

**ALFRED BESTALL, RUPERT AND ME
1936-1945**

Chris Bryant

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For Caroline

Best of Daughters,
Quondam Rupert Fan and Bringer of Pies

1. INTRODUCTION

It is June 2020. At the age of 84, with a sigh of relief, I send to the publishers the final typescript of a book on evolution, my professional swansong (Bryant and Brown, 2021). Covid-19 is changing everyone's life so my wife and I have to deal with lockdown and social distancing. I am recovering from a back operation that limits my mobility even more than the virus. In enforced and, therefore, virtuous idleness, I cast around for a project (nonprofessional) to feed my decades old writing addiction.

Inspiration comes when I remember a young student who, rather cheekily, asked me if I could give her a list of the books that had had the most influence on my life as an academic biologist. I compiled a long list, and she went away satisfied, but the first entry only concerns us here. It was:

Rupert Bear Annuals (1936-1945) by Alfred Bestall.

I was born in 1936, the year of the first Bestall Annual. By the time I was beginning to read, Rupert Annuals had become part of my life. Four had already been published and the rest turned up regularly at Christmas.

Why did I cite all ten Annuals? It was because, at the time I was asked the question, I could not remember one that I felt was more influential than any of the other nine. Alfred Bestall's imagined landscape had permeated my life. In many small ways, as well as a couple of large ones, he changed the way I lived it. Although I never actually met him, at one stage in our lives, we were probably less than a mile apart as the Express Office in Fleet Street was just down the road from King's College in the Strand, where I spent several years. The present work explains my relationship with Bestall's artistry and his imagined Rupert and how my life was subtly moulded by them both. I had a lot of enjoyment from this task and, having done the writing, I offer it to you, dear reader, because it seems a pity to waste it. In what follows I have used Bestall (B) numbers, where I can, to help identify the stories.

One of my very earliest memories is looking at the pictures in a Rupert Annual. It must have been 1940-41, the period of the 'phony war' in Britain because, unlike the four earlier Annuals, this Rupert book is fully coloured. In those memories, it is early evening and England is bright with the sunlight of 'double summertime' that was introduced for the duration of the war. There are still three or four hours of daylight left, but I am in my pyjamas because I have gone to bed early in order to 'read'. In fact, bribing me with time to read was the standard way of getting me upstairs to bed without complaint. I am flat on my stomach on my bed under the window, turning the pages of my book. The sun is setting behind the houses across the road. The deeply golden sunset has the effect of making the coloured pages vivid, so vivid that they have glowed in my mind for almost eighty years.

I never owned the first four Annuals but I was lucky because Edith, one of the two little girls who lived next door, had them all. Edith was several years

older than me. The other, Hildegarde, was my age so we often played together and if Edith were available she was put in charge. She took her duties seriously. Not until she was sure I wouldn't spread jam on her beloved books would she let me look at them unsupervised. She also taught me NEVER to turn down the corner of a page as a bookmark, and NEVER to write in the margins. One consequence of this came 70 years later. When Anne and I 'downsized' to a smaller house, I sent a couple of thousand almost pristine books to a deserving charity!

The author, seated, in his first school uniform about 1941. On the left of the photo is Edith, Rupert Librarian Extraordinaire and on the right her sister Hildegarde

When Edith was satisfied that I was properly book-trained she let me take them home for an overnight loan. She was also very generous with her stock of yellow-covered Mary Tourtel books, that depicted a Rupert scuttling across a landscape populated by threatening characters from the early Middle Ages, -ogres and giants, witches and wizards -who would not have been out of place in the tales of the Brothers Grimm. I read each of them once but rarely went back to them because their evil characters haunted my nightmares. No, Ms Tourtel did not do much for me, but I was a Bestall fan from the first page of his I that looked at. I am sure Edith, and probably Hildegarde, felt the same.



2. WHERE IS NUTWOOD?

I expect that all children who are early captivated by Alfred Bestall's stories try to find Nutwood and I was no exception. I lived in a 1930s housing development on the edge of Stanmore. The remembered Stanmore of my childhood has never existed in reality, though I see it clearly enough in my mind's eye, in colours as bright as those of Alfred Bestall's Nutwood. As the years went by, other authors attracted me and memories are complicated by the contributions of Enid Blyton and Malcolm Saville. Arthur Ransome added his two penn'orth but the effort of squeezing Lake Windermere into my world view nearly defeated me. But I had imagination to spare and, in the end, I made do with the Stanmore Spring Ponds for my toy yacht.

The Spring Ponds at Stanmore about 1950. Modern Stanmore is quite urbanised, but still an attractive town.



An actual, rural Stanmore had existed, of course, but was beginning to disappear with the pre-war expansion of the London suburbs. Development was on hold for the duration of the War, so I was privileged to see the last of the old Stanmore. Cars were mothballed and raised on blocks in garages for the duration. With very little traffic on the road, even at the early age of five I was allowed a lot of freedom to play with other children who had been told to keep an eye on me. The magical summers were full of personal discoveries while the few winters that have lingered in my very selective memory are either associated with snow falls and the festivities of Christmas or the miseries of winter ills. Summer days, however, seem to have been both numerous and endless, hours of playing in parks and meadows not yet overwhelmed by suburbia. There was still a Common, a Heath not too far away and streams and ponds were, pre-pollution, teeming with wildlife

It was the time of the last renaissance of the cart horse. There was a dairy farm just down the road that sent out a horse-drawn milk delivery cart. The baker and the coalman also delivered their goods by horse drawn wagon and the Rag-a-Bone man, named for his call, collected junk in one. All very Nutwood. There was a railway branch line with three stations and one passenger train with two carriages. It was drawn by what I thought of as a magnificent LMS steam engine -we called it the Belmont Rattler -but it was actually a 67-ton Stanier Class push-me pull-you work horse.

The Belmont Rattler

We had access to the line because, as the figure shows, after Belmont the train crossed an undeveloped and overgrown site used as a prewar builders' yard. We used to put ha'pennies on the rail to be squashed into 'pennies' by the wheels of the passing locomotive. The driver used to wave at us -or perhaps shake his fist. These are the sorts of things Alfred Bestall might have remembered from his own childhood, so it was a link, if a tenuous one.

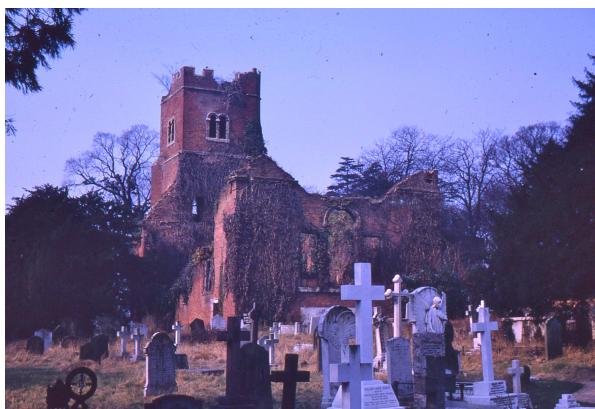


Belmont Station after the Beeching cuts, looking towards Stanmore

From the time I was six, I was allowed to go to school by myself (only 0.5k) and at weekends I was allowed to rove further afield as far as a small stream, inches deep, where there were newts to be caught, examined and released. I was sure my village was a neighbour of Nutwood. I tried to map Nutwood on my mental plan of the area and almost convinced myself I had seen glimpses of it.

We are told that Bestall spent much of his time in North Wales, in Beddgelert, and was much influenced by the country around (Bott, 2003). Much later, I had thought Nutwood might have been further south and east than that, in the Cotswolds, because of the thatched roofs and abundance of grand houses, ruined castles and at least one knocked about abbey. Or -here I drew long bow -even Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

There were big houses in Stanmore, too, Bentley Priory and Cannons and a very satisfactory red brick ruin of old St John's Church (c1300AD) that, while not a ruined abbey bore a resemblance to one that had been drawn by Alfred Bestall. At the time of which I am writing, I had had no difficulty in convincing myself that Nutwood lay near Stanmore, perhaps past Clamp Hill and on along an ancient track, now a road, called Old Redding, beyond the 2000-year-old Grim's Dyke.



Old St John's Church Stanmore

Much later still, when I was older and wiser, I cycled there just to make sure that I had been imagining it. It wasn't there: perhaps, like the fabled Scottish village of Brigadoon, it only manifested itself at long intervals?

So where is Nutwood? The answer to that is nowhere and everywhere; for adults it is now more of a meme than anything else, sitting at the backs of our minds and very slightly modifying our view of the world. Memes can be very influential. During my career I must have lectured to several thousand undergraduates. Every one of my lectures was prepared by a mind unconsciously nuanced by the work of Alfred Bestall. But this is trivial compared with Sir Paul McCartney. A self-confessed Follower, his music has reached millions of people in his lifetime and a tiny part of his influence will have derived from the processed memories of his childhood and his encounters with Rupert.

