

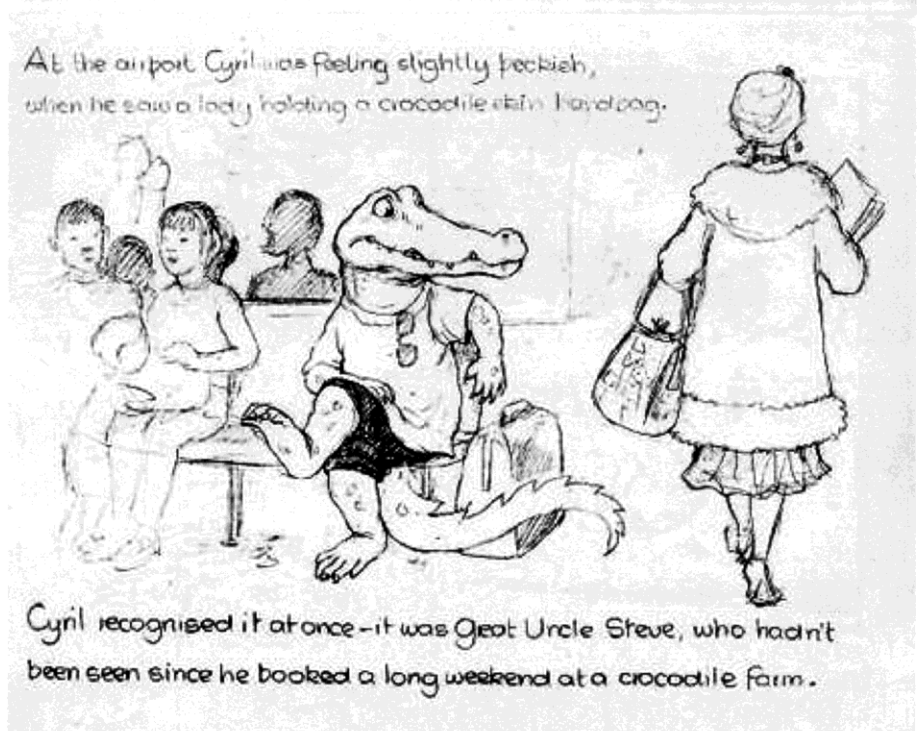
Brian Stewart:

A tribute from John Harrold

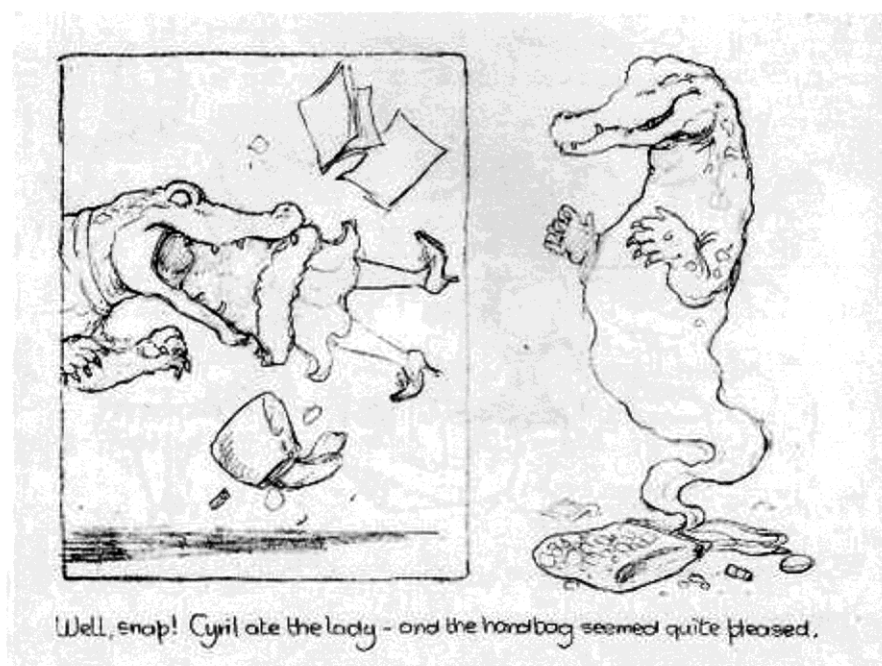
With the sad news of Brian Stewart's untimely death on the 12th December, not only did I lose a dear friend, but so did Nutwood. Many Followers reading this article will know Brian through *The Rupert Dossier* and the talk he gave at the 2001 AGM, but will perhaps be unaware of just how instrumental he was in setting up the Canterbury signing and promoting the links between Rupert and Canterbury, as well as giving that fine artist Mary Tourtel the recognition she richly deserves.

