



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

# An Interview With John Vernon Lord

**Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?**

The *Rupert Bear* annuals written and illustrated by Alfred Bestall 1935-65. There are lots of pictures and 3 ways of telling the stories: running headlines, rhyming couplets beneath each illustration, and a longer prose narrative to choose from. The content and composition of the illustrations, the characterization of the individuals, the atmosphere, and the variety of the settings are all a delight. I do not remember being read to by anybody when I was a child.

**Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?**

This happened early on in my life. I was mostly brought up by a grandmother and a great aunt when I was aged between 6 and 12. They always encouraged me to draw. Indeed drawing has been a constant preoccupation throughout my life. I didn't think of anything else when it came to considering my future occupation. It just came naturally and I have been very fortunate that I have been able to work as an illustrator, and a teacher of the subject at University, throughout my life.

**Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?**

If we knew the answer to this question we would all become successful. We all have varied tastes too so what may be successful for one group of people may be a failure to others.

**Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?**

When writing and illustrating for children I mainly cater for the child I once was myself and still am to a certain extent. My *The Giant Jam Sandwich* was a story I invented for two young boys who were frightened of wasps. When illustrating fiction for adults I think you have to confound the readers' expectations and help them read it afresh, especially if it is a familiar text you are illustrating.

**Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?**

We have about 5,000 'physical' books at home and two electronic books on my computer. Books on shelves can be arranged in a conducive way for the individual who owns them – by themes and subjects, by fact and fiction, by authors and illustrators, by period and so on. You can do this with electronic books too but for me it is not the same to go through lists of documents on a computer. For me each book has a memory of where and when I bought it and the circumstances. One of my favourite occupations is to search through the shelves of second-hand and antiquarian bookshops. It is a different world from downloading digital files on a computer. It is more serendipitous too. I love the physical quality and shape of a book too, the dustcover, the binding, the paper, the typography, the nature of print and the turn of the page.

I think the question of the electronic book replacing the physical book will ultimately be a matter of 'green' issues – what it costs in energy to produce them and the requirements of spaces in houses. Books require plenty of electrical power to produce them – for generating the text and images, for making the paper and binding materials, for transporting them to the bookshops and on-line warehouses and so on. Similarly the electronic book requires a tablet, mobile phone or computer to read it. All these require considerable amount of electrical energy to produce them, as well as run them and charge their batteries. It would be interesting to know the comparative use of energy that is needed for the production and use of the electronic book and the physical book. One of the marvellous features of electronic books is the ability to download very rare publications at very little expense.

**Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?**

Yes, I am an avid collector. I have a collection of rare 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century *Aesop's Fables*. We have many books about Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and James Joyce. We also have many books about art and artists, illustration and illustrators, music and musicians. As for wanting to own a special book, I cannot think of anything I would love to own just now, other than William Caxton's *the subtyl historyes and Fables of Esope*, 1484. The unique perfect copy of this fine volume is in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, so there is not much chance of owning that!