3. WHO WERE THESE MYSTERY MEN?

I read and reread those early Rupert Annuals to which I had access and the later ones that were beginning to appear at Christmas. I fell in love with the

exotic characters that were to be found in and around Nutwood. I became a Follower of Rupert in the Daily Express. At my mother's suggestion I cut out each daily panel and assiduously glued it into a scrapbook that she provided. Woe betide anyone who lit the living room fire before I had got to the paper with my scissors. I only knew that the war had really come to end when the Daily Express published two panels each day instead of one.

I knew I could never aspire to being Rupert but what of the other characters in the stories? The inhabitants of Nutwood divide naturally into three groups.

The first group are background characters, always available in Nutwood to advance a story, but who rarely have a great role to play, such as Barbara and Barbara's grandmother, Mr Anteater, Gaffer Jarge or the occasional farmer.

Second there are those who are his friends, who have a role in the story, such as Bill Badger, Algy Pug, Constable Growler and the Professor, called the Inventor or the Master in some earlier stories, and his Dwarf, who is unnaturally strong. (This echo of the traditional mad scientist's Igor may be a hang-over from Mary Tourtel's more threatening mediaeval landscapes in which the little bear wandered. Later, with greater political correctness, the Dwarf is referred to as the Professor's Assistant and later still as Bodkin). The Professor and Bodkin live in a perfect Norman stone keep, or round tower, and produce a string of inventions that often form the basis of an uncomfortable -and even terrifying -Rupert adventure. I hankered after being like the Professor.

The third group are characters imported from wherever Bestall's creative mind chooses to take them -from a period in history, say, or from a contemporary but far away country. He is not above seeking his inspiration in fantastical imaginings such as King Frost's realm and the Kingdom of the Birds.

Many stories stand out in my mind but there are two of special significance. They are Rupert and the Mystery Pond (1941 B45) and Rupert and the Iceberg (1940 B33). It is not carelessness that makes me put the earlier story later and you will soon see why. In the first, Rupert discovers a strange gentleman in 17th century garb carrying an oddly shaped walking stick. He has sprained his ankle while searching for the origin of the water that continuously fills a small pond. Rupert and Bill Badger solve the puzzle of the stick, and Rupert finds the underground stream that is the source. The second story opens with Rupert helping an old man, with a long white beard and a black Victorian frock coat, climb out of a lake. He has fallen in while attempting to net a rare species of water weed. The old man is called the Collector and is capable, it appears, of quite a turn of speed because of the urgency of getting his water weed home before it dries out. He is also an accomplished pilot and later in the story takes Rupert to the Arctic to see his Uncle Polar while on another collecting expedition.

It is Christmas 1946, and I am now 10 years old. My parents have given me a set of the Children's Encyclopedia. Idly turning the pages one day I came

across a print of a man in a costume and big wig, very like those of the man with the strange stick in the story of the mysterious pond. I found this curious, so I read on. I discovered that the man in the print was Sir Hans Sloane who was a physician and antiquary. His name is now given to the famous London Square and his personal collection of antiquities form the basis of the British Museum collection. Could Rupert's friend and Sir Hans be the same man?

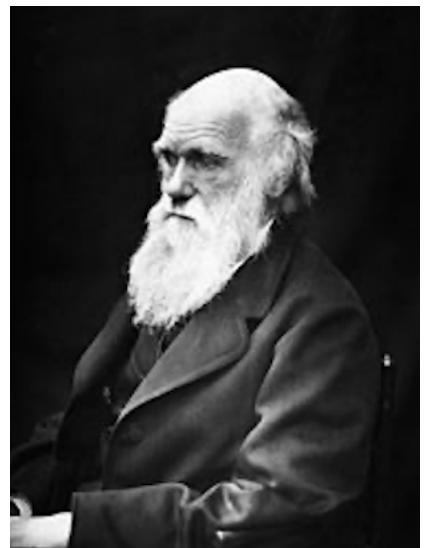
Sir Hans Sloane -the Antiquary?



My next discovery, some time later, was a photo of an old, balding man in black Victorian garb and sporting a long white beard. It was the Collector!
Was Alfred Bestall writing about real people? By now I had got accustomed to Rupert's habit of slipping into little bubbles of history, so I found nothing anachronistic about him having adventures with Sir Hans or with Charles

Darwin. Perhaps Bestall used these men as models for his characters, perhaps not, but I was motivated to read everything I could find about them, their lives and works. As a result of Bestall's art, I became fascinated by palaeontology, archaeology and biology and remain so to this day.

It also explains why the Children's Encyclopedia is next, after Rupert, on my book list



Charles Darwin - the Collector?

4. RUPERT IS NOT A KOALA!

I thought that I was having a normal childhood -against a background of war, rationing and the Blitz! My family were lucky -no one was killed although the favourite uncle was wounded. Towards the end there were Buzz Bombs and a V2 rocket that made its presence felt to me on March 22, 1945 (wrsonline.co.uk). It fell 50m away, but most of the blast was taken by the house next door. Edith, her family and her Rupert books were safe in a shelter. My own Rupert Annuals also accompanied me to the shelters during the air raids. The comfort and pleasure and reassurance I got from

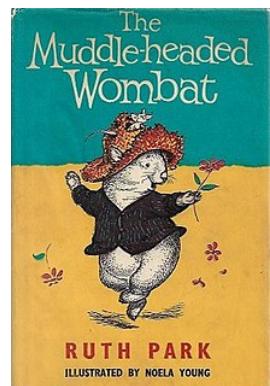
them in those difficult times was immeasurable.

I went to a primary school, which I loved, and then was cruelly snatched away to attend a crammer in Harrow, where I became something of a scholastic whizz-kid. I grew out of Rupert, won the much hoped for scholarship to a Public School that promptly disabused me of any ideas I might have of continuing to be a whizz-kid by putting me in a class with 29 others just like me. The Public School gave me a brilliant education while neglecting my social skills. I became a science nerd and went on to University. During the final year of my PhD in 1961, I met and, to my surprise and delight, married Anne, a tall, elegant, funny and totally socialised Australian nurse. Fast forward to 1968.

Now happily married, we lived in Canberra with a son and a daughter. As our children grew, Anne and I drew on our own early lives to make sure that the childhoods of our children were as fulfilling as our own had been. Anne was only distantly aware of Rupert, having grown up in Australia where the children's early classics include Blinky Bill (a Koala, who first appeared in a book in 1933 and has his own stamp) and The Muddle-Headed Wombat. These are all, appropriately, set in an Australian landscape.

Rupert Annuals were almost unobtainable in Australia. I suggested to my parents that they include a Rupert Annual in their Christmas gift parcel to the children, and they did so for some years. The books were received with 'modified rapture' by our children and I was, quite irrationally I realise, disappointed when they politely read them and enjoyed them -and then moved on. Nutwood held little relevance for them; their territory was Canberra, the Bush Capital of Australia, and the bush was teeming with life very different from that found in the English countryside. I realised at last, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, that we were 'not in Kansas anymore' and Rupert was not a marsupial!

The final blow was much later delivered by our youngest grandson when he was 18 years old. He was familiar with the Rupert Annuals that his father and aunt had received in their Christmas Stockings forty years earlier, although he had never owned one of his own - he preferred Asterix and Tin-Tin. "They're terrible! (of the Rupert Annuals) The stuff of nightmares!" he said, "a small boy with the head of a bear running around, making friends and having adventures with other animal-headed people! What were they thinking!"



5. RUPERT AS SUPER-HERO

What indeed were they thinking!

It was a revelation. I realised I had never thought of Rupert as a boy. But then, I do not think I ever thought of him as a bear. In fact, I must confess that his furry images on the covers of the Annuals always made me slightly uneasy. The heads seemed wrong somehow, out of proportion to the rest of him. Rupert Bear was a unique entity created to carry fascinating stories. He was the soul of the book, its *raison d'être* and that was enough for me. Rupert had so much more concern for others, and was possessed of more skills, initiative and courage, and was more adventurous than any boy I knew, especially including myself. He was also a suicidal risk-taker, jumping into a subterranean river in *The Mystery Pond*, (1941 B45) at the behest of a large green frog (that looks as if it was really a toad), often acting as a guinea pig to test a new invention for the Professor (*Rupert and the Snow Machine*, 1937 B14). He once magicked himself into an unknown limbo in a search for his lost pals (*Rupert in Mysteryland*, 1938 B26)! This was not a boy this was an archetypal superhero for children! And to add to his non-boyness and the mystery of his own origins, he frequently disappeared from home for quite long periods and his parents were only slightly disconcerted!

