

---

# SPECIAL FEATURE

---

## *Rupert and the Treasure Hunt*

---

**W**e have already looked at a few "themes" in Rupert stories ... underground stories, "green" themes and influences from and to other stories. This article looks at one of the more common and obvious themes that has been well-used by all of Rupert's artists - that of the treasure hunt.



*All good Rupert adventures begin in the familiar surroundings of Nutwood - this time on the common in Rupert and the Lion Rock, where the chums meet the aristocratic and kindly-looking Admiral - who appears in several guises across the years.*

---

It's a common theme in most forms of children's story, from Robert Louis Stevenson through John Masefield and J.R.R. Tolkien to Susan Cooper. The treasure can be gold doubloons, a magic box, a dragon's hoard or even the Holy Grail itself. Once again, Rupert is part of an honourable storytelling tradition that is quite distinct from that of the strip cartoon (we apologise for droning on about this again, but it is important!). The repeated appearance of identifiable and well-developed themes weave our Nutwood chums into the fabric of childrens' literature at the highest level. Mary Cadogan reiterated this observation and developed it in her insightful talk at the 1997 Annual Meeting, reproduced in *Nutwood Newsletter 27*.

In previous "thematic" articles, we have tried to draw out separate and identifiable forms of the same theme. In this feature, we will start by looking in some depth at what we believe to be the finest



*Rupert and Pharoah's Treasure - a recent and unusual example of the genre, where the treasure is not actually hidden - in fact it is stolen by a "baddie" in London, far from its Egyptian origins.*

---

example of this type of Rupert story and then look at other examples - before and after - to see how the other elements of the treasure story are used in each. As usual, this is not an exhaustive survey. Such things are very boring. We hope that this article will send you back to your pile of Annuals to re-read these fine stories, to find new depths in them and to fill the *Postbox* pages with your findings of even more examples.

*Rupert and the Lion Rock* (B129, 1951) is surely the finest example of the Rupert treasure story. It is a story of great breadth and scope, from Bestall at the peak of his storytelling and artistic powers. Beginning, typically, on Nutwood Common, the story takes Rupert and Rollo with a mysterious Admiral, to see Sam - Nutwood's anachronistic tarry-pigtailed sailor. The Admiral has a chart that shows the treasure's whereabouts under the eponymous Lion Rock. Rupert is not meant to go on the treasure hunt, but as a result of his curiosity, both he and Rollo find themselves stowed away on a boat belonging to a band of ruffians. These same useful ruffians appear in many Rupert stories and



*In a thrilling scene, Rupert descends into the Lion's Mouth to retrieve the treasure - in "Rupert and the Lion Rock" again*

---



And here are the pirates - with Rupert and Bill

---

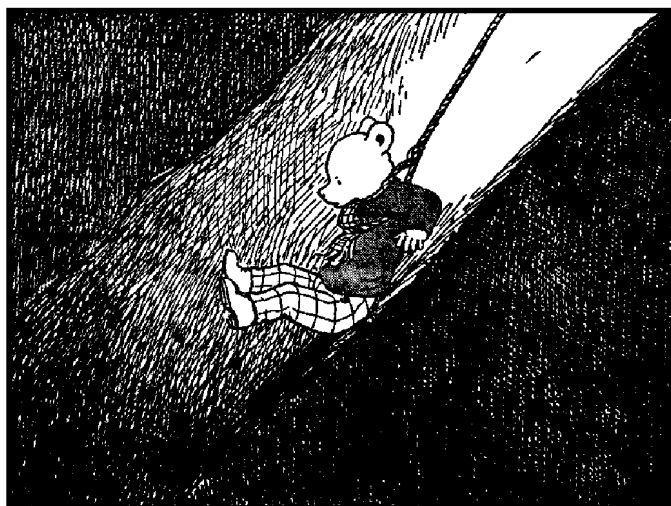
add a hint of relatively safe nastiness. In this story, the Admiral's handyman is one of the baddies and knows the secret of the treasure - adding a touch of betrayal to the story.

