



ANZAAB Aspects of Book Collecting **Children's Books**

Kookaburra Books

Background: Books written and printed especially for children were almost entirely unknown before 1650, and the next one hundred years produced only a few. Some of the earliest were books of manners and moralistic tracts. There was also a pictorial encyclopaedia by Comenius published in 1657 and books of fairy tales published at the end of the seventeenth century. The moralistic trend continued through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century with chapbooks illustrated with woodcuts, and later coloured by hand. In the second half of the nineteenth century artists such as Kate Greenaway, Walter Crane and Randolph Caldecott introduced art and design rather than just caricature, heralding the golden age of children's book publication which was from 1890 to the First World War. Illustrators such as Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac contributed to handsome gift volumes. Since then the field of children's book collecting has proliferated with books aimed at children's own tastes and enjoyment rather than being instructive or moralistic.

Range: There are several aspects to collecting children's books. Some collectors concentrate on iconic titles such as *Wind in the Willows*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *Lord of the Rings* and various editions of 'Alice' for example.

Others collect by subject such as 'golden age' gift books, fairy books, golliwog books, schoolgirl romances and comic annuals.

Some people go back to their own childhood or that of their parents and collect books that they remember such as Enid Blyton, Beatrix Potter, *Biggles*, *William*, Arthur Ransome, *Rupert* and *Edward Ardizzone*. Modern writers such as J.K Rowling, Roald Dahl and Terry Pratchett are also collected.

Availability: It is fairly easy to build a collection from many of the modern and twentieth century authors, but much harder to find earlier material. Chapbooks and earlier children's books are seldom seen in Australia.

Collectable authors such as Elsie Oxenham, W.E Johns and A.A Milne can be found quite easily in bookshops, but pre war titles in dust jacket are much harder to find. It can sometimes be hard to find children's books in very good to fine condition, as understandably they were handled a bit roughly, hence finding a rare book in bright condition can be very satisfying.

Price Range: Many children's books can be picked up very reasonably for between ten and one hundred dollars, but rarer items can sell for thousands of dollars, for instance the withdrawn first edition of *Alice* can be worth up to half a million dollars.

Footnote: Collecting children's books can be a very rewarding pastime, a connection with our own childhood and a source of beauty and wonder.