A major difference between Rupert and a super-hero is that one of the basic qualifications of a super-hero of the modern idiom appears to be an early, painful personal crisis. If you look up Super-Hero debuts on the internet you will find a list going back to Spring-Heel Jack in the middle of the 19th century. Modern, adult, more famous super-heroes have personal disasters and shameful secrets in their pasts that directly influence their super-presents. Superman is an alien exile from an exploded planet; Spiderman was a sickly teenager bitten by a radioactive spider; the Incredible Hulk was a wimpy (and careless) physicist who accidentally became irradiated with gamma rays; Captain Marvel is an alien; Batman witnessed the murder of his parents; and the Lone Ranger is the sole survivor of a group of Texas Rangers ambushed by outlaws. The Little Bear has no such disasters in his early days, unless you count being forced to wander in Tourtel's Grimm-like landscapes before being rescued by Bestall.

No, there is no evidence of trauma or alien birth in the Bear's early life. Possession of a mother and father who evidently belong to the English middle-class -because Uncle Bruno, Mrs Bear's brother, is a doctor -suggests he arrived in this world as a normal mammalian birth without alien interference. The small cottage where he and his family live is thatched and was quite likely the converted cottage of a farm worker.

6. RUPERT IS A VERY ENGLISH BEAR

How was it that Alfred Bestall's work held such an appeal for me and my generation and subsequent generations? First and foremost is its Englishness and its portrayal of English landscapes. Nutwood could be almost anywhere in the south of England -except it has doors into other universes and other times. You might follow Rupert to find him in the Kingdom of The Birds or discoursing with medieval or renaissance characters. Space is somehow warped so that he might travel from Nutwood to Afghanistan or China or the South Sea Islands or lose himself in the

illusions of Mysteryland. These worlds are richly populated with fascinating beings; nineteenth century pedlars, Chinese magicians and conjurors, Sultans from the mysterious east, and exotic avifauna, all drawn with exquisite detail.

Second, this is done by Bestall with the great artistic ability that is well recorded and discussed elsewhere (Perry, 1985 and Bott, 2003). His depiction of the countryside around the fictitious Nutwood combines impressionist, evocative landscapes that contrast with the finely detailed inhabitants. The illustrations, four to a page, create luminous images in the mind of an adult reader, let alone the impressionable mind of a small child. Like an earlier commentator, some of those images from 80 years ago still burn brightly in my mind, and to come upon the original after all this time is a shock, although a pleasant one. They have sometimes been modified by memory. For example, in *Rupert and the Piper* (1943 B55) my memory has inverted at least one image. I would have been ready to swear, on oath, that the giant hand that threw Rupert and his parachute over the Piper's tower was depicted as throwing from the right of the picture to left. In fact, it was the other way around. None the less, I have near perfect recall of the details of the fingers. Indeed, for me, even after nearly eighty years this one picture is sufficient to bring back vivid memories of a long-gone Christmas.

One of Bestall's great strengths was in drawing Rupert. The little bear is always depicted in natural poses, on the corners of the pages of the books as well in the main text. I spent hours trying match the figures of Rupert on the page corners with a similar figure somewhere in the book. The illustrations are dynamic; each successive image advances the action. Indeed, in these days of Artificial Intelligence, it would be possible to line up the pictures of any story and ask a computer to create intermediate images and connect them in succession, thus creating a movie. With his touch of genius, Bestall equips the little bear with a full suite of facial expressions, by minute adjustments to the few black lines and dots that form his features. I am in complete agreement with an earlier writer who argues that *Rupert Annuals* are not comics, though they bear a distant relationship to them. They have evolved beyond the child's comic; perhaps they are proto 'graphic' novels, in which the images carry the narrative -except that Rupert's narratives are more complex, for they are fourfold, carried by page headlines, rhyming couplets, plain text and images.

This four-tier narration sets them apart from all others. At first, when I was very young, I just looked at the pictures and when I could persuade her my mother would read the headline on each page to me and I would carefully scrutinise the page to try to understand what was happening. When I learned to read, I soon got fed up with headlines, and switched to the rhyming couplets. In a surprisingly short time, I got fed up with those and found myself reading the narrative at the bottom of the page.

7. THE STORIES OF THE FIRST TEN YEARS

The stories cover a wide range of genres, all of them developed within that

overarching concept of a little bear having adventures. In the first ten years of annuals there 81 stories. Thirty-nine are pure Adventure stories, unlikely adventures it is true, but if you are prepared to accept the Bestall universe, where you may get into a rotating elevator and travel to China, they do not have a fantastic, magical whimsicality. The adventures can be almost mundane -and often based on misinterpretations of everyday sayings or terrible puns like 'turnips' and 'turn-ups'. *Rupert and the Turnips* (1945 B75) is about losing and recovering a valuable brooch. An exotic adventure, with a minimum amount of magic because the Conjuror has broken his wand, is about the return of a beloved lost moth -although it is obviously a butterfly -to a North Indian King (*Rupert and the Black Moth*, 1943 B60). Rupert treks there on foot but is, at the very end of the story, instantaneously returned home by magic.

I now find it very curious that Bestall, so meticulous in his detail, should confuse a moth with a butterfly and then give this nectar-eater such a voracious appetite that it eats cabbages down to the stem overnight! In a couple of his drawings there is a suggestion of faint white markings on the butterfly that make me think that his model is the black version of the Orchard Butterfly, *Papilio aegeus*. Its caterpillar feeds on Citrus tree leaves and is a bit of a pest. It is very common where I live. It is quite big, with a 12cm wingspan. If you meet one unexpectedly, coming round a corner, you almost feel as if you are going to be knocked over! I never saw one without thinking of this story.

The Orchard Butterfly, a common garden delight, or pest, in Canberra, depending on how many citrus trees you have!



There are eleven stories that I have labelled Fantasy Adventures (see table

1). A good example is the 1937 story *Rupert and the Little Men* (B12), which features seven dwarves and an Ogre in a Castle. It is, I think, a final nod to Tourtel Land. All the Santa Claus stories are obviously pure fantasy and were launched by *Rupert's Christmas Adventure* (1936. B4) that also introduced Golly, Santa's chief assistant, for the first time.

Seven stories have Magic as the main theme and a further three in which magic is an important prop. Whenever Tiger-Lily is around, you can be sure of a magical theme as she is a terror with a wand (*Rupert and Tiger Lily*, 194 B52; *Rupert's Strange Party*, 1944 B65). A further three stories I have classified as magical adventures, combining the mundane and magic. A good example is *Rupert and the Wrong Presents* (1942 B47) in which Rupert and Willie get the wrong (magical) presents and much trouble goes into returning them. Had *Rupert's Fairy Cycle* (1945 B78) been a magic carpet the story might have come straight out of Arabian Nights. And the lesson? Be careful what you wish for.

The final grouping is that of Science Fiction. By this I mean stories that are themed upon new inventions, where there is an attempt, however slight, to

explain how the inventions work. There are nine of these in the first ten volumes, but my imperfect memory of my children's books tells me that there are many more examples with the passing of the years. Most are due to the fertile and often irresponsible scientific dabblings of the Professor. Rupert was often called upon to test his inventions, much to the apprehension of the reader. In Rupert's Birthday (1943 B57) he complains to the Professor that he has not grown since the day before. The Professor lends him his latest invention, an electric belt that controls growth; the consequences are almost disastrous for Podgy Pig.

The Science Fiction stories are among my favourites as they stimulated my imagination in a way that magic did not. Even as a child I knew that magic was not real, though I would willingly suspend disbelief in childhood games, or fall under the spell of a good stage conjuror. But it seemed as if the

Professor's inventions could work. In Rupert and the Flying Bottle (1937 B10), the Professor invents antigravity, a respectable concept in modern science fiction. The highly crafted cricket bats of today are foreshadowed in Rupert's Marvellous Bat (1940 B41). The Professor's portable voice recorder and player only needs miniaturisation to become today's commonplace item (Rupert and the Mystery Voice, 1944 B68).

As a final comment on the stories, it is impressive that they were written in a particularly anxious period in Britain. The last years of the thirties had their own anxieties that were followed by the phoney war, the Blitz and the Battle of Britain. In those years of war Bestall only twice acknowledges the turmoil and then only obliquely. The first time is in 1939. In Rupert and the Strange Airman (B24), a foreign boy turns out to be an endangered Prince and heir to the throne of an unnamed European country clearly threatened by Fascism. Rupert is instrumental in foiling the kidnappers. Rupert and Golly (1943 B64) describes how Golly, annoyed because Santa's toy workshop has been discovered, imprisons both Rupert and Bill Badger as a punishment and gives them the task of painting toy aeroplanes. Rupert and Bill turn it into a competition to see who can paint the most toy Spitfires (Rupert) or Hurricanes (Bill). Otherwise, Nutwood is a place of peace, strongly reassuring to small children in air raid shelters.

