

PEOPLE & PLACES

Rupert Bear and Victorian Toys



Mary Tourtel (1874-1948) and the creation of Rupert (1920-35)

Mary Caldwell was born at 52 Palace Street, Canterbury in 1874. She was part of a talented family: her father and brother were stained glass restorers at Canterbury Cathedral, and another brother was a children's illustrator.

Mary studied in Canterbury: first at Simon Langton School for Girls and then the Sidney Cooper School of Art where she won awards and was tutored by Thomas Sidney Cooper whose works are featured in the Garden Room of the Beaney House of Art & Knowledge.

She went on to study at the Royal College of Art, where she met Herbert Tourtel, who she married in 1900. Herbert worked for the *Daily Express*, and it was through him that she came to create Rupert in November 1920 for the newspaper (at the foot of the women's page). The story continued over 36 issues of the paper and was then issued as the first Rupert book by the publishers Thomas Nelson in 1921.

Rupert's adventures with friends Bill Badger, Algy Pug, Edward Trunk, Podgy Pig and the Wise Old Goat were a series of cliffhangers to keep young readers in suspense, waiting for the next day's paper.

In the 1930s the *Express* started a fan club, The Rupert League, and at one point was spending £3,000 per week just on staff replying to children's letters.

Mary produced her last story in 1935, having contributed over 3,500 Rupert pictures and at least 87 stories. She died in Canterbury Hospital in 1948, aged 74.

Animal books for children had already featured largely in Mary's early career as an illustrator. Her first publications *A Horse Book* and *Three Little Foxes*

appeared in 1897 when she was only 23. (*The Rabbit Book, Humpty Dumpty* and *Old King Cole* are other examples of her early work.) A handkerchief book *When Animals Work* was published in 1919. A bear, very similar to Rupert was one of the characters.

Rupert's Rivals!

Teddy Tail (a mouse) drawn by Charles Folkard for the *Daily Mail*, first appeared in April 1915 as part of a circulation war in the British press, who wanted to recruit child readers to boost their sales figures. In 1919 the *Daily Mirror* responded with Pip, Squeak and Wilfred created by locals author Bertram J Lamb (Uncle Dick) and artist Austin B Payne.

The earliest Rupert storybooks (from the 1920s) were written and illustrated by Mary Tourtel. They include *Adventures of the Little Lost Bear, Rupert and the Old Miser* and *Rupert and the Princess*. *The Little Lost Bear* was the very first Rupert book, reprinting material from the *Daily Express* stories of November and December 1920 and published by Nelson in 1921.

The *Monster Rupert series, the Rupert Story Book* and *The New Rupert Colour Adventure Book* were published after Mary Tourtel's death in the late 1940s and 1950s.

Alfred Bestall MBE (1892 -1986) and Rupert's colour-filled career(1935-65)

The New Adventures of Rupert published in the autumn of 1936 was the first full-colour Rupert Annual and was an enormous success. Its creator Alfred Bestall contributed material to it for 40 years, latterly with the assistance of Enid Ash, Alex Cubie, Doris Campbell and Lucy Matthews.

Rupert's first colour scheme was a blue jumper and grey scarf, but as colour printing improved he was shown in bright red and yellow (originally Bill Badger's clothes).

Such was the importance of Rupert to national morale in World War Two, that he almost always continued to appear, even when paper rationing reduced the *Daily Express* to a single sheet.

Rupert and origami

Stories by Alfred Bestall often took Rupert on adventures to exotic locations. An oriental scene with pagodas was used as the endpaper for the 1969 Rupert Annual. Alfred Bestall introduced origami (paper folding) to the annuals. The paper fold usually appeared in one of the stories.

Rupert abroad!

Rupert was translated into many other languages including Portuguese (as *Rukas*) and French (as *Rupert L'Ours*) and also appeared abroad untranslated to help teach English as a foreign language!

Rupert was first published as *Bruintje Beer* in a Dutch national newspaper in 1929 (after much haggling over the fee, as Herbert Tourtel's rhymes didn't easily translate into Dutch!). He eventually appeared in three other papers and in books from 1930 onwards in Holland.

Brown bear to white bear

The traditional brown Rupert head on the annual covers was altered to a white head in 1973 without the approval of the illustrator Alfred Bestall. He was so upset that some proof copies with Rupert's face, hands and boots in the original brown were produced to appease him. It was Bestall's last Rupert cover.