I first made Brian's acquaintance when he phoned me out of the blue at the Daily Express. As a founder member of the Rupert & Canterbury Group, set up to promote Canterbury's connections with the popular children's character, he took the initiative to contact me and find out if I would care to come down to Canterbury and meet the Group.

Brian, his wife Carole and I soon became good friends, and I would regularly stay with them and enjoy their hospitality on the Friday evening before the Canterbury signing. It was not long before I discovered that Brian had a very refined and discerning aesthetic palette, was immensely knowledgeable about art in general and painting in particular, and was also a talented and imaginative artist in his own right.



Colin the Crocodile



His cheerful nature, readiness to see the humour in every situation and total lack of pretention belied his wealth of knowledge and expertise. And this rejection of pomposity was behind his democratising philosophy whereby children were encouraged to feel at home in his gallery at Falmouth and to express their opinions on the works displayed, thereby accustoming them to art from the earliest possible age.

His appreciation of good drawing made him an ideal lecturer on Rupert and Nutwood as he could discuss the merits of Tourtel and Bestall's work and analyse their qualities with the discerning eye of a connoisseur of fine art. Mary Tourtel has

often been badly represented and reproduced – not to mention maligned, but Brian recognised her for the superb, imaginative illustrator and animal artist that she was, as do I. In fact, his knowledge of Mary extended back to her mentor, Thomas Sydney Cooper, a renowned animal painter about whom Brian wrote a fascinating and well-illustrated little volume.

Brian had an impish sense of humour which was given free reign in a children's book he wrote several years ago and for which I provided layout sketches, "Colin the Crocodile" (or "Cyril le Crocodile" in French). The humour is slightly dark at points and perhaps not to every editor's taste, though one Parisian publisher was very keen to publish it. However they wanted a completely different layout to suit their house style, with one illustration per double spread. As that didn't at all match my established concept of the book, we declined. Here are a couple of pencil page layouts which give a flavour of the story and an idea of Brian's sense of humour. I'm sure the book will appear on the shelves at some future date.

While Brian still worked for Canterbury Museum, he devised the idea of persuading the authorities to commission a permanent Rupert monument which would be bright and entertaining. I was invited to produce an initial design for a public fountain which would feature Rupert and his chums and was intended to be housed in a Canterbury shopping arcade. The final sculpture would have been executed by an experienced artist who had

already produced popular public sculptures of familiar figures such as Max Wall. The idea did not receive the support of the Council, which is rather a pity, as it would have added yet another Rupert feature to the City, attracting fans of the character and the world of Nutwood. But full marks to Brian for yet again striving to promote Rupert's popularity and establish him further as a great British tradition.

And we mustn't of course forget Brian's involvement in the setting up of the Rupert Bear Museum, which has proved such an attraction to children and Nutwood pilgrims alike. I remember how much delight he took in watching the initial concept assume concrete form.



Fountain Design

Brian wasn't the sort of person to boast about his achievements and his involvement with Rupert or to capitalise on it in any way, which I think justifies even more his place in the Rupert hall of fame.

But apart from his professional qualities, I would also like to mention that some people in my entourage, who had met Brian only once or twice, were deeply saddened by the news of his death, which says a lot about the man, the friend and the warm and loving person who will be remembered and missed by many.

John Harrold