8. THE SOCIAL MILIEU OF NUTWOOD: RUMANS AND HUMANS

Rupert was conceived as a counter to the Daily Mirror comic strip, one that had rather cornered the market for 'naturalistic' animals -Pip (dog), Squeak (penguin) and Wilfred (rabbit). Mary Tourtel's invention of a boy with a bear's head therefore owed nothing to the competing comic strip. Her first story, Little Lost Bear, introduced a Rupert who was more bear-like than Alfred Bestall's version in his later stories and illustrations.

Wherever she drew the inspiration for her Boy with a Bear's head from, Mary Tourtel's idea certainly has a sound classical and theological basis. There are no relevant precursors in animal biology, so I have had to turn to Ancient Egypt and India to find parallels. A Sphinx, for example, has the

head of a human and the body of a lion. Rupert and his friends just reverse this pattern. The Hindus have many animal-headed gods, and so did the ancient Egyptians. A boy with an animal head should therefore cause us no concerns; indeed, he brings us closer to the gods.

A discussion of the animal-headed inhabitants of Nutwood, in their many occupations, is made simpler if they be given a general name. 'Rupert' comes from the same roots as 'Robert' and means 'shining renown'. Better not to interfere with that so, for convenience, I suggest 'Rumans' by analogy with 'Humans'.

Individual Rumans generally seem to have the common name of their nearest wild equivalent rather than their official classificatory names. Thus, the cumbersome Rupert Ursus, a borrowing from Linnaean classification, was, thankfully, rejected and perhaps not even considered (!) in 1920. Mr Anteater probably rejoices in the fact that he was not named Mr Myrmecophaga. Algy is Algy Pug, not Algy Dog or Algy Canis, while the Constable, also a dog, is a rare exception; he has the stern name of 'Growler', a name that gives one confidence in the long arm of the Law. Pong Ping is sometimes called the Little Peke and for all I know, not being a speaker of Mandarin, 'dog' may be subsumed within the cluster of logograms that make up his Chinese name. 'Dog' is not used by Bestall, however, except as a pejorative for thieves and vagabonds.

It must be said that while mythical chimaeras are usually unpleasant and often fatal if one should encounter them, the Nutwood Rumans are benign. In all cases except three they are animal heads on human bodies. The first exception is Edward Trunk who seems to have retained his elephantine torso and forefeet. Even without manipulative hands and wrists, however, Edward plays a mean game of cricket, hitting the ball accurately and, with the Professor's prophetic, newly invented bat, for prodigious distances. He does appear to have human feet, to judge from his lace-up shoes, though how he ties them is beyond me. The second exception is Lily Duckling, who has retained her wings and webbed feet and may not be a Ruman at all: maybe she falls into the class of Sentient Animals (see below). This is a group in which birds are very strongly represented. The remaining exception I have noticed is the Wise Old Goat, in that his front hooves are cloven, yet he seems to have human feet, albeit indistinctly drawn. Strangely, Mrs Sheep, a close evolutionary relative, and Billy Goat are 'normal' Rumans, with hands.

There is no discernible social barrier between Rumans and Humans. The local shopkeeper is clearly a relative of Mr Chimp, the schoolteacher who from his gown, obviously has a university degree. Although the Bear family seems comfortably off, it is far from clear what Mr Bear does for a living. Mr Bear says he could not afford to pay for Rupert's ticket to the Circus (*Rupert and the Circus Dog*, 1943 B61). This may just be astute parenting, however, as the Little Bear went out and earned his entry fee. Uncle Bruno (by inference, Mrs Bear's brother as she receives letters from him) is a GP and doing quite well, to judge by his sporty car. Algy's parents are obviously quite affluent, as they have a family limousine. Mr Pug is also fond of fishing

and has quite expensive looking equipment. Mr Badger runs a car and so does Mr Pig.

Dogs are to be found in service, as they so often are today. Constable Growler is the local bobby, a relative has a position in the local fire brigade and another is a Postman. Yet another is a local farmer. This is unusual, as most farmers in Nutwood are Humans, as well as their farm hands. There seems, therefore, to be two families of Dog, one of which embraces the dark side. A villainous Dog features in Rupert in Mysteryland, (1938 B26), and we are treated, in the story of Rupert and Uncle Bruno (1940 B34), to the edifying sight of a Dog who is a common thief and kidnapper being collared by Constable Growler.

9. ALFRED BESTALL'S LITERARY DEVICES

An English village is a small place and Nutwood seems to be one of the smaller ones. A quick census shows that there might be between 20 and 30 households and therefore its area is quite small. In order to participate in interesting stories, therefore, Rupert must have access to a much wider world. Bestall has created historical and geographical 'bubbles' in order to increase that possibility. History bubbles allow Rupert to move backward in time, geographical ones allow him to travel timelessly anywhere and the whole world is accessible to him. His is also an alternative Universe that enables him to visit places we only imagine, Mysteryland, the Kingdom of the Birds, the Realm of King Frost. To take advantage of all these phenomena, Rupert has allies.

(1) Animal Friends and Helpers

A census of the first ten annuals shows that Rupert is a remarkable animal linguist and, what is more, his animal friends understand him and always seem eager to help him. At least, this is the most parsimonious explanation for the excellent communication that exists between Rupert and wildlife that I can think of. The alternative view, that Rupert speaks only English and all species of wildlife in the Nutwood environs have their own languages, but all have learned English to communicate with Rupert, is simply multiplying one's 'unknowns' far too much. I am sure William of Ockham, of Ockham's Razor (see Bibl.), who, for all I know, may appear in a later Annual, would approve of this, the simplest explanation: that one of Rupert's 'super-powers' is communication. There is literary precedent for this point of view. Hugh Lofting's (1922) Dr Dolittle was taught the rudiments of animal languages by his household parrot, Polynesia, who could also speak English, but all the other species of animals of his household could communicate easily with one another. Eventually John Dolittle could converse with them all in their own tongues. This, I suggest, is the case with Rupert.

Almost all of Rupert's animal friend are sentient. Renee Descartes, a famous French philosopher said, famously, -"I think, therefore I am." We know

what he meant, but it would have been much clearer had he said "I think, and I am aware that I think, therefore I am (sentient)". Sentience is the awareness of one's consciousness. In other words, 'I am conscious and I perceive the fact that I am conscious.' Philosophers of science are now willing to allow that many animals are aware of their consciousness ourselves, many other mammals, many birds, especially the parrots and the crow families, -and some invertebrates, octopuses, for example. All of life, however, displays what Daniel Dennett calls 'comprehension without consciousness' -the ability to take steps to stay alive, whether plant or animal. Even Charles Darwin thought his earthworms acted as if they had a purpose in mind. (Feller et al. 2003).

Gaia is the name that James Lovelock (2000) gave to our planet, in which everything is connected to everything else. Consider the Butterfly Effect air disturbance caused by a butterfly flapping its wings in a non-linear system, like Gaia, might be amplified into a tornado. Think how flipping one domino has caused the toppling of more than 5 million in a Guinness Book of records attempt. Think how increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is upsetting everything.

Everything in Gaia is connected to everything else, sometimes at quite distant removes. I will give one example of the real-life connectivity of a communication network here, from the many that exist, all connecting with each other. Fungi live in the humus of the forest floor. Fungi produce very thin, long tubes that connect them to each other and to trees. These tubular networks can transport water, nutrients and molecular alarm signals from one tree to another and one fungus to another. The network runs through woodlands and forests like a closed computer system, ensuring all the trees are connected. One example, in Oregon, covers about 30 sq km (Whiteside et al. 2019). And that network will be connected to another network and so on.

Nutwood, wherever it is, will be part of this system. I have already remarked that Rupert has a habit of slipping into bubbles of history. I also suggest that Rupert often visits an alternative universe where the whole of Nutwood, as he perceives it, is itself in an evolutionary time bubble, one where animals are further along the evolutionary track than in our own universe. The need for cooperation, for mutual survival is better developed in this Nutwood. That is why the wildlife seek help and are quick to offer it to Rupert and his friends and relations. In Nutwood, John Donne's famous "No man is an island" verse should be written 'No Species is an Island" and go on to

Any species' extinction diminishes mine, because my species is involved in this cooperative world. Therefore, never send to know for which unfortunate species the bell tolls; it tolls for yours.

