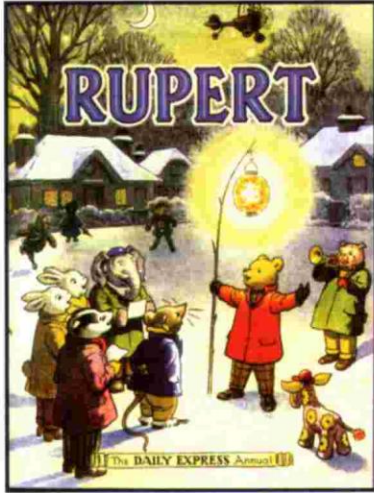


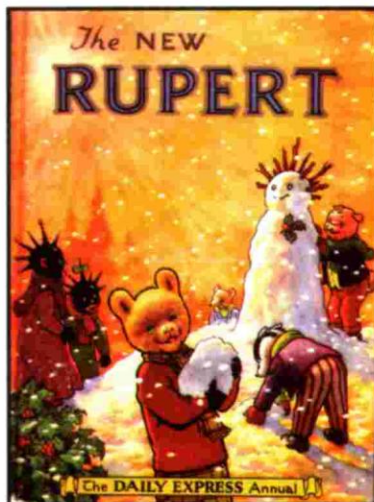
Rupert's Annual Snowcover

The “big winter storm” of February 2009 brought snow back into the public’s consciousness with a bang. Of course, the Scots and “upland northerners”, more used to white winters took a more phlegmatic view. However, for some older



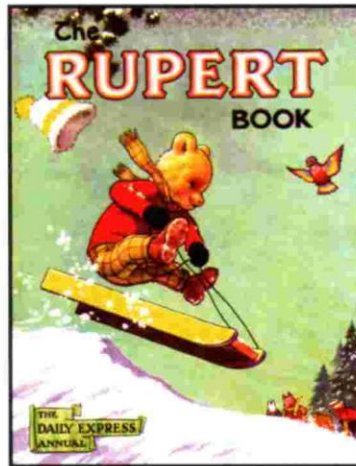
building snowmen in an almost carnival atmosphere.

No-one incidentally was better at communicating this atmosphere than Alfred Bestall and, of course, he did this intermittently on the covers of Rupert annuals. As mentioned in an earlier analysis of Bestall’s cover work, Rupert and his chums were seen in a variety of seasonal activities.



must still be the ultimate Christmas Eve fantasy, so

people “down south”, it must have been like a taste of the “good old days” with good “old-fashioned” winters. Whilst many people might have cursed the arctic spell, as evidenced via the news bulletins, many children and some adults took to their sledges or started



much so that the scene has been endlessly reproduced via porcelain and posters.

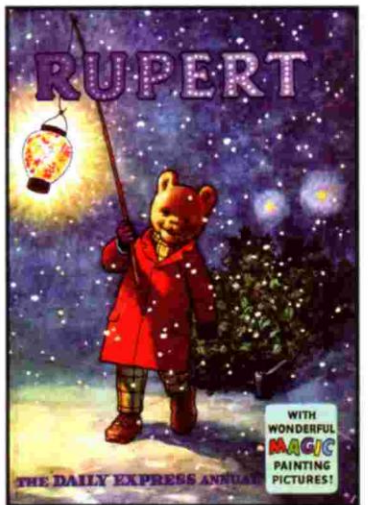
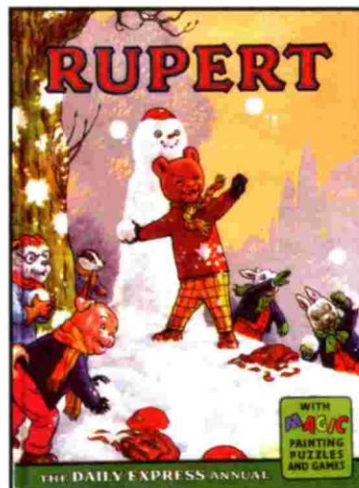
As if making up for lost time, Bestall produced another superb Rupert snow scene in 1951. This annual cover showed Rupert clasping a snowball, climbing a slope with chums and a huge, white snowscape behind him – once again magical.

Little wonder the 1951 Rupert annual rocked up sales well in excess of one million, representing the

peak of Rupert sales. Never before or since has a Rupert annual made such a snowy impact – almost as if Nutwood had been transferred to Switzerland!

It now seemed that as the 1950’s progressed winter was increasing its grip. 1954 had a annual cover showing Rupert by a snowman and snow falling

down from an orange sky. The overall effect was that of the cosy glow of a snowy sunburst. By now Bestall had achieved an intermittent “hat-trick” of three magical winter wonderland annual covers.

