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# What a Difference Fifty Years Makes: Used Book Prices Skyrocket Since 1953

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**W**E ALL KNOW ABOUT INFLATION. As time goes by, the price of many commodities goes up. One of those commodities is certainly books, not all books, but books that had a little something special about them originally. Sure, a new paperback in the 1950s was perhaps 35 cents, and the same paperback reprinted today might be \$9.95. That's an inflation factor of about 30 over fifty years. Pretty impressive, don't you think? But, after all, we're only talking about an amount less than ten dollars. How about some really exciting examples in the used and antiquarian book trade?

Years ago, I acquired a few book catalogues from a major London bookstore specializing in collectible and antiquarian books: Bernard Quaritch Ltd. I just recently came across these catalogues again amongst my poorly organized book holdings. There were a half-dozen of these immensely interesting catalogues and I chose the 1953 issue so as to make a fifty-year comparison with today's prices.

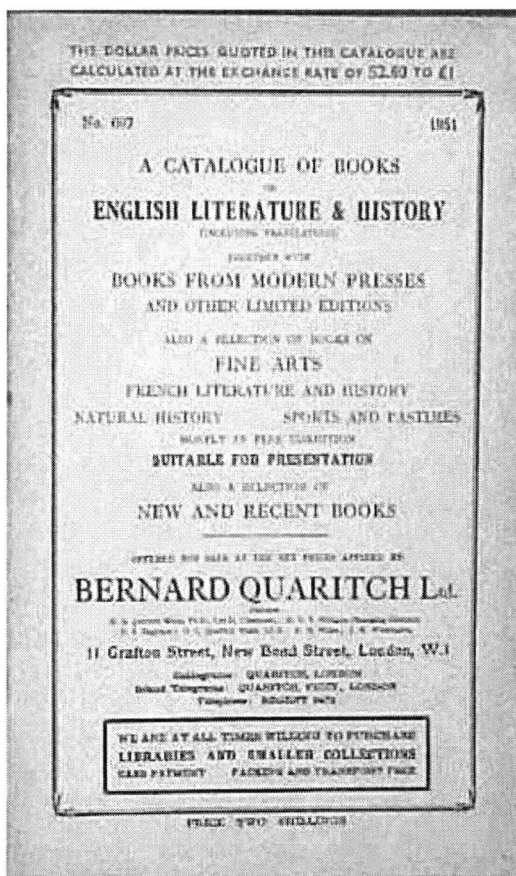
Bernard Quaritch travelled to London from Berlin in 1842. He worked for Henry G. Bohn, the leading secondhand bookseller in England, for a few years, then opened his own shop at 16 Castle Street, Leicester Square, in 1847. From the beginning, Quaritch's was known for quality. Bernard Quaritch's expressed intention early on was to become "the first bookseller in Europe." It can certainly be argued that he did become the first bookseller in Europe, taking part in almost every significant sale of the century and acquiring most of the significant books. Quaritch was also known as the publisher of Edward FitzGerald's first English translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, a 250 copy edition which he had printed in 1859.

In their wonderful book *The London Bookshop*, Richard Brown and Stanley Brett have this to say about Quaritch's: "The progress of the business is signposted by its long series of excellent catalogues, the importance of which was declared by the founder when he wished for 'no other memorial than my great Catalogue'." Bernard Quaritch died in 1899 and was succeeded by his son Bernard Alfred Quaritch, who in turn died in 1913. In 1917, the firm became a private limited liability company and descendants of the founder continue on the board. Quaritch's kept up the great tradition of producing quality catalogues and the 1953 catalogue from which I will be drawing examples is Catalogue No. 721. Looking through the more than 1100 used book listings

and the more than 100 “Recent and Forthcoming Books,” my envy quotient is off the charts! It seems truly incredible that one bookstore could be in possession of so many absolute treasures at one moment in time. Few, if any, bookstores today could boast of a comparable inventory. They just couldn’t afford it.

Of the many incredible books in Catalogue No. 721, I’ve limited myself to 17 examples. Forgive me for choosing mostly children’s and other well illustrated titles for that is my own main interest. Firstly, I quote the exact description from Quaritch’s catalogue, then, secondly,

I provide the price, or a range of prices, that each book is available for today. In many cases, I also provide the name of the bookseller offering the book for sale. In this way, you’ll get an idea of which world dealers today are carrying on the Quaritch tradition of providing fine books.



“Belloc(H.). *Belinda. A Tale of Affection in Youth and Age*. 8 vo. First Edition, Edition Deluxe; parchment. 1928. Of this special edition only 165 copies were printed, all signed by the author. £3 (\$8.40 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. \$125 U.S. Somewhere in Time Books.