An excellent example of three-way communication among wildly dissimilar entities (hedgehog-Rupert-eel) is found in Rupert and the Ruby Ring (1938 B21). We find Rupert strolling by a small river when an urgent hedgehog accosts him to tell him that there is something amiss in the river. Rupert goes to investigate and finds an eel threshing about in the water. Rupert nets

the eel (I wonder how it was he had a net with him -surely not for catching things with which he could communicate?) who is then able to explain that he has put his head into a ruby ring and can't get the ring off. Rupert removes it and the eel is so grateful that it swims back, downstream, to the seaside to show Rupert where the rest of the treasure is hidden in a tidal cave. This is a case, unlike the Black Moth, where Alfred Bestall's knowledge of Zoology is flawless. Rupert found the eel in freshwater and it is about as thick as a finger. This suggests that it is a youngster who has just ridden the Gulf Stream from spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea to Sandy Bay. It had not yet fully adapted to fresh water when Rupert first found it so was still able to tolerate sea water and show Rupert where the rest of the treasure lay.

In the first ten annuals there are, excluding the countless birds, about 40 animals with whom Rupert communicates. Domestic animals, local wildlife and exotic Circus escapes (elephant, tiger, kangaroo, snake) show the full extent of Rupert's linguistic gifts.

The greatest part of the list is made up of vertebrates, but there is one crab who is also gifted with speech. Cats are particularly favoured, especially black ones, although it is impossible to say with any certainty that they are not all the same cat, owned by a Girl Guide, that turns up over and over again. In England, male urban domestic cats range across as much as 6 hectares (60,000 sq m.) of land so an individual cat could pop up almost anywhere in Nutwood! In these early stories, the black cat has a strong tendency to bipedalism and even holds paws with Rupert

By far the most common animal conversationalists are the birds, probably all birds, although blackbirds, crows or their relatives have frequent roles in the stories. It is commonly thought that birds, by virtue of their small brains are stupid: indeed, 'bird brain' is a common epithet for someone who does something foolish. Bird brains, however, manage to cram far more brain cells into a small space than mammals do and their brain architecture is different. The clever crows of New Caledonia are excellent problem solvers. Many other species of bird are as intelligent as chimpanzees, perhaps even more so. Their songs are very complex, and it has recently been shown in our Universe that birdsong carries a large amount of information for other birds, and not just for members of their own species. They also have physiological advantages that mammals do not have; for example, instead of having in-out breathing as we do, their breathing apparatus has a mechanism that enables them to perform circular breathing, like expert didgeridoo players or flautists. It allows them to extract more oxygen from a lungful of air than we do. If humans don't survive global heating, I'll put my money on a bird as the next dominant intelligent creature on Earth.

Perhaps Rupert's evolutionary bubble has gone forwards somewhat faster than in our own reality, towards better bird brains. All birds communicate with him and each other. Indeed, in *Rupert and Bill in the Tree Tops* (1938 B9), Rupert discovers -or is discovered by -a whole kingdom of very advanced talking birds with a highly developed social structure. It has the organisation of a 17th century royal palace but is unfortunately lacking in medical knowledge. Uncle Bruno has to be co-opted to cure the King's

depression.

(2) Adventures Underground

There is no doubt that, in the first ten Annuals, an outstanding recurrent theme is the natural cave, secret passage or tunnel, of which there are no fewer than 24 instances. As a small child, I loved them, I couldn't get enough of them which, of course, justifies Bestall's use of them. As a mechanism for moving a story along they are unparalleled and sometimes the tunnel is an end in itself. Now for some definitions.

Caves and Crevices are natural formations, though they may be enhanced by human activity. They are places to hide from predators. Caves with improved access come into this category. Tunnels are created by human activity, although natural features may be incorporated into them. Their object is to allow you to move quickly from A to B. The London Underground and the Channel Tunnel are obvious examples, but they can be as small as the tunnel at Regents Park Zoo. Secret Passages are mostly found in the grand houses of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and were usually designed to provide hiding places or escape routes for Roman Catholic priests

(a) Caves and Crevices

Rupert and the Little Men (B12) finds Rupert in the course of outwitting a very Tourtelian Ogre, with a look of the Tyrolean about him, by hiding from him in a convenient crevice that the Ogre cannot penetrate. The crevice gives Rupert access to the castle that the ogre has occupied. Rupert contrives to trap the ogre in a sort of oubliette that can only be entered via a hole in the ceiling from which Rupert removes the rope. I have absolutely no childhood recollection of this story which suggests I found the Ogre too scary. If I were to be seeking the story I enjoyed least in these ten volumes, this would be a good contender. It is, I think, the very last of Tourtel land

The King of the Imps of Spring has his domain in a cave, whose entrance is via a trapdoor, with several exits in hollow trees (Rupert and the Daffodils, B16). We find Rupert, in Rupert and the Courier Bird, (B31) being taken for a flight in the old Professor's newly invented multidirectional autogyro. I am happy to say that the Professor was at first reluctant to take Rupert but too easily persuaded to take him, even though it is a one-seater. They are caught up in a wild storm and, when it abates, they are running out of fuel and need to find a place to land. Through the clouds they spy a landing place. The Professor puts down, only to discover that they seem to have experienced a geographical shift. They are on top of a very tall butte, of the sort more commonly seen in Arizona. A few hundred yards away there is a second butte. Rupert sees that the only chance of rescue is to get down and alert rescuers to their plight. He put on the only parachute and jumps. Is he the first base jumper?

He makes contact with some men who turn out to be 'gold prospectors' and

aren't pleased to see him. (There is little gold in Arizona but plenty of uranium, which had become very valuable as the atom bomb is only three or four years away). Rupert is taken up high into the butte through a system of caves. As Rupert looks out, he can see the old Professor on the adjacent pinnacle. He then receives a push in the back, accidentally -we hope -and falls. No spoilers -I will leave him in mid-air and move on!

The next cave worthy of the name is the toad's cave in Rupert and the Mystery Pond (B45). Having solved the mystery of an old antiquarian's staff, Rupert and Bill discover the entrance to a vertical tunnel. The wall has steps let into it, which suggest it might have been the entrance to an old mine. Rupert descends and immediately gets lost in an underground cave system, with stalactites and stalagmites and a previously unknown underground river running through it. He follows the river and encounters the toad who informs him that the only way home is to jump into a nearby whirlpool. Unhesitatingly, he jumps in, boots and all, and is carried to a small pond, having solved the antiquarian's problem of where all the water in the outflow was coming from.

Desperate to rescue his friends after they have been shut up in the Piper's castle, Rupert receives help from a friendly giant who operates a lift in the caverns underneath (Rupert and the Piper, B55). Rupert has to travel on foot to North India to return a valued black moth to its illustrious owner, because the Conjuror has broken his wand and cannot use magic to send him. Due to geographical contraction, often encountered in Rupert stories, and with the help of a system of caves, he completes his errand and is returned by magic (Rupert and the Black Moth B60).

Rupert and Golly (B64) borrows from Brer Rabbit the idea of a supposedly impenetrable briar or bramble patch that you can pass through if you know how. Bill and Rupert see Santa's Golly heading towards such a bramble patch and disappearing into it. Puzzled they return to it, separately at different times, and fall into it from a rocky outcrop above the patch whereupon Golly emerges from a crevice and captures them both. The crevice leads to a cave that is Santa's Nutwood toy repository.

Finally in Rupert and Rollo (B69) much of the action takes place in a system of seaside caves used by smugglers to hide their contraband. Rupert and the Yellow Cloak (1945) features a quarry.

(b) Tunnels

The first tunnel appears in the very first story that appears in the 1936 Annual Rupert and the Wonderful Kite (B6). It is a small thing, a culvert, almost no tunnel at all and you can see straight through it. It allows a stream to flow under a high garden wall that encloses a last but one piece of Tourtelliana, the garden of 'Mary Quite Contrary'. From the dress of Mary and her Grandfather the garden appears to be in the 18th century bubble. Rupert and Bill float through the culvert on a handy log and an adventure follows involving a dishonest gardener. The Grandfather is so pleased with the

outcome that he gives the friends a little rowing boat to get them back through the tunnel and on to a 20th century lake for more excitement. Who needs a time machine?

In Rupert, Bill and the Pearls (B3), Rupert finds the first real tunnel, part natural and part constructed. It is the hideout of the thief who stole the pearls. Rupert explores the tunnel, releases Bill who has earlier been kidnapped, and they emerge from the other end to discover the thief about to escape in a Tiger Moth. Rupert and Pong Ping (B19) has the friends traveling on little mats, as in a helter-skelter, in a steep tunnel that looks as if it were made by the great tunnelling machine of the Emperor of China.