Rupert and Rollo thus arrive at Lion Rock just ahead of the Admiral and Sailor Sam and find the box of "treasure" - actually a box of stones and a second clue - before either the goodies or the baddies get there. The baddies march off happily with the box of worthless pebbles, while Rupert makes a daring descent into the very mouth of the Lion Rock to recover the real treasure for its rightful owner, the patrician-looking Admiral.

This story has it all - admirable goodies, an exotic location reached rapidly from the pretty but prosaic surroundings of Nutwood and nasty baddies who, satisfyingly, end up looking stupid. There is a neat "double bluff", where the real treasure is not where the chart says it is and also a thrilling and dangerous-looking underground scene where Rupert (naturally) takes to potholing and brings home the goods.

Most of these ingredients are also in the earliest Treasure-Hunt story that we have found - *Rupert and Bill and the Pirates* (T81, 1934). In this stirring tale, Rupert and Bill are cast adrift, while pottering in a rowing boat at the sea-side, by two naughty schoolboys - who play no further part in the tale. We are assured that they "saw that they had done wrong", but they are not subject to a Bestallian rehabilitation. Our chums are subsequently marooned on an island, where pirates, led by a hook-handed "heavy" worthy of R.L. Stevenson or J.M. Barrie, capture and enslave them. They are made to work hard and also to take part in the actual treasure hunt - where Rupert and Bill undergo yet another ordeal down a hole. This is one that we didn't spot in our earlier article on underground

adventures in *Nutwood Newsletter* 25! Emerging from the cavern, our chums are confronted with a Red Indian (Red Indians and Pirates? Slightly surreal - but in a Rupert story, why not?). The first Indian is a baddie, but he is summarily killed by some rather more friendly Indians who deliver Rupert and Bill up to a kindly-looking "Captain" at a nearby busy port, who sails them home safely, to the arms of the anxious Bear and Badger Mummies. The intervention of the Indians is a little peculiar, however and we suspect that Mary threw them in more to add to the excitement than to develop the plot sensibly! Despite its "everything but the kitchen sink" nature, this is a thrilling tale, with a wide-ranging, inventive and surprising plot. It is interesting to note that the "Captain" is an early example of the handsome and kindly grey-bearded Squires and Admirals that appear in many later Bestall stories and mentioned earlier in this article. Only last year (1996) the Rupert Annual included a fine Robinson/Harrod treasure hunt story - the inventive and often hilarious *Rupert and the Pharaoh's Treasure* (H172, 1992). In this later example of the genre, Rupert and his chums find themselves in the British Museum, looking at Pharaoh's treasure and then in the Science Museum, where their curiosity powers up a time machine and sends Rupert back in time. He meets up with Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, with whom he shares an exciting and atmospheric chase after a Dickensian jewel-thief in the museum, who has just pinched Pharaoh's treasure. Helped by Sergeant Growler (promoted backwards in time and very slowly!) they return the treasure to its place, thus ensuring that the earlier scenes in the present time do not affront causality! Holmes' chum Mr. Wells



Rupert goes "down under" again in Mary Tourtel's *Rupert and Bill and the Pirates*"

