'll go and fetch some rope.
"There's some left in my boat, I hope."



"If that great load we're going to shift
I'll have to rig some sort of lift."

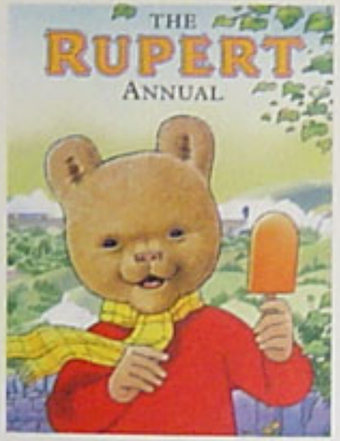
The Hermit gasps, "At last I'm free!
You can't think what it's like for me!"

Zig says, "All pirate loot must go
To Old King Neptune down below."

it is hard to pick out favourites, but the silvery sequences from 'Rupert and the Harvest Moon' (2000 Annual), the night skies of 'Rupert and the Star Gazer' (1995 Annual) and the surreal world of Chalk Town in 'Rupert and the Magic Chalk' (1997 Annual) are certainly on my list.

In 1985, the *Daily Express* celebrated Rupert's sixty-fifth anniversary, and the fiftieth Rupert Annual, by producing an exact facsimile of the 1936 Rupert Annual. This was printed on thick, matt paper, just like the original, and came in a dust-jacket reproducing Bestall's first cover illustration with the first red-jumpered, yellow-trousered Rupert. A great success with collectors, this was followed by other facsimiles at regular intervals. There have been gaps along the way, but the series is still being produced. The appeal of these books shows how collectable Rupert has become in recent years, but sales of the main children's Rupert Annual far exceeds nostalgic memorabilia and encourages the thought that the Rupert Annual may continue for many years to come.

My active involvement in Rupert ended abruptly in 2001, when the *Daily Express* was sold and a new owner took over. New stories stopped appearing in the newspaper, and eventually the backlog of work that had not been anthologised ran out. A new chapter began in 2008, however, with Stuart Trotter's Rupert Annuals, produced entirely from scratch with stories that have never appeared in the *Daily Express* – which continues to rerun Alfred Bestall stories from the 1950s. The new Annuals ensure Rupert's continued presence, but they are a far cry from the glory days of the Rupert League or the million plus print run of Bestall's heyday. Perhaps no children's character today can hope to match those peaks. The world of Nutwood is a long way from that of the Internet, iPods and twenty-four-hour television. Rupert books continue to sell, however, and to children encountering Rupert for the first time, any comparison with the past is largely irrelevant. I hope they enjoy the new stories as much as their parents and grandparents enjoyed the stories of their youth.



The cover of the Rupert Annual, 2007, drawn by Stuart Trotter. Opposite: silvery sequences from 'Rupert and the Harvest Moon', Rupert Annual, 2000 (top and middle); the enchanting night skies of 'Rupert and the Star Gazer', Rupert Annual, 1997.