“Gallico, Paul. *The Snow Goose*. 4 to., Edition DeLuxe, with 4 plates in colour and other illustrations by Peter Scott; buckram, 1946. Limited to 750 copies signed by the author and artist. £5 (\$14.00 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. \$278 U.S. Trafford Books.

“Thoreau (Henry David) *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. Lg. 8 vo. Large Paper. 16 woodcuts by Eric Fitch Daghish on Japanese vellum; linen sides; vellum back, gilt top. 1927. Ltd. to 100 copies signed by the artist. £3 10s. (\$9.80 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. Regular edition, not signed. \$100 and \$200 U.S.  
No signed limited editions listed for sale; Ahearn estimate \$750 U.S.

“Crane, Walter. *Queen Summer, or, the Tourney of the Lily and the Rose*. Penned and portrayed by Walter Crane. Impl. 8 vo., with 40 pages of text and coloured illus. by Walter Crane; pictorial boards. Cassell. 1891. 15s. (\$2.10)”  
Sept., 2003. \$300 U.S. (spine worn). Heritage Book Shop.  
\$325 U.S. Thorn Books.  
\$350 U.S. (soiled covers). Green Gate Farm Antiquarian Books.  
\$450 U.S. AlephBet Books.

“Defoe (D.) *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. 2 vols., roy. 8 vo., with 22 plates by Thomas Stothard; original boards, with printed labels; uncut. Cadell, 1820. A fine copy except for the foxing of a few plates. £5 (\$14.00 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. No copies listed as available in the original boards, but several copies listed in calf or morocco bindings in various conditions.  
\$250, \$400, \$1000, \$1510 and \$1550 U.S.

“Goethe (J. W. von). *Faust*. From the German by John Anster. 4 to., with 21 plates in full colour and other illus. by Harry Clarke; boards, parchment back, gilt top. 1925. Limited to 100 copies for England signed by the artist. £1 15s. (\$4.90 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. \$755 U.S. Midway Used and Rare.  
\$950 U.S. Heritage Book Shop.  
\$1033 U.S. Stella & Rose’s Books.  
\$1250 U.S. Between the Covers Rare Books.

“Bridges (R.) *Eros and Psyche, a Poem in XII Measures*. Gregynog Press. 4 to., with woodcuts from unpublished pencil drawings by Edward Burne-Jones; white pigskin, in buckram case. Newtown, Mont.(gomeryshire) Wales, 1935. 300 copies were printed. £7 10s. (\$21.00 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. \$975 U.S. Ursus Rare Books.  
\$1300 U.S. George Robert Kane Fine Books.  
\$1500 U.S. Bromer Booksellers.  
\$2000 U.S. Heritage Book Shop.

“Dodgson (C. L.) Lewis Carroll. *Through the Looking Glass & What Alice Found There*. Sm. 8 vo. First Edition, with 50 illus. by John Tenniel, original cloth, hinges skillfully repaired but a very good copy. Macmillan, London 1872.  
£6 (\$16.80 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. \$1185 U.S. Rebacked. Stella & Rose’s Books.  
\$3500 U.S. In half-morocco box. Powell’s.

“Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Roy. 8 vo., with 20 full page plates in colour by Arthur Rackham; cloth, with dustwrapper. 1926. £2 (\$5.60 U.S.)”  
San Francisco 2003 Book Fair Catalogue. VG in d.j. £750 (\$1200.00 U.S.).  
Peter Harrington Antiquarian Bookseller.

“Yeats (W.B.) *In the Seven Woods: being Poems of the Irish Heroic Age*. Cuala and Dun Emer Press. 8 vo., First Edition; linen. Dundrum. 1903. 300 copies were printed. £3 (\$8.40 U.S.)”

Sept., 2003. \$2250 U.S. James S. Jaffe Rare Books.

“*The Gun at Home and Abroad*. 4 vol. roy. 4 to., profusely illus. w/59 coloured plates by George E. Lodge, Archibald Thorburn, V.R. Balfour-Browne, and E. Caldwell, and over 200 other plates in half-tone, monochrome, and photogravure, brown morocco gilt, gilt tops. 1912-1915.

4 vol. Ltd. to 500 numbered sets.

Comprises: Vol. 1 British Game Birds and Wildfowl.

Vol. 2 British Deer and Ground Game, Dogs, Guns and Rifles.

Vol. 3 The Big Game of Africa and Europe.

Vol. 4 The Big Game of Asian and N. America. £24 (\$67.20 U.S.)”