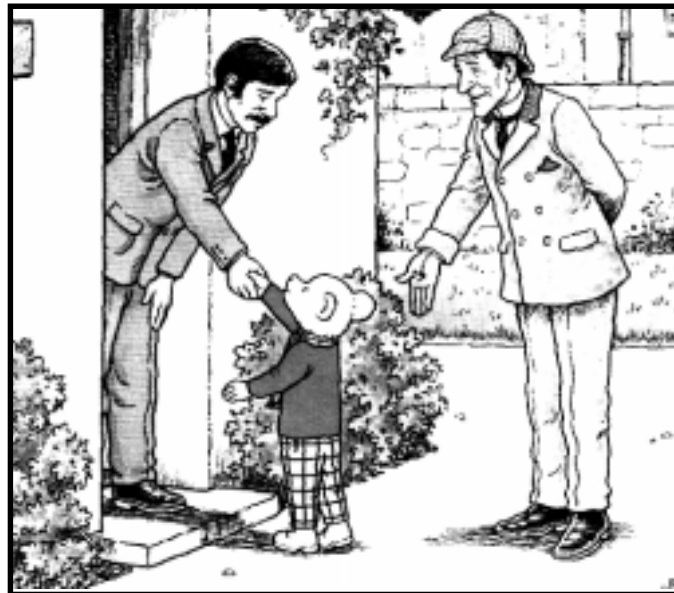
---

(Ian Robinson clearly had fun with this story) then transports Rupert forward again in time, to his chums' surprise and Dr. Chimp's considerable relief. In truth, this is not a conventional treasure hunt - more of a tale of thwarted burglary. However, it continues the treasure hunt theme into a different form of story, where Ian Robinson adds in time travel and characters from other stories. Mary Tourtel started this - most notably in *Rupert in Dreamland* (T14, 1923) and Alfred Bestall often dropped Nursery-Rhyme characters such as Simple Simon and Mary (Quite Contrary) into stories. *Rupert and the Pharoah's Treasure* moves Rupert into new territory (we think) by introducing very identifiable characters from adult novels. Perhaps this will prove to be a useful device in future Rupert stories? What would happen, for example, if Rupert bumped into Bilbo Baggins? What would a



Here is a distinctive circular lagoon, in "*Rupert and the Sleepy Pears*"

---

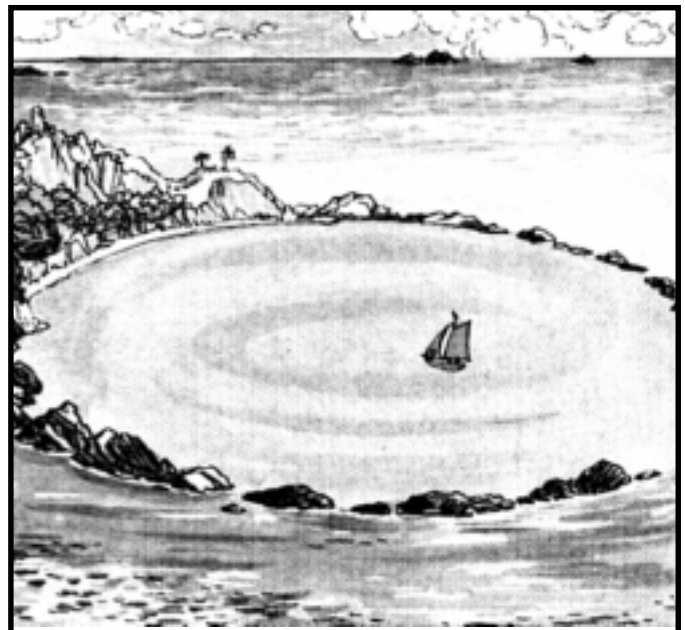


Here Rupert, having saved Pharoah's Treasure, is introduced to (H.G.) Wells by Sherlock Holmes - Rupert needs Wells' help to get back to the present day.

---

between two of Rupert's most intriguing, consistent themes and well established and respectable exemplars in "real" literature.

For the remainder of this article, we will take a wander through a selection of treasure hunt stories, looking at intriguing angles and interesting links. It's not unusual for people and places to reappear - sometimes in disguised or renamed forms - in Rupert stories. For example, a very distinctive circular lagoon appears in both *Rupert and the Red Box* (BGB2, 1939) and in *Rupert and the Sleepy Pears* (B94, 1946) - both excellent Bestall treasure hunts and clearly based on the same island in AEB's fertile imagination. In the *Sleepy Pears* story, the



And here it is again - in "*Rupert and the Red Box*"!

