

INSTANT EXPERT

Ladybird books

The slim volumes that have helped children enjoy reading for close on a century are now collectors' items with huge nostalgic value, says the *Roadshow's* **Katherine Higgins**



KATHERINE HIGGINS
Katherine, who trained at Christie's, is one of the *Roadshow's* miscellaneous experts and is the author of *Are You Rich?* (Carlton Books).

When I was five, I didn't much care for collecting... I just wanted to be Rapunzel. When my mother turned the pages of the 14th book in Ladybird's 'Well-Loved Tales' series, my fantasy sparked to life. The mismatch between Eric Winter's watercolour of Rapunzel's flowing golden hair and my own short curls mattered not – I was mesmerised. Tale told, I was hungry for more and Ladybird was ready to oblige with a run of colourful fiction and absorbing fact. Those who bought into Ladybird for half a crown (there was no price increase for 30 years) knew exactly what they were getting – squeaky clean, accurate content and fabulous artwork in a perfect-for-small-hands cover.

I was brought up on Ladybird books – surely they're not worth anything now?

'So many people who had Ladybirds as children want to take a trip down memory lane and re-read them,' says Robert Mullin, a collector who

is researching the entire Ladybird output on his website The Wee Web. Nostalgia has certainly moved the market substantially in a decade. You can still join in with a few pounds but expect to part with £250 or more for a first edition or rarity.

So which ones am I hoping to find in the attic?

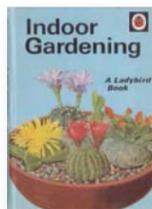
In terms of collectability, it's anything from the books of the 1940s until the introduction of shiny, laminated covers (from 1983) that sparks interest. If you could dust down a first edition copy of *The Impatient Horse*, you'd be laughing (see Top of the Tree, overleaf). Equally sought-after is the 1964 *Cinderella* (from the 606d series), which costs around £200 with dust jacket. These unite two interest groups – those who seek out true rarities (*The Impatient Horse* ran to only three editions) and those who are driven by memories. 'The 606d *Cinderella* has gained its high price tag by dint of being so much loved, rather than through being rare – such is the power of nostalgia,' says self-confessed

BOOKS, from top: *Helping at Home* by ME Gagg (1961), £4, *Ladybird Fly Away Home*. *6c Reading with Sounds* (1965), £4, *Beware of the Leopard Books*. *4c Say the Sound* (1965), £2, *Ladybird Fly Away Home*. **MARBLES**, £1 per set of 12; **picture DOMINO CARDS**, £8; **TOY CARS**, from £1, all from vintage markets. **Toy COWBOYS AND INDIANS**, from 'Wild West' set, £22.50, **Berry Red**. 'Oxford' picture and word making **CARDS**, £6.50; vintage **TEDDY BEAR**, £12, both Milly & Dottie's Emporium. 'Mool' **WALLPAPER** in buttercup, £45 per roll, **Mini Moderns**

THREE OF THE BEST

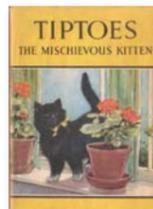
GOOD

£5-£10: *Indoor Gardening*, first edition (1969), from series 633, 'Hobbies & Interests', printed with the 2/6 price that was about to change after 30 years due to decimalisation. BH Robinson went on to illustrate a number of books in the 'How it Works' series, including *How it Works: The Computer*.



BETTER

£45: *Tiptoes the Mischievous Kitten*, 10th edition (1954). Although a later copy of the 1949 original, this will still trigger memories for some and is ahead of all those copies that have lost their dust jacket. Something like this offers you the opportunity to trade up to an earlier copy when you can.



BEST

£70: *Telling the Time*, first edition (1962). A Douglas Keen commission that encapsulates Ladybird's formula and was meant to be drawn on by children learning to tell the time. Since most children did what Ladybird suggested, the good clean condition of this copy, complete with an undamaged dust jacket, sets it aside from others.



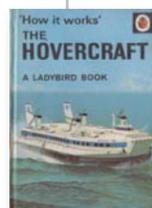
PHOTOGRAPHS: CAROLYN BARBER. STYLING: KIERA BUCKLEY-JONES



BOOKS, from top: 6a *Our Friends* by William Murray (1964), £2.50; *Levers, Pulleys and Engines* by Newing and Bowood (1963), £5, both Ladybird Fly Away Home. *British Wild Flowers* by Brian Vesey-Fitzgerald (1957), £2.50, Beware of the Leopard Books. *The Lord's Prayer* (1961), £2, Ladybird Fly Away Home. *Toys and Games to Make* by James Webster (1966), £2.50, Beware of the Leopard Books. 'Battery Square' WALLPAPER, £40 per roll, Mini Moderns



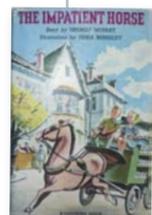
AN INVESTMENT
Ladybird refreshed best-sellers with an illustrative and textual make-over – the 'How it Works' series was given a new look at the end of the 1970s. As original first editions



climb in value, these later revised editions will become increasingly sought-after.