Sept., 2003. \$2250 U.S. ExLib. RulonMiller Books.

\$3800 U.S. All Books.

\$5000 U.S. Fine copies w/bookplates of Edward Sands Litchfield.

James Cummins Bookseller.

“FitzGerald (E.) *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. 4 to., Edition De Luxe, printed on fine paper, within Oriental borders, with 20 coloured plates by Edmund Dulac; vellum gilt. (1909) This edition was limited to 750 copies signed by the artist. With a bookplate. Binding a little soiled, but with the original silk ties. £7 (\$19.60 U.S.)”

Sept., 2003. \$2383 U.S. (lacking silk ties) Peter Harrington Antiquarian Books.

\$2500 U.S. Heritage Book Shop.

“Malory (Sir Thomas). *Le Morte D'Arthur*. The Book of King Arthur and his noble Knights. Riccardi Press. 4 vols., 4 to., printed on handmade paper, with 48 coloured illustrations from watercolours by W. Russell Flint; limp vellum; gilt tops, with silk ties. 191011. Limited to 500 copies. £25 (\$70.00 U.S.)”

Sept., 2003. \$3000 Heritage Book Shop.

“Cervantes (Miguel de) *The History of the valorous and wittie Knight Errant, Don Quixote of the Mancha*. Ashendene Press. Shelley House, Chelsea. Translated out of the Spanish by Thomas Shelton. 2 vol., folio, printed in red and black, on handmade paper, with numerous woodcut initial letters and borders designed by Louise Powell; boards, with canvas backs. 1927-1928. £45 (\$126.00 U.S.)”

Sept., 2003. \$4000 U.S. Phillip J. Pirages Rare Books.

“\_\_ The same. 2 vol., folio, printed in red and black on handmade paper, with numerous woodcut initial letters and borders designed by Louise Powell; pigskin. 1927-1928. 225 copies were printed. £55 (\$154.00 U.S.)”

Sept., 2003. \$5000 U.S. Thomas G. Boss Fine Books.

\$5560 U.S. Sims Reed Ltd.

“Burne-Jones (Sir Edward) *The Flower Book*. Reproductions of 38 watercolour designs. Roy 4 to., full morroco. 1905. Ltd. to 300 copies. The illustrations are not of the flowers themselves, but of subjects suggested by their names. £13 10s. (\$37.80 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. \$7630 U.S. Ian Hodgkins & Co.  
(July, 2003. \$164 U.S. A copy offered lacking all 38 plates.)

“Barrie (J. M.) *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. First Edition, Edition De Luxe, with 50 coloured plates and decorations in black and white by Arthur Rackham; vellum. 1906. This special edition was limited to 500 copies signed by the artist. £31 10s. (\$88.20 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. \$8500 Heritage Book Shop.  
\$10,325 Peter Harrington Antiquarian Bookseller.

“Chaucer (G.) *Troilus & Criseyde*. Ed. by Arundell del Re. 1927 with *The Canterbury Tales*. 4 vols. 1929-1931. Together 5 vols., impl. 8 vo., printed on handmade paper, with woodcut marginal decorations and numerous other woodcut illustrations by Eric Gill; boards, with morocco backs. Golden Cockerel Press. Of *Troilus and Criseyde* only 225 copies were printed and of *The Canterbury Tales*, 500 copies. The 5 vols., 1927-1931. £65 (\$182.00 U.S.)”  
Sept., 2003. *Troilus & Criseyde*. \$13,503 U.S. Henry Sotheran.  
*Canterbury Tales*, 4 vol. \$8095 U.S. Henry Sotheran.  
*Canterbury Tales*, 4 vol. One of the very few (varying sources say 6 to 10) printed on vellum, full British Morocco, brass clasps. \$85,000 U.S. James Cummins Bookseller.

One assumes inflation will continue unchecked in the bookworld as well as in other spheres. However, the factors of supply and demand also have a major impact on prices. Today, there is still a high demand amongst collectors for quality books, and with more and more fine books being acquired by libraries and other institutions, the supply continues to dwindle. If buyer interest continues to exist, then prices will continue to climb. This condition applies to some more recent publications as well as to antiquarian books. I think we can continue to expect to see a lot of excitement generated in the collectible and rare book world. It may be time to pick up something special!

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*Terry Stillman is a long-time Vancouver bookseller and proprietor of Stillman Books. He specializes in children's/illustrated, aviation/military, naval, golf, fishing, and other fine books. He may be reached at 604-465-7702 or at his website: <http://www.stillmanbooks.com>.*