---

Psammead make of Rupert and his chums? I think we can live without Rupert drinking frobscottle and learning to "whizz-pop" with the BFG, but interesting possibilities are opened up by Rupert's contact with other characters from children's (and other) books. The example shown in *Rupert and the Pharoah's Treasure* links one of the most intriguing and consistent Nutwood themes - a fascination with weird and wonderful machinery - to its literary precursors via H.G. Wells. It also casts Rupert as detective - perhaps a theme for a future feature - alongside the greatest detective of them all. Perhaps unwittingly, Ian Robinson has underlined in this highly inventive tale the parallels



Pirate leader Roderigo - both exotic and sinister - from "Rupert and the Sleepy Pears"

---

treasure remains hidden, as it is in the lagoon itself. Sailor Sam is happy to leave it there for a future visit (does it occur? We have not found it!) as the pirates do not have the secret of the treasure's whereabouts. It is interesting to see such a cliffhanging ending as most children's stories seem to tie up all the loose ends. Bestall would clearly have written good serial adventures for television! Interestingly, a name recurs in Bestall's treasure-hunt stories. In *Rupert's Winter Journey* (B72,

1943) Pedro is an unfortunate sailor (also a goodie), kidnapped and then marooned by the luckless pirates (who fail to find the treasure). In the much later



Pedro - this time an unfortunate marooned sailor in "Rupert's Winter Journey"

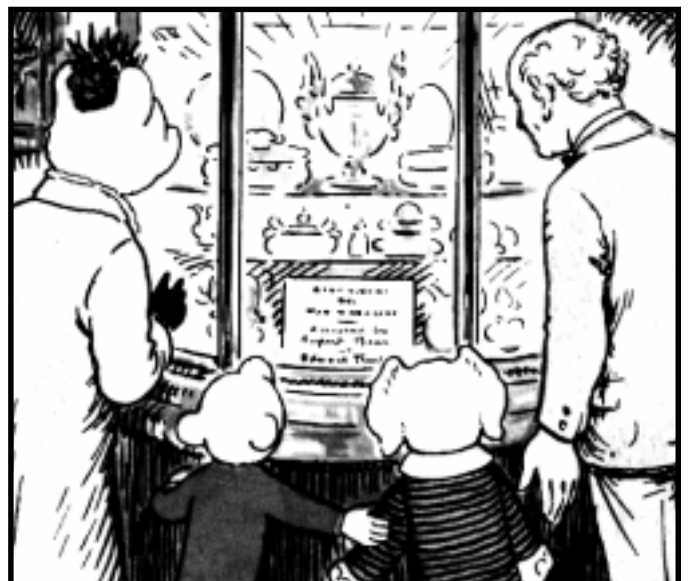
---

*Rupert and the Purple Star* (B194, 1960), **Black Pedro**, a definite baddie, appears. This is not very politically correct ... but black presumably refers to his heart or his drooping moustache, as Black Pedro is exotic-looking, but definitely white!. Before these two stories we have a nameless pirate leader (*Rupert and the Old Map*, B70, 1942) and between the two, a pirate leader Roderigo (*Rupert and the Sleepy Pears*, B94, 1946). AEB admitted that he did not have a perfect memory for themes and names - so some inconsistency and renaming is not surprising.



Here is our hero, with the treasure, in "Rupert and the Red Box". This image also appeared in George Perry's book "Rupert, a Bear's Life" as an example of the process whereby Rupert acquires his colour. This was written in 1939 and coloured in 1982

---



Our hero surveys the treasure he helped to retrieve, at the end of "Rupert and the Carved Stick"