A short tunnel is used by the smugglers in Rupert and the Air Smugglers (B30) to hide their contraband. It has an entrance, access to which is covered by a large flat rock and, some distance away, an exit. Bestall must be applauded for the design of the mechanism that lifts the rock. It would probably work though it may need a bit more intermediate gearing -we must allow Bestall the artistic license to cut a corner -and when open is held in place by a substantial pawl that blocks the gear train. Bill Badger inadvertently releases it, the entrance stone falls and Rupert and Bill are trapped.

Entrapment is also the theme in Rupert and the Silver Trowel (B28). Rupert encounters a magical gardener living in a quarry, when they are caught in a cave behind a rock fall. The little woodman, in Rupert and the Little Woodman (B46) also lives a troglodyte life in a small tunnel accessed through a hollow tree. Yet another character, an inventor, lives and works in a system of caves. He has invented a life-size clockwork car and forces Rupert to work as his assistant (Rupert and the Forest Fire B48).

Rupert penetrates a high rock barrier when he discovers a hitherto unknown tunnel. Once through the tunnel he finds a tall palisade behind which confectionery birds live (Rupert and the Sugar Bird. B39). In Rupert's River Adventure (B63), Rupert's friends are imprisoned in a castle surrounded by a lake and Rupert and Podgy find a way to rescue them via a tunnel in the foundations.

(c) Secret Passages

The underground passage in Rupert and Uncle Bruno (B34) could be classified as a tunnel. One end of it, however, is to be found in a ruined abbey or castle, no doubt one that Cromwell knocked about a bit, so I prefer to think of it as a secret passage. One end of the passage starts in the cellars, so it was most probably built at the same time as the main structure, to act as a bolt hole for beleaguered occupants. It is remarkable in that, lined with stone blocks, it passes under a river. The tunnellers must have gone very deep but, on the far side of the river, the tunnel approaches the surface and has weakened to the extent that it gives way under Uncle Bruno.

Presumably because of a rather stiff body, Edward Trunk is an expert cart

wheeler. When Rupert and friends slip into a history bubble and visit a sixteenth century castle, Edward's weight is too great to be supported by the hidden roof a secret tunnel. He falls through and when they haul him up they discover a pearl necklace draped over a tusk. Rupert investigates and finds the treasure (*Rupert and the Cartwheels*, B51). In another history bubble, perhaps two hundred years later, in the eighteenth century, Rupert comes across an antique key and helps the owner of the nearby castle to find a hidden door. It leads into a room in the basement of the castle. There they find a map which shows the entrance to a secret passage. Rupert explores and is astonished by what he finds (*Rupert and the Iron Key*, B58).

(3) Bestall's Inventions

While enjoying the Rupert stories, the reader tends to overlook the fact that invention is part of authorship; we tend to attribute all the inventions to the Professor rather than the author. The inventions are, however, carefully calculated by Bestall not only to be plausible (at least, most of them) but to further advance the story. Howard Smith recently commented on the high quality of Bestall's inventive mind, something that I also found apparent in, for example, his cave 'door' opening device (B30)

I do not think Bestall was actually ahead of his time. Rather, I think he was tuning into the zeitgeist, the spirit, of the nineteen thirties. Take, for example, the autogyro, the illustration used by Howard Smith,. The first powered aeroplane flight was made by Wilbur Wright in 1903. A mere 20 years later, in 1923, Juan de la Cierva's autogyro made its first successful flight. Bestall's first autogyro appears, beautifully illustrated, on the cover of the 1936 Annual. It bears a strong similarity to de la Cierva's invention. Autogyros are low speed aircraft which perhaps makes them a bit more useful in Bestall's stories.

Juan de la Cierva's autogyro

Autogyros differ from aeroplanes in that lift is provided by the rotor. After an engine-driven start up, the rotor is kept turning by the air flowing over its blades, maintained by the forward thrust of the propulsion engine. If that engine cuts out, the autogyro slowly descends, its rotor acting almost like a parachute. On the 1936 cover, the beautifully depicted autogyro is clearly one of de la Cierva's. By 1939, however, Bestall has somewhat redesigned it to suit his own purposes. The cover depicts a fuselage is shaped like a rugby ball and there is a propulsion engine at each end so it can go in either direction. I like to think the aircraft's swollen middle now accommodates a swivel chair so that the rather large professor can whizz round and face the other way. There is also room for Rupert and a friend. In the 1942 annual, the love affair with autogyros is over (B48). Willie Mouse's tiny aeroplane,



sent to him by an uncle, still had the superficial look of an autogyro but it is a monoplane that the pilot operates by turning a handle that turns the forward propellor. This is a bit cheeky of Bestall, because I doubt whether Rupert, even given a huge mechanical advantage by a gearing system, could generate enough thrust to move it forward, let alone get it off the ground. However, let us not allow physics to spoil a good story!

Bestall, in 1936, must have been almost overcome by his creative exuberance for the new task of liberating Rupert from Tourtel Land, counting the autogyro, he presents us with six inventions in the very first Annual. This may be because he is introducing his version of the character of the Professor for the first time, so he is giving us an overview.

Here are the remaining five. 1. In Rupert's Autumn Adventure (B2) both Bodkin and Rupert successfully use spring-heeled boots to escape capture. This is a concept that goes back to Spring-Heeled Jack in the 1830s. The winged boot in Rupert and the Wrong Presents (B47) is another version, this time magical. Outside of Nutwood, it is an idea that has never been successfully transformed into reality; apparently, American paratroopers who tried to use them to soften landings broke their ankles. 2. The descending breakfast table (B3) is an example of the 'dumb waiter', an elevator or lift used for transporting meals between floors in big houses and restaurants, first used in the USA in the 1840s. 3. The moving staircase (B3) was an American invention first built in 1892. 4. The idea of a parachute (B3) goes back to Leonardo da Vinci, although his design is more like a tent than a modern parachute. I doubt whether Bestall's side-by-side parachute (B3) would pass the aviation safety regulators. Finally, 5. it seems as if the Professor has cracked the Rumpelstiltskin problem; how to spin straw into gold. His modern transmutation system uses dead leaves, however, rather than straw! (B3)

In 1937 there are three more inventions. In Rupert and the Snow Machine (B14) there is an early idea for a propellor driven sledge that has yet to be realised, except perhaps in the boats of the Florida everglades. The snow machine itself was well before its time and more successful than the modern efforts using the same principle of seeding clouds. An important accompaniment of the snow machine is a balloon to take it up into those clouds (B14). It is an unremarkable device, similar to meteorological balloons in that a gas is used to provide lift. I suspect the Professor would have used hydrogen as it would have been far easier to come by and less expensive than helium. The string that the pilot (Rupert) holds presumably operates a double valve mechanism, one for releasing hydrogen from a cylinder into the balloon to increase lift, and another to vent the gas into the air when it descends. It is this one that fails, quite uncharacteristic of both the Professor and Bestall, and Rupert is whisked off for an alarming sequence of adventures.

The idea of Antigravity has fascinated authors for at least 100 years. HG Wells toyed with the idea in 1900 (*First Men in the Moon*) and in 1903 (*The Truth about Pycraft*). In the first story, Cavorite was a substance that, if made into a sheet on the ground, would make anything above it weightless.

Thus air, weightless, would rise up and the air rushing into the void it left behind would, in turn, become weightless, creating an air fountain that would whisk anything else also weightless out into space. This was the principle that got the heroes of the story to the moon.

The truth about Pycraft (don't tell anyone) is that he was very fat and consumed a mysterious concoction that would make him lose weight. It did, but he retained his rotund figure and, weightless, floated to the ceiling like a

balloon. It appears that the Professor has rediscovered the formula in the story of Rupert and the Flying Bottle (B10). In liquid form, a carefully calculated amount can be placed in a bottle and make it float in the air. Unfortunately, Podgy Pig found the bottle, took a swig and suffered Pycraft's fate. This is an invention yet to come in our mundane world. The nearest thing is a superconducting ceramic. When an electrical current is passed through one it creates a powerful magnetic field that can hold a piece of metal in the air.

By the time the 1940 Annual came out the first flush of inventiveness was over, and Bestall settled on one or two encounters with the Professor each year. Clearly a cricket tragic, Bestall worked out his frustrated ambition in getting the Professor to create a bat capable of hitting a cricket ball a prodigious distance. Well ahead of its time, in the illustration the bat is attached to what looks like an electrical device -perhaps a heater to finish the drying process. Whatever the process was, it worked in Edward Trunk's 'hands' (Rupert and the Marvellous Bat (B 41))

The Professor has his own private radio station (Rupert and Pong Ping B19) and while he didn't invent radio, Bestall's illustration, and another in Rupert and the Courier Bird give us an excellent impression of a radio studio of the time, as part of the laboratory in which he does his inventing. I found that, as a small boy, there were many things that I seemed to recognise in his workshop and some that I was already familiar with, like the small microscope (NOT a toy!) that I had for my 10th birthday. I yearned for a laboratory like that and many years later I had one and a 'Bodkin' to look after it. She was actually called a Research Fellow and was a long-time colleague and I am happy to report that she, too, became a Professor with her own 'Bodkin'.

