

Rupert Bear -Not Much of an Engineer????

A Talk by Dr Fred Starr PhD, FIMMM, MIMechE, C.Eng

Sidcup Literary and Scientific Society

Emmanuel Church Hall in Hadlow Road

Promptly at 7.30 PM, Tuesday 8th January

(admin £4)

Synopsis

Once upon a time, in a million British households, one of the big events of Xmas day was finding out whether Santa Claus had brought the new Rupert Bear Annual and what was in it. Even adults would want to know. Many of Rupert's adventures relied on technology, a word then almost unknown, but now in daily use. Without doubt, these technical aspects, along with the superb illustrations, were a prime reason for the popularity of the Annuals. The lecturer, who has a scientific and engineering background, believes that his early fascination with these subjects stems from his close reading of Rupert. Many others, some of whom must be among the top engineers and scientists in this country, could also trace their early interest back to Rupert.

The lecturer is an active member of the Newcomen Society, a group of enthusiasts who are dedicated to unearthing the forgotten history of engineering and technology. By the nature of the Society we occasionally unearth some half baked and really daft ideas. Our members have the habit of describing them as "Rupert Bear Inventions". It always raises a laugh, as we all know what is meant.

This, in my view, is to downplay the significance of Rupert in shaping the nation's consciousness. The lecture will attempt to show why the Rupert stories worked and had influence. Alfred Bestall, an accomplished magazine artist and cartoonist, although not the originator of Rupert, was the man who started the Annuals in 1936. But, in addition, Alfred had a technical background, having driven and maintained trucks and buses on the Western Front. Moreover, when Alfred took over the Rupert series, the Britain of the 1930s had much to boast about, engineering-wise. The format was set for Alfred and his successors. The Annuals are still published.

You will see that Rupert had a hands on involvement in mechanical, chemical and aeronautical engineering, and not surprisingly, now has his own fan club, "The Followers of Rupert Bear". Through their magazine "Nutwood Newsletters" and Library Service, the Followers have provided many of ideas and illustrations that will be used in the talk.

Fred Starr: 14th Dec 2018