

ALFONZO

IAN POUT - TEDDY BEARS OF WITNEY

"Alfonzo is quite exceptional for the aura he pervades. He has touched the hearts of people of all ages around the world in a way no other bear has."



Alfonzo was the heart of Teddy Bears of Witney from 1989, when Ian Pout bought him at Christie's, until his journey to Denmark in the autumn of 2016. Every bear has his or her (or even its) own identity and can be special for an infinite variety of reasons. To most of us our childhood bear will always be the favourite. Others will earn a special place in our heart for its charm, story, rarity or just the way 'it speaks to you'. Alfonzo is quite exceptional for the aura he pervades. He has touched the hearts of people of all ages around the world in a way no other bear has.

In 1989 the Christie's catalogue told the story of how this small red Steiff bear was given to Princess Xenia of Russia in 1908 by her father, Grand Duke George Michailovitch. In the summer of 1914 the princess brought Alfonzo with her for a visit to Buckingham Palace and was prevented from returning to Russia by the outbreak of war. Five years later the Grand Duke was assassinated at the Fortress of St Peter and St Paul. This story, combined with the rarity of the bear, was enough to encourage Ian to pay a world record price for him. More light was shed on Alfonzo when, seven months later, Ian received a hand-written letter from the vendor, whose identity had until then been known only to Christie's. Mrs Nancy Leeds Wynkoop explained that Alfonzo had lived with her at her home in Vermont since her mother, Princess Xenia, had died in 1965. She believed that it was the princess's English nanny Miss Bourne, known as 'Nanabell', who made his cotton sateen Cossack outfit and she told how the princess and Alfonzo wintered at the Mihailovskaya Palace in St Petersburg and spent summer by the Crimean Sea in their house, close to the Emperor's. She also mentioned that Alfonzo felt at home in Vermont because there were bears in the local mountains. Alfonzo's provenance could not have been more perfectly endorsed. He became accessible to all when Steiff made a limited edition of



him in 1990. Other versions by Teddy Bears of Witney followed. From 1989 to 2017 Alfonzo was occasionally exhibited at events in Germany, Monaco, San Diego and Kyoto but most of the time he spent at his home in Witney. A serious illness in 2013 and his subsequent seventieth birthday combined to make Ian think seriously about Alfonzo's future. Parting with him would be traumatic but, at just this time, serendipity alighted. Gitte Thorsen, a Danish bear artist already well known to Ian, told him that she had left her full-time job as Designmaster at LEGO to help with the formation of a new teddy bear museum to be built in Billund, within walking distance of Legoland. There was already a connection to

Denmark as Princess Xenia's mother was Princess Marie of Denmark. A few months later Ian met the owners of the museum, Gunhild Kirk Johansen and her husband Mogens, along with Gitte and Johnny, Gitte's husband, who were also helping to set up the museum. The decision was made and a new journey for Alfonzo was about to begin. Alfonzo will be on display at the Teddy Bear Art Museum, Denmark, from the Spring of 2018 when the new museum opens. Teddy Bears of Witney remains home to a still more famous bear, Aloysius, the star of *Brideshead Revisited*, as well as many others.



TOP: Teddy Bears Of Witney limited edition Alfonzo.
LEFT: Steiff Centenary Alfonzo.
ABOVE: Bristol's lost bear poster.



Bristol Airport

Amazing journeys start here

The newest arrival at Teddy Bears of Witney is Bristol, a circa 1910 German bear, who was left behind at the departure lounge of Bristol Airport in 2012. After considerable efforts by airport staff the bear and Bob Baker, nephew of the bear's original owner, were re-united in 2015. In the meantime Bob's health had deteriorated, and so he decided to sell the bear. Ian remembered reading about 'Bristol's' story and was more than happy to become his new guardian when he appeared at auction in December 2015. This somewhat battered but highly charismatic bear is usually on display in Witney but will have a rare outing on June 11th, when he will be exhibited at Woburn. Bristol is a more than welcome addition to the collection at Witney but as Ian says, 'no bear can replace Alfonzo.'

ABOVE: Bristol a 1910 German Bear