The 'growing belt', portrayed in Rupert's Birthday B57, plays on the desire of humans to achieve personal shape change without hard work. There have been many devices that purport to remove unwanted fat by vibration or 'electrolysis' but none that work. The Professor's belt does. Press the switch one way and you get bigger; the other way reverses the effect. A major difference is that the belt affects all dimensions simultaneously. Thus, when Podgy tried it on he became a gigantic scaled up version of himself. This is clearly an undesirable function if all someone wants to do is to remove the fat pads on their belly.

By 1945, Bestall had clearly recognised the advantages of miniaturisation and portability. Rupert and the Mystery Voice (B 66) is based on a portable

recording and playback device while Rupert's Winter Journey (B72) is made in a one human, two ruman submarine -Sailor Sam, Rupert and Bill -that the Professor has invented. This tiny craft has no apparent room for fuel so one must assume the Professor has also invented a solar cell.

There are two inventions not ascribed to the Professor. The first is a sort of burrowing subterrain (by analogy with submarine) that gets Rupert and Pong Ping to China and back (B11). This is a marvellous streamlined device with a drilling nose, more like a countersink rather than a penetrating drill, and four huge, clawed wheels. (Pong Ping's inverting elevator, or lift, to China came later.) This machine, even though it looks a bit too fat for the hole it drills, is a great improvement on Le Scolopendre (the Centipede), of Henri Bernay (1926). That is a series of articulated carriages, like a modern train, but running on caterpillar tracks, for burrowing through ice in the Arctic. Where the engine should be there is a large drill similar to that of Bestall's machine. Even allowing for the poor quality of the drawing in Le Scolopendre, Bestall's design is far superior.

Anyone who has ever seen a toy car or locomotive that is driven by a clockwork motor that you wind up with a key must have wondered what a full-size version would be like. So did Bestall and in Rupert and the Forest Fire B 48 he gives us his version of the clockwork car. To avoid having the giant spring mounted vertically, which would occupy most of the back tray of the car, he lays it on its side. This would necessitate a geared transmission system and gear box -Bestall is no stranger to gears -to transfer power to the back wheels. Then he had to design a device for tightening the spring after each trip. Bestall obviously was not satisfied with his invention, for it is the one of the few in all ten Annuals that fails and it fails quite spectacularly. The spring escapes from its mountings, uncoils itself catastrophically and, its free end hooking into Rupert's jumper, deposits him in a tree.

10. CONTENDERS FOR THE BEST ANNUAL 1936-1945

To return finally to the matter of influential books, I can imagine the young colleague mentioned in my first paragraph accusing me of cheating or laziness when I nominated ten Rupert Annuals as No.1 on my personal list. I felt at the time I was being honest, as the Rupert influence was strong in the first ten years of my intellectual life. But it must be said that some years were stronger than others. In the end, I decided if I had to choose just one Annual it would be that of 1940.

It is as if Alfred Bestall, having been given the gift of colour, rose to new artistic heights in his story telling. The first four annuals are, metaphorically and literally, colourless by comparison with the inventiveness displayed in the fifth. I must emphasise, in what follows, that by choosing stories that I found most rewarding as a child, I do not mean that I did not enjoy the others. Of course I did, there are good stories in all of the ten Annuals and I enjoyed all of them.

For example, Rupert, Bill and the Pearls (1936 B 4) is a great adventure, giving the mischievous Bill an opening role as a Guy Fawkes that he never again equalled (except possibly his role as the Chinese Prince in Rupert and the Chinese Prince (1946). After that introduction, the thieves with the stolen pearls become the focus of the yarn and Rupert is firmly grounded in the 20th Century by a hair-raising ride clinging to the wheel strut of a biplane, probably a Tiger Moth. The adventurers are helped by a bipedal black cat,

the first of several over the years (unless they are all the same!). It also features a tunnel, so beloved by Bestall that it is the first of two dozen up to 1946.

In 1937, for me, the standout story, is Rupert and the Chinese Cracker (B 11), that introduces the brilliantly drawn Chinese dragons for the first time. This dragon is actually an illusion, but in Rupert and Pong Ping (1938 B 19) the dragon motif is explored in more detail. Rupert and Pong Ping visit China traveling in the great burrowing machine that looks as it might be capable of drilling the Channel Tunnel. 1938 was a particularly good year, for we also have Rupert in Mysteryland (B26) and Rupert and Bill in the Treetops (B9), a visit to the Kingdom of the Birds.

1939 starts off with Rupert in the Snows (B5). Stories were much longer in those days; this one occupies 22 pages. Rupert has a number of adventures each of which would make a good story in the 1950s. Rupert runs an errand for a doctor (not Uncle Bruno) who has buried his car in a snow drift; with the help of three girl guides he rescues a little girl who has fallen though the ice of a frozen pond; he unmasks a thief (it was Podgy Pig at his very greediest) who has stolen and consumed all the doctor's medicines; he gets caught in a blizzard to be rescued by the assistant of the Master (who has not yet been awarded his Chair as a Professor); he flies with the Master in a monoplane fitted with skis to a distant, snow covered mountain range in search of a rare plant to replace one of the doctors medicines consumed by Podgy; he tumbles over a cliff and descends into a valley in an avalanche; he is rescued by a boy skier called Emil (so we may now be in Switzerland) who promptly breaks a ski and sprains an ankle; Rupert then sets out to ride one ski further down the mountain for help; at last, he finds a warm mountain hut and two men who call the Master, who turns up in his ski-plane to take him home. Whew! This is no ordinary Bear!

The other outstanding story in the 1939 Annual is Rupert and the Courier Bird and occupies a mere (!) 19 pages. Rupert succours an exhausted exotic bird that turns out to be a courier from the Kingdom of Birds. The courier gives Rupert a special jewel in gratitude. Rupert seeks out the (newly promoted) Professor, previously the Inventor, who has seen nothing like it. They go for a flight in the Professor's newly completed autogiro, but, buffeted off course by storm clouds, he puts it down at the nearest land. When the clouds clear, they find that they are on top of very tall rock stack or butte. Rupert finds a way down through the stack -a volcanic vent, perhaps, -and after a series of adventures finds his way to the kingdom of the birds

Leaving 1940 aside for the moment, in the 1941 Annual we have Rupert and

the Red Egg (B49) which involves Rupert in another trip to the Kingdom of the Birds and the disconcerting hatching of a Chinese Dragon. Thus, Bestall manages to combine two of my favourite themes in the one story. Also in this volume is Rupert and the Mystery Pond (B45), of which I have already spoken. In 1942, two separate stories introduce two literally fantastic characters. In Rupert and Odmedod (B50) we meet an animated scarecrow who helps Rupert expose a gang of air-smugglers and we are treated to the high comedy of Rupert filling-in for the absent scarecrow and failing badly. Rupert and the Sea Serpent (B46) has Rupert and Algy racing to escape a sea serpent, with a large giraffe-like head and an engaging grin, that is joyously surfing a tidal bore up the river. That story left me with a fascination for tidal waves and tsunamis.

In 1943, I felt there were three outstanding yarns. The first (Rupert and the Piper B55), was a bit of a cheat, because it centred upon a dream that Rupert had after eating too much seaside rock and reading about the Pied Piper. It had the totally memorable episode of a friendly giant hurling Rupert over a castle tower clutching a parachute made out of the giant's handkerchief. I was disappointed at the time that the adventure was not 'real' and failed to go to a conclusion. Rupert wakes up as the parachute is torn from his grasp by the rush of air. In Rupert and Tiger Lily (B53) it appears that somewhere along the way the Chinese Conjurer/Magician has lost his son, Ting Ling, and acquired a daughter. Tiger Lily is mischievous, inscrutable and implacable and is introduced here for the first time. She makes life miserable for the teacher in school, with the stump of a discarded magic wand. Finally, in this volume I choose Rupert's Birthday for the Professor's invention of a vibrating belt that puts weight on the wearer. Vibrating belts today, obtainable but with equally fictitious recommendations, fail to take weight off

For me, the stand-out story of the 1944 volume is Rupert's Strange Party (B 65). Although it is magically based, with Tiger Lily up to her old tricks, I think it is because the ubiquitous black cat has a strong role to play, reminiscent of the early volumes. Rupert and Granny Goat (B69) is a 'wrong pills' story where poor granny is made weightless and takes to the air looking rather as if she were sitting in her chair and has forgotten to bring it along. It is evident in this story that the Wise Old Goat now has proper hands and feet and has assumed true Ruman form. No such change came over Lily Duckling in the previous story. Modern smugglers (Rupert and Rollo. B89) and 18th century pirates (Rupert and the Old Map, B70) continue to do sterling service in brilliantly illustrated caverns and pirate schooners, respectively. Rupert and the Yellow Cloak adds another villain to Rupert's growing list of captures. This story does not apparently have a B number as it did not appear in the Daily Express -perhaps because of the 'yellow' of the title could not be properly represented in a black and white newspaper.