Alex Cubie (1911-95)

The job of producing Rupert stories passed from Alfred Bestall to Alex Cubie in 1965. He was a former cartoon film animator with Rank Studios so he brought more variety to frames.

John Harrold (b. 1947)

As Alex Cubie approached retirement one of the young artists on the team, John Harrold, emerged as a successor and worked through from the 1970s, and was the official Rupert artist for over 30 years. He had trained at Glasgow School of Art and soon stamped his own style on the drawings, blending humour with outstanding line drawings, and introducing unusual shapes to the page designs and new characters to the stories. Often other artists on the team were employed to colour the drawings, for example Gina Hart.

It was in this period that the enthusiasts' group The Followers of Rupert was formed (in 1983) - they describe themselves as not over-serious, but an organisation with a largely adult membership.

Stuart Trotter

Rupert's artist is now Stuart Trotter, a Rupert enthusiast and an experienced children's illustrator/storyteller who has illustrated Postman Pat, Winnie the Pooh, Kipper and Thomas the Tank Engine. He is developing his own style of Rupert artwork, based on that of his hero Alfred Bestall, and has been the official Rupert artist since 2008 when he illustrated his first Rupert annual.

Rupert memorabilia

Many Rupert spinoffs have been produced over the years from slippers to badges, and including items aimed at the adult market - the collectable china was donated to Canterbury Museums & Galleries by the makers Royal Doulton.

Rupert and the Frog Song

Sir Paul McCartney's BAFTA award-winning video *Rupert and the Frog Song* was inspired by an illustration in the 1958 Rupert Annual. It was released in December 1984 and at the time became the second most successful video ever (it was only outsold at the time by Michael Jackson). To accompany it, the song *We All Stand Together* was arranged by Beatles A&R man George Martin, reaching number three in the charts.

Famous Rupert fans!

Paul McCartney wrote:

For the British, Rupert is an institution - like the Queen, Britain just wouldn't be the same without him.

As a boy I always turned to the Rupert column in my parent's Daily Express and was particularly fond of the Rupert Christmas annuals. I rediscovered him in the 1970s when I started reading bedtime stories to our eldest daughter Heather.

I think of Rupert as an 11-year-old boy - I don't know why. I've got a little phrase that I associate with him: 'It can be done!'. I feel that is always his attitude. He is very positive and has that spark of optimism combined with a certain innocence which makes it great to set horrors and dangers against him.

Monty Python's Terry Jones wrote:

As a child, the world of Alfred Bestall's Rupert Bear books often seemed more real to me than the real world did. It was certainly a world I wanted to inhabit: kind, secure and yet exciting. Rupert has many chums and you feel there is a lot of goodness in the air.

Early toys from the Canterbury Museums & Galleries collection

These toys mostly date back to the Victorian period - some possibly to the Edwardian period.

The **mechanical doll** stands on a 3-wheeled trolley with a wind-up mechanism underneath. As the wheels turn, her head turns and she lifts her arm. She has a china head and hands, and her hair is probably human. She is dressed in a blue over-mantle trimmed with lace, worn over a red and white striped skirt and stockings. She wears a little metal cross on a ribbon round her neck.

She is believed to be an A,B&C Company mechanical doll made by A Theroude (1842-95).

She was donated by Miss Watkins of Whitstable, who played with her in the late 1800s.

The lovely **Noah's Ark** is made of wood and decorated with coloured cut straw. All the animals are hand carved from wood and painted to traditional designs: as a result they have great individual character. Some of them are shown here - the rest live inside the ark, whose main body lifts off. The toy is German, dating back to about 1840, and was donated by Mrs Athol Jackson of Kingsgate Castle in Kent.

The **Boys Brigade 1st Company membership card** belonged to Alfred Johnson for the 1899 to 1900 session. (Unfortunately, his age is not recorded.) We do know that to be members, boys had to be over the age of 13, of good character and regular attenders at Sunday School. It was a very military-style organisation: they wore uniform, obeyed officers' orders, practised drill exercises and those that were in the band weren't allowed to join any others. The joining fee was one shilling (closer to £15 in today's money).

All the other toys are metal: the sawing man and Punch and Judy are automata (so a lever or handle made the figures move), and the wheels on the tin carriage, cart and cars all go round. The dog and frog are probably made of lead - and none of these toys would pass current safety standards!



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