

## ARTHUR RACKHAM

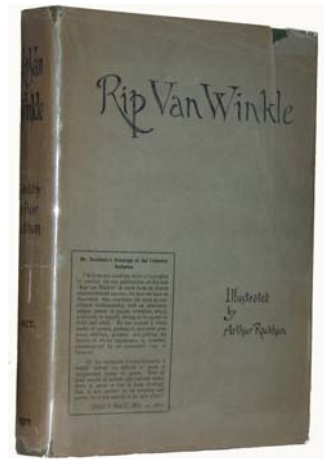
**London born artist** Arthur Rackham needs little introduction. He was the pre-eminent British book illustrator of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and his output is impressive in both quality and quantity. Rackham's work has long attracted collectors from around the world and there is an amazing array of unusual variants, deluxe bindings and special editions to keep enthusiast interested.

Rackham began his career selling drawings to newspapers and periodicals, gradually establishing himself as an artist and illustrator of adventure stories. An example of his early illustrations can be found in books such as *'The Peradventures of Private Pagett'* 1904.



**It was the commission for *Rip Van Winkle*** from William Heinemann in 1905 that launched Arthur Rackham and the Golden Age of Illustration as we now know it. Like most of his large gift books, this book was offered in two formats; an edition deluxe bound in full white vellum and signed by Rackham, plus a less expensive cloth edition, often referred to as the trade edition. Both were

beautifully produced, with 51 mounted colour plates and elaborate gilt covers. Rackham's gift books were published with dustwrappers, although due to their frailty and combined with the beauty of the covers below, most wrappers have been lost or destroyed.



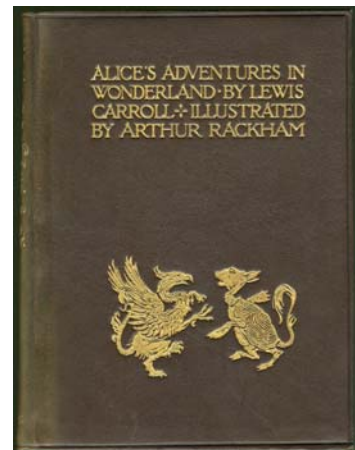
***Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*** was Rackham's next gift book, published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1906. His illustrations for this story received unanimous praise and cemented his reputation as a leading book illustrator. The book not only established Arthur Rackham's style of fairies and goblins, twisted trees and hidden faces, but confirmed the popularity of the "Gift Book", which was to last for around the next 30 years.

The popularity of Peter Pan was such that Harrods wanted to offer the book to its customers and commissioned a unique brown suede cover for copies on sale in their Knightsbridge store.



For the next 20 years Rackham, working mainly with Heinemann, illustrated such classics as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1907), *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1908) and *The Tempest* (1926). During this time his publishers stuck mainly to the early formula of issuing a deluxe signed edition together with a trade edition.

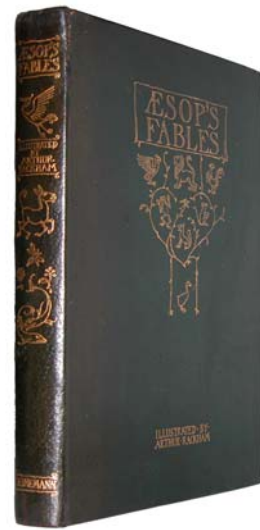
As early as 1907, Heinemann tested a different style for the production of Rackham's version of *Alice in Wonderland*. The deluxe edition was bound in white buckram and was not signed by the artist, whilst the trade edition could be ordered in either a cloth or full leather binding. This was also the first of Rackham's books to have a full colour dustwrapper.



In 1910 and 1911 Rackham's illustrations for Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* were published. These were two magnificent volumes which proved popular with Rackham's devotees as well as with opera lovers. A small number of the trade editions of these books were available in a beautiful limp suede binding with gilt stamped design and yapp edges. A later edition also offered a full leather publisher's binding.

Around this period Heinemann were toying with different approaches to the presentation of their gift books and when the 1912 *Aesop's fables* was printed trial bindings were tested for both the deluxe and the ordinary editions. A trial

copy of the signed limited edition coming from the publishers files is bound in full black leather with gilt vignettes and tooling, although on publication the deluxe edition was in full white buckram. The trade edition was available in both cloth and in limp suede with a printed box.



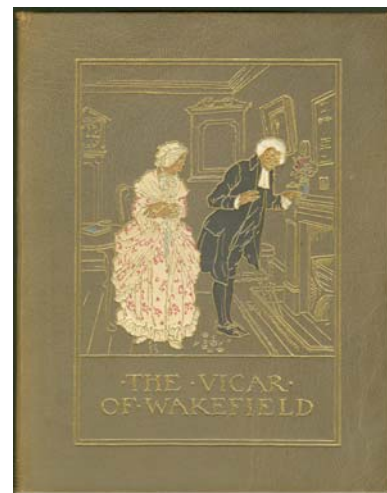
**During the 1920's** Rackham started a practice of including small drawings in the books he sent as gifts to friends. The books with drawings were greatly appreciated and friends



began to commission Rackham to insert drawings, and occasionally watercolour paintings, into their books.

**When George Harrap** became Rackham's main publisher in the late 1920's they were keen to maximise the commercial success of their new artist. The first gift book they produced, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1929) maintained the traditional format of a signed deluxe edition, bound in full vellum and issued with a printed slipcase. The trade edition was issued

in cloth with a full colour dustwrapper and also in a soft, grey leather binding into which one of the artists scenes was stamped in gilt and highlighted with inlaid coloured leather.





They quickly picked up on the popularity of books which contained drawings by the artist and in the 1930's introduced an extra special limited edition. This comprised of the first nine or ten copies of the deluxe edition, bound in full morocco by Sangorski and Sutcliffe, each with an original watercolour painting associated with the text.

Shown here is a watercolour from the special edition of Walton's *Compleat Angler*.

**In the final years** of Rackham's life he was able to undertake a commission that had appealed to him for some time. Because of his contract with Heinemann, Arthur Rackham had been obliged to turn down Methuen's offer of illustrating the first edition of Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* (1907). The Limited Edition Club, New York later commissioned Rackham to illustrate *Wind in the*

*Willows* (1940) which was completed shortly before his death in 1939. Sadly Kenneth Grahame was no longer alive to oversee the work, but his widow took it upon herself to show Rackham the areas of the Thames that had inspired the book. It was published in England by Methuen 10 years later. This book provides 16 magnificent watercolour images of Grahame's animals and Thames-side scenes. As with other works immortalised by Rackham this final tale was published in varying formats, ranging from the quarter cloth, large paper version first issued in America, through to a smaller format trade edition in dustwrapper and ending with a luxurious deluxe edition, printed on hand made paper and bound in full soft, white calf. As a final tribute to this great artist there could be nothing more suitable than the combination of this literary and artistic masterpiece.