The last of the albums of the decade under consideration is that of 1945. My three favourite stories in this collection are chosen primarily because they rework themes that had given me considerable pleasure in the past. In the first, Rupert and Willie (B77) we slip once more into the 18th century history bubble -this could be the same one that was recorded in Rupert and the Wonderful Kite (B6) -when Willie disappears into a drain that gives access

to a system of secret passages within the walls of an old castle. The story later features something that, I notice, has given proper concern to a previous Follower. As a reward for finding the tunnel, Rupert is given a load of logs for firewood and helps to cut them on a circular saw, driven by one of Bestall's beautifully drawn, highly geared mechanisms. No occupational

health and safety regulations in those days; the saw lacked both a safety-guard and a cut-off in the event of a mishap, which quite traumatised the earlier Follower. The second story, Rupert's Fairy Cycle (B78), Bestall uses the geography bubble to take Rupert all over the world in response to ill-considered wishes. The final example is Rupert and the Cuckoo B74 featuring yet another antiquary, this time a historian researching old buildings in Nutwood. From the look of his clothes one can imagine him conversing with the Collector/Darwin at one of the Linnean Society of London meetings a century and a half ago. Rupert duly finds Nutwood Castle and a large chest of copper coins and is rewarded with an ancient heavy penny for his trouble. Finally, I cannot leave this section without acknowledging an old friend. Golly makes yet another appearance in Rupert and the Reindeer (B71).

11. THE 1940 ANNUAL

So, finally, I have to justify my choice of the 1940 Annual as the outstanding annual of the decade. It seemed to me that almost every story offered a lesson or a circumstance that was relevant to my young life. It opens with Rupert and Uncle Bruno (B34). I too had a favourite uncle, so that I could relate to Rupert's excitement on the very first page.

Uncle Bruno's arrival is imminent. Rupert rushes out and climbs a tree to look for his uncle's car, ignoring the warning, by a friendly squirrel -a warning that I had heard so often from my mother -that the branch he was sitting on was not safe. The branch breaks, dropping Rupert neatly into the back seat of the car, whereupon Uncle Bruno understandably loses control of the car and rolls it. What a start! There follows a pause for bandaging and recuperation. Rupert, now recovered, is returning home with some shopping, when he is robbed of a basket of provisions by a Dog. He chases after the robber with no success.

He meets his friend, Willie Mouse, who has a new telescope. Rupert borrows it and randomly trains it on a ruined abbey across a river and spots the Dog. This picture, framed by the dark edge of the telescope, is one of the very few that does not have Rupert in it. How did the villain get across the river, as there are no convenient bridges? The unfortunate Uncle solves this mystery later by falling through a sink hole into a secret tunnel that goes under the river! From there on, with the aid of Constable Growler, the story continues to a happy ending.

I have spent time on that first story because I feel that it shows Alfred Bestall at his best. It is as if he were liberated from the colourless world of Mary Tourtel from the moment he picked up his box of paints. This feeling is

increased by the second story, (Rupert, Bill and the Bluebells, B40) in which the colours of wildflowers predominate. Rupert enters a competition to collect the most species of wildflower, with Bill as a partner. Their collection is going well until Ting Ling begs for their choicest flowers to cure his father who is unwell. Unwilling at first, they finally agree. Now, almost flowerless, the two friends have several other encounters that test their generosity further, and finally submit a only meagre collection to the judge. But wait -their collecting basket is bewitched and produces flower after flower, all in glorious colour. They win the prize but agree to share it with everyone else. For a small and selfish boy, this is yet another important lesson.

The next story, Rupert and the Silver Trowel (B28), is notable in that much of it takes place underground -another collapsing tunnel! The masterly use of slabs of sombre reds and browns make it a pictorial feast. I have written about Rupert and the Iceberg (B33) and Rupert's adventure with a Charles Darwin look-alike so I will pass on to Rupert and the Air Smugglers (B30), in which a search for a lost cricket ball leads to the discovery of a yet another underground tunnel (and a mechanism for lifting the entry stone that looks as if it would work) and to the capture of smugglers gang.

Rupert's Marvellous Bat (B41) struck a chord with me, for I was an enthusiastic cricketer from an early age. We know early that something strange is going to happen in this story, for on its first page Rupert sees an aeroplane with crescent shaped wings -obviously from the Middle East! And strange it certainly is. Edward, with his great strength, wields a new bat with greatly improved capacity to hit sixes, recently invented by the Professor. Edward lands a ball right into the cockpit of the aeroplane. The aeroplane lands, and the two eastern crew members seem rather amused by the accident. No doubt seeing an advantage for their Test team, they gather up bat, ball and the two friends and whisk them away, first to a zoo and then to the top of a minaret. All this is rendered with the exotic colouring of a Hollywood depiction of a Caliph's palace in Baghdad. A hair-raising escape down a rope of knotted blankets, another prodigious Edwardian cricket six to alert a passing cargo steamer and the friends are returned home. This story is just a kaleidoscope of colourful scenes and, people.

Rupert and the Pedlar(B27) is a simple story of a thieving pedlar who looks like a refugee from a nineteenth century novel by Thomas Hardy and whose swag is hidden in an old windmill. Bestall's use of russets and browns bring the old mill to life. But he has left us with one little puzzle in the last frame. There appear to be two Ruperts -one returning her umbrella to Mrs Trunk in the foreground and the other, in the far distance driving the horse and cart; the red jumper and yellow trousers are clearly visible with a lens. (Note -I am using the 1992 Annual Concepts Ltd. facsimile of the 1940 Annual.)

Before I move on to the last story in that Annual I would like you to have a quick look, if they are available, at Rupert's Christmas Adventure (B5), Rupert and the Snow Machine (B6) and Rupert's Adventures in the Snows (B21). All three depict icy and snowy landscapes and in the first of these Bestall has even attempted an impression of the Aurora Borealis. Painting

snowy, frosty landscapes when you are only allowed red, black and white ink must be a thankless -perhaps even dreary -task; all those blank, white spaces.

Now compare them with Rupert and King Frost (B38). Bestall threw his palette at the task. King Frost's domain coruscates with colour, subtly applied. There are pale washes of yellow, blue and green, against which the solid blocks of colour that are Rupert and Algy stand out almost in three dimensions. The impression of the Aurora is far more successful than in the earlier story. (This frame, incidentally, is another in which Rupert's form does not appear, although his presence is implied by the north bound ski-plane.) But Bestall was still not satisfied with his auroral colour burst -if we step out of our chosen era for a second to 1948 -as Rupert and Jack Frost B92 offers a third example.

The King Frost story scared me as a child. You knew something was up because, after a riotous day building and knocking down snowmen, Rupert notices, in two separate pictures, a sinister, 'noiseless aeroplane'. Sure enough, next day when they go to repeat their game, Rupert and Algy crash painfully into a solid ice snowman. As they set off for home to nurse their bruises, the snowman comes up behind them -this really scared me -and takes them into captivity to face King Frost for ill-treating snowmen. The snowman is an embodiment of cruel and relentless authority, but eventually the friends are rescued by King Frost's son, Jack Frost.

And now, finally, I will reveal my choice of the best story of the decade. I think that the best story is...

Rupert and Uncle Bruno B34.

It was always in the running situated, as it was, on the cusp of plain and coloured stories. For those of us who had grown up with the plain volumes, the vivid colour was a delightful surprise, but there are other qualities about the story that I have already discussed.

You will understand, if you have read so far, that it is a totally personal selection, based on my ideas about the way a story is written and presented. I can hear you say 'Oh rubbish, he got that wrong! What about....' If you do, I will be pleased for I have engaged your attention and it may be that you will be moved to write about your favourite annual and story. Bear in mind there are nine other decades of Rupert stories all asking for some form of analysis!

But I have a final confession to make. That 'best story' is the story I was reading all those years ago in 1941, in the light of the glorious sunset that I described on the first page, and has stayed with me for 80 years.

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