TOP OF THE TREE

George Murray brings Horace the delivery horse to life in *The Impatient Horse* (1953). But it never touched children as other books did and ran to very few editions. It's classed as super-rare and tops the price charts, costing around £300 for a fine first edition with dust jacket.



“The Ladybird book as we know it came with the advent of World War II”

Ladybird addict Helen Day, who is behind the website Ladybird Fly Away Home.

Keep an eye out too for the six *Adventures of Wonk* from the 1940s, each with Joan Kiddell-Monroe's free-flowing illustrations of a little koala bear. Few and far between, a first edition in a good state with dust jacket now costs £100-plus.

Hmmm, my collection is more *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Goldilocks* – are they worth anything?

Those who grew up in the Sixties and Seventies have a soft spot for the 'Well Loved Tales' series because they comforted at bedtime and helped us to read, with their grading system from level 1 (*The Three Little Pigs*) to level 3 (*Beauty and the Beast*). Millions were sold in countless editions. *Cinderella*, the first, was the only title issued with a dust jacket. Subsequent tales were sandwiched between matt pictorial boards. The key to value is how far down the edition and condition chain they go. An average late-print run copy of any

of these titles would start at around £10-£20, providing there's no extra felt-tip colouring!

How did these books come about and when?

The firm behind Ladybird was printer/stationer Wills & Hepworth. Its first foray into children's literature during World War I was a sideline to keep the printing presses turning. The resulting titles (like *Tiny Tot's Travels*), which carried an open-winged Ladybird logo (registered in 1915), were large annual-size productions with three-colour illustrations. But the real beginning of Ladybird as we know it came with the advent of World War II, when it made a second foray into children's titles. The first three appeared in 1940: *Bunnykin's Picnic Party*, *The First Day of the Holidays* and *Ginger's Adventures*, all with their signature small size (7 x 4¾in) and standard format: 52 pages fitted exactly on to one printing sheet – a bonus when paper was restricted.

Were they a success?

They were but the two shillings and six pence price tag, equivalent to half the weekly cost of an average household's coal, put those first books beyond pocket-money reach. In the 1950s, the

“Thames Valley Police realised the instructional benefits of *The Motor Car* (1965), using it for driver training”

focus shifted when Douglas Keen introduced a range of thoroughly researched educational titles (such as *The Book of British Birds and Their Nests*, series 536, 1953), commissioned from specialist authors and illustrators, including CF Tunnicliffe and Frank Hampson – known for his *Eagle* comic illustrations. Success was sealed with the Ladybird Reading Scheme (produced from 1964), which was a collaboration with the literacy specialist William Murray. This series gave many Britons learning to read a helping hand in the form of Peter and Jane's family life.

How can I spot a first edition?

There are dozens of pointers. For starters, you need to establish the publication date. Don't be misled by the 'first published' date on the title page: this does not guarantee your copy is a first edition. Key dates will help you – for instance, in 1961, the Ladybird logo changed from an open-winged flying ladybird to the plan view that's more familiar. In 1965, dust jackets were abandoned in favour of matt board covers. If there's a pre-decimal price printed on a matt

board cover, it must have been issued between 1965-70 (after which the price appeared as 12p).

Is there anything else I should look for?

The 'How it Works' series (654) is revered for its ability to dissect complex science into easily understandable facts for children. That said, some titles did in fact find their way into adult hands. Thames Valley Police realised the instructional benefits of *The Motor Car* (1965), using it for driver training, while Avis car hire ordered a bespoke version with a grown-up cover (much sought-after today).

ICL salesmen were encouraged to study *The Computer* (1971) and a copy of the 1979 revised edition found its way into the GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) library. It remains to be seen who will be the first to find a copy of the 'holy grail' of Ladybirds (if it still exists, as none are known to) – a special run of the 1971 version for the Ministry of Defence. 'Approximately 100 copies were produced with special covers so they didn't look like children's books,' recalls Douglas Keen.

FIND OUT MORE

- Ladybird Fly Away Home. ladybirdflyawayhome.com
- The Wee Web. theweeweb.co.uk
- March House Books. 01963 364403; marchhousebooks.com
- Ladybird Index of UK First Editions available by email from steve.rudge@gahenty.co.uk
- Ladybird Books. 0845 313 4444; ladybird.co.uk



BOOKS, from left: *The Computer* (1971), £6; *Flight One: Australia* by David Scott Daniell (1958), £2; *British Birds and Their Nests* by Allen Seaby (1953), £3; *People at Work: The Fireman* by Vera Southgate (1962), £3; *People at Work: The Policeman* by Vera Southgate (1962), £5, all Ladybird Fly Away Home. CARS and MARBLES, as before. WOODEN HOUSES AND CARS, £4 for the set, vintage market. 'Moo!' WALLPAPER in smoothie pink, £45, Mini Moderns