---



*Rupert and Septimus find the route to the treasure*

---

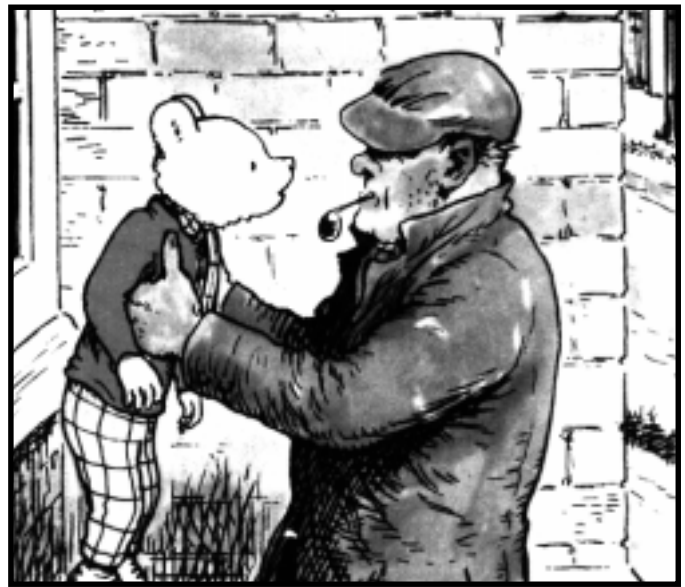
One or two other treasure hunt adventures deserve special mention - just because they are fine yarns, exciting and full of new ideas.

In *Rupert and the Iron Key* (B58, 1941), the said key is thrown into a tree where Rupert is hiding, by yet another set of ne'er-do-well ruffians. On advice from Rollo's omniscient Gipsy Granny, Rupert takes the key to the nearest big house, whose owner (dressed in typical archaic clothes) is intrigued but puzzled. Not knowing where the key has come from, they put it back in the tree and follow the thieves to find that it opens an ancient, secret cellar. Once again, a cryptic map shows where the trapdoor is concealed. As usual, Rupert goes down the hole to see what's what. He



*The Iron Key unlocks the secret treasure - a solid-gold suit of armour.*

---



*Rupert stumbles into the baddie in Rupert and the Iron Key*

---

discovers a suit of solid gold armour - one of the greatest family treasures. This story has a peculiar, truncated ending as Mrs. Bear appears in the second-last frame and the story screeches to a halt. It feels like a shortened story, but John Beck's *Rupert Index* indicates otherwise ... very strange. *Rupert and Rusty* (B174, 1957) is another Bestall



*Very mysterious - smoke issuing from an unoccupied cottage, in "Rupert and Rusty"*

---

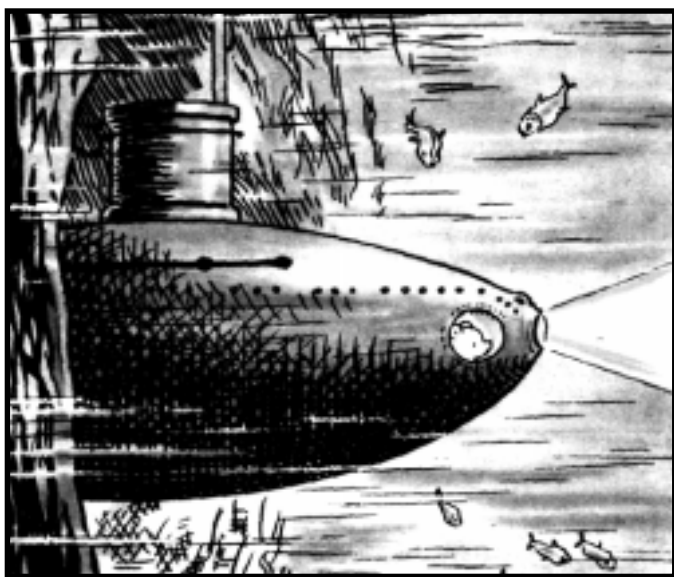
masterpiece of intrigue, mystery and inventiveness. Rusty is actually Adolphus - an odd choice of name - almost as bad as Septimus. Where did AEB get these peculiar names from? There is a wonderfully gripping connection in this story between an apparently unoccupied cottage with smoke issuing from its chimney and an underground lair. The fire is actually underground and Rupert and Rusty make



