

Winnie-the-Pooh

WINNIE-THE-POOH is probably the most famous literary bear in the world. Seventy years after publication of the first book in which he featured, the royalties from the books and spin-offs amount to something approaching £2,000,000 a year!

Pooh's fame rests on just three small books: *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), *Now We Are Six!* (1927), and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928). Yet A. A. Milne, the writer of these classic children's stories, saw himself primarily as a serious playwright and even, on occasions, resented his success as a children's writer because he felt it distracted people from his adult work.



The teddy bear who was to become Winnie-the-Pooh was bought in 1921 for the first birthday of Milne's son, Christopher Robin, by his mother, Daphne. The bear, at first called Edward Bear or plain Bear, was an Alpha bear made by J. K. Farnell. Nowadays he lives in the New York Public Library, along with his friends Eeyore, Tigger, Kanga and Piglet, who were all donated to the children's section of the library by A. A. Milne's American publisher. Even now he is a fine specimen and photographs taken in his prime show a typically plump, glossy Alpha bear. 'He and Christopher Robin were exactly the same size on that day, ten years ago now, when the friendly bear joined the Milne family,' Daphne Milne later told an American reporter.

When he became a little older Christopher Milne decided on a more personal name for his bear. It was a combination of the name of a real bear he had admired

at London Zoo, a Canadian brown bear from Winnipeg called Winnie, and the name of a swan he used to feed in the country, which he had called Pooh. A. A. Milne explained that they took the swan's name with them when they returned to London 'as we didn't think the swan would want it any more'.

The beautiful illustrations for the books were by Ernest H. Shepard, who had already illustrated Kenneth Grahame's book, *The Wind in the Willows*. Shepard based all the characters on Christopher Milne's toys except Winnie-the-Pooh himself, who was modelled on his own son's Steiff bear called Growler.

In 1961 Walt Disney bought the film and merchandising rights to Winnie-the-Pooh and new drawings were created which gave Christopher Robin's world-famous bear a new, less sophisticated look. Disney have made several Winnie-the-Pooh films and exploited the image with great efficiency. Nowadays Shepard's original images and the new Disney images exist happily side by side.



ABOVE: A.A. MILNE, HIS SON CHRISTOPHER ROBIN, AND THE ORIGINAL WINNIE-THE-POOH.