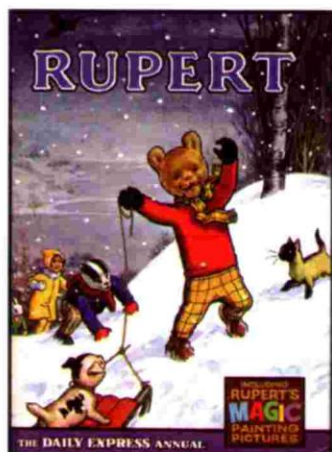
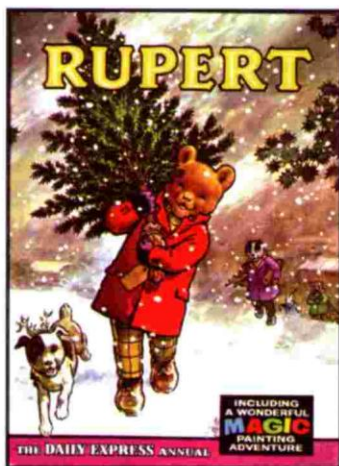


In addition the whole effect was enhanced by the newly introduced laminated boards, giving a very glossy effect, so would this continue?

Sure enough in 1956 another splendid annual cover greeted the eye. Rupert was to be seen sledging down a steep snowy slope, this time to a backdrop of a turquoise sky. Already the 1950’s

had yielded a record-breaking three snow-covered Rupert annuals in just seven years. However, the rest of the 1950's annuals present paradoxically the rest of the seasons with the decade ending on a very summery note; strangely enough matched by a hot summer.

As if by magic, winter returned with a vengeance for the 1960 annual: a wonderful illustration of Rupert holding a lantern and walking in a night time snowstorm from a dark blue sky. If you look closely you will observe the same lantern Rupert had been holding just eleven years earlier. Bang on cue, two years later the 1962 edition had Rupert playing snowballs with his pals, the obligatory snowman and all under a pink sky, suggesting late afternoon.



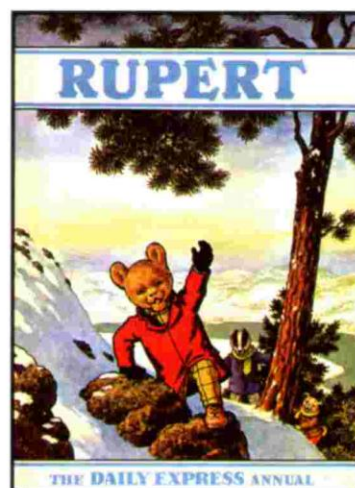
As if by instinct, Bestall snow scenes seemed to coincide with a cluster of colder winters. In fact the 1962 Christmas annual, as mentioned, presaged the coldest winter for three hundred years in the UK. Early 1963 still remains on the record books as the coldest winter in recent history, giving a three-month deep-freeze. Did Bestall know something we didn't?

The winter wonderland of the snowy sixties was again reflected in two more annuals, namely 1965 and 1967. In the former Rupert is carrying a Christmas tree through a ferocious blizzard coming from a dark, leaden grey sky. This very dramatic weather is actually being appreciated by that marvellous little dog, Snuffy, who like Rupert looks very happy. The later annual shows Rupert with a sledge under somewhat calmer conditions, again with Snuffy.

Well, if the 1950's had notched up three snowy covers, and the sixties four, what would the 1970's produce? Rather fewer as it happened. The 1970's started well enough, for on the 1970 annual cover itself, Rupert waves triumphantly part way up a steep

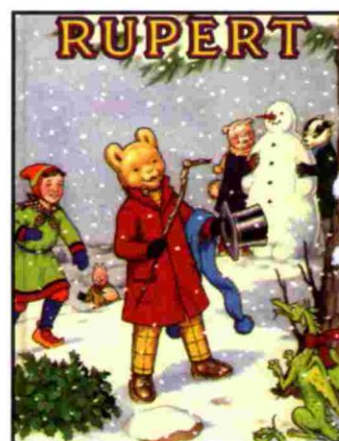
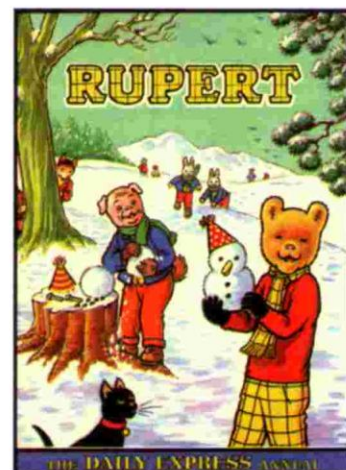
snow covered slope backed by alpine scenery and for once it's not snowing – in fact it looks to be a fine, crisp winter's day.

Unfortunately this was to be Alfred Bestall's annual "snow-cover" swansong. His last cover work was for the 1973 annual and after that even "winter" took a backseat! Cubie's 1974 annual cover was at the best an adequate depiction of



a Ruperty winter scene, but after this, just a big thaw. A further change in artist to John Harrold was welcomed but for a while yielded no "snow-cover". In fact it wasn't until 1989 that the annual sported a snow scene and three years later a creditable Christmas cover appeared.

Somehow, winters were just not the same anymore. Maybe Nutwood was suffering from global warming since with the exception of 2002 and 2005 the annual covers were looking decidedly warmer! The question now remains whether that golden period of dramatic winter covers will ever return? Perhaps in an effort to redress the meteorological balance and to resonate with the arctic period of last February, Rupert and his chums could



be seen enjoying the traditional winter fun of sledding, snowballing, snowman building, skating etc under those intense, dramatic skies so beloved of Alfred Bestall. After all, as both Alfred and Rupert might well have reiterated "there's no business like snow business!"

Gordon Bramham