

End of the Rainbow Kirsty Johnstone

My mum and I started collecting teddy bears in the early 1990s, firstly the cuddly ones then progressing on to artist bears, we also attended many local Hertfordshire fairs together. My eyes were opened to the extent of the bear world when I visited the Easter Fairs held at the Business Design Centre in Islington, one year the fair even made the BBC local news there were so many people queuing! Sadly in 2000 mum died, I inherited her hug and I decided to branch out into old bears.

I attended the December 2000 Christie's auction where a world record was set of £91,500.00 for a Black Steiff. I knew nothing about antique bears and as I viewed all the lots I was continually drawn back to one bear, a 1914 eighteen inch Farnell, he must be my first pot of gold as he started my love of old bears. I felt so privileged to be able to take him home. He had pride of place in my flat, he was so distinguished with lovely eyes and a very knowing stare, he must have

felt happy in his new home, as just after Christmas I was sitting in my chair when I heard a noise, Donald as I had named him, decided to speak.

My second pot of gold is Edwin, a five and a half inch mascot bear, who combines my love of history and bears, he started my collection of bears with wartime provenance, now my main interest. I had first heard of Edwin in 1994 when he was put up for auction the first time, he was on the television and in the papers, I said to my parents how lovely it would be to own him as he had such a story attached to him, you can imagine their reply as I had just moved into a flat and was broke! I read Edwin had been sold at Phillips and was off to live in Jersey.

You can imagine my surprise when the catalogue for the 100 Years of the Teddy Bear Christie's December 2002 Auction arrived and there was Edwin Lot Number 2. This time I was not going to let him slip through my grasp, I was so nervous, the Christie's ladies were nervous for me. Joy oh joy I successfully bid for him, there were sighs of relief all round! Every time I look at Edwin I cannot imagine his life with Percy in the trenches, what he must have witnessed and how lucky he was to have made it safely back to Blighty when Percy was killed. Edwin's face is very expressive and shows a deep seated sadness in life, he does have some war wounds, one eye is missing and has been replaced with embroidery and he has a large stain over half



of his face. Verna, Percy's widow, kept Edwin by her bedside then gave him to her daughter, Joan, but no one was ever allowed to touch or play with Edwin, perhaps this solitary life adds to his sadness.

The pot of gold I am still hoping to find is Sopwith, another bear who I missed at auction in 2005. He was the original Sopwith of Colour Box Bears fame and was sold when the Fagans dispersed their collection. Sopwith is another bear who comes with incredible provenance, first being the mascot of FL Lt William Turnbull RFC, who was killed in a crash over Salisbury Plain, there are photographs of William and the bear, who always accompanied him on his flights. The bear was returned to William's family and again took to the skies in WW2 as a mascot for another family member. When the Fagans acquired Sopwith in 1992 he took to the skies again with the RAF, both in modern jets and on a Lancaster bomber in the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, this time raising a lot of money for charity. Sopwith acquired many mementos during this period including Vera Lynn's autograph all of which he still has! Needless to say if anyone knows of Sopwith's whereabouts I would be very grateful if they told me, as I would love to see him take to the skies again in honour of the RAF's 100th birthday.