*Rupert and Adolphus (alias Rusty) squeeze in to find the treasure, in a splendid chest.*

---

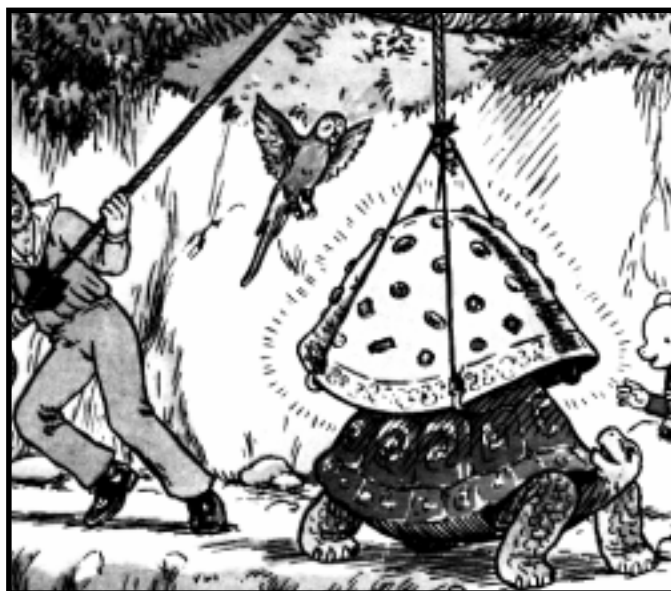
(yet another) daring potholing trip to enter the baddie's hiding-place and find the archetypical pirates chest. There are many, many clever ideas and interesting twists here. There's a sinister baddie who turns out to be the ne'er-do-well nephew of the cottage's owner. The treasure map gets torn in two and can't be made sense of until Rupert (who else?) discovers the second part. Adolphus/Rusty is imprisoned by the baddie, but Rupert escapes and discovers the route through a wardrobe (!) from the mysterious cottage to the seaside cave and the treasure. Only Rupert and Rusty are small and agile enough to reach the treasure, which turns out to be in an archetypical treasure chest.



*Bestall missed no opportunity to introduce a new form of transport for Rupert. Here is a very fine submarine, from "Rupert's Winter Journey" ... we have no real excuse for showing it here ... we just like it!*

---

In *Rupert and Old Tom's Trove* (H124, 1984), a later story, Sam is still around to spur our hero on to follow an enigmatic clue ("if in it's name t'were "U" not "O", to feed a Lord Mayor it might go"). More unpleasant-looking baddies fill out the plot and follow Rupert and Sam to a treasure island. There, they meet a turtle (see the clue above for the key to this little word-play) who takes them to meet a poor, sad "Hermit-turtle", who carries an awesome weight of jewelled gold on his shell. Naturally, Rupert struggles through the clutches of the Sea-Gnomes, who turn out to be good guys after all, to and relieve the Hermit-turtle of his uncomfortable, if valuable burden. There are several precursors to this form of story - where a "treasure" is more of a burden than a delight. It appears in



*Rupert and Sam relieve the Hermit-Turtle of his uncomfortable burden, "Rupert and Old Tom's Trove"*

---

ancient legends such as that of Midas and continues through Frodo's burden in *The Lord of the Rings*. Finally, the treasure hunt theme was visual enough for Mick Wells to produce the 1976 "TV Storybook", *Rupert and the Pirate Gold*. Rupert, Bill, Rastus Mouse and the Merboy (aided by a large but friendly octopus) retrieve a valuable-looking chest of pirate gold. Cap'n Binnacle is also implicated and Black Pedro is mentioned. The story is not a re-write of *Rupert and the Blue Star*, where Black Pedro appeared before and we cannot trace a "real" Rupert story that could be the basis of the TV Storybook yarn (can you?).

*Alan Murray, John Jones and Jason Pointing*