

Paul donates hundreds of Puffins to museum

Newbury man and his late wife spent years amassing huge collection

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A NEWBURY man has decided to donate his late wife's remarkable collection of 2,000 Puffin story books to a children's museum.

Paul High, an 81-year-old retired teacher who lives in Porchester Road, will give every single book – ranging from JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit* to *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson – to The Story Museum in Oxford next month.

His late wife Elizabeth, who died three years ago, studied English at Oxford and completed a postgraduate degree in children's literature at Warwick before becoming a teacher alongside her husband.

Mr High said that she had a particular fascination with illustrated children's books which spurred her on to start the collection.

He said: "Her main interest in teaching was telling kids stories."

Elizabeth's collecting began when the 2,000th Puffin book – *I Like This Story: A Taste of Fifty Favourites* chosen by Kaye Webb – was released in 1986.

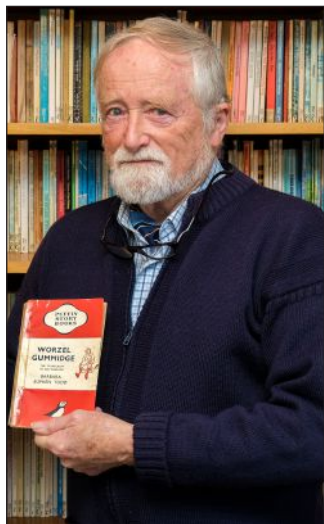
After she bought *I Like This Story*, she decided to collect the first 2,000 books in the extensive Puffin story book collection.

Mr High said: "It gave us an excuse to go into charity shops. We'd always go in with a list of numbers."

Mrs High asked her three children and 10 grandchildren to help complete the collection, and they would regularly find editions she was missing.

The Highs loved to travel, and sourced some of the Puffin books in far-flung places such as New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Before she died, Elizabeth



Paul High

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Elizabeth High

managed to source all 2,000 editions which all now fit on three large bookshelves in her study at the Porchester Road home.

Mr High said: "When she died, we decided as a family that if we could, we'd keep the collection together."

A local publisher and friend, Nick Battle, recently suggested that Paul should get in contact

with Allen Lane, one of the publishing houses under the Penguin umbrella named after Penguin's founder.

Two of its trustees came to view the collection and urged the High family to keep the collection together, before they searched for an appropriate place to donate it to.

The trustees advised Mr High to donate it to The Story Museum in Oxford, a family museum dedicated to educating through the power of storytelling.

He visited the museum for the first time at the end of last year and met the curator who said that the museum would be "delighted" to receive Elizabeth's impressive collection.

The Story Museum is set to catalogue and collect the books sometime in February.

"What I hope to do, when the museum have actually collected it and taken it, is to have a thank you celebration with my children, grandchildren and friends somewhere in Oxford," Mr

High said.

He is still in contact with some of his late wife's roommates at Westminster College who she studied with 60 years ago, and he hopes they will join him and his family at the celebration.

Mr and Mrs High met in 1961, when they were two young people from Norfolk selected to take part in the first student trip to Russia after the Cold War started to thaw.

Paul and Elizabeth's first date was a month-long one taking a peek behind the Iron Curtain.

The pair kept in contact when they returned to the UK and a few years later, when Mr High worked as a bus conductor in the holidays while he was a student, he met Elizabeth again because her village was on his bus route.

They married in 1965.

After their marriage, both the Highs embarked on careers in



Paul High with the first Puffin book and 200th Puffin book Ref: 04-0124N

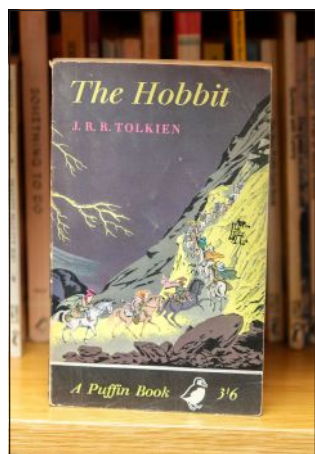
education. They taught in East Africa as well as at Prior's Court when it was a prep school.

Notably, Mr High has visited all seven continents, having spent a term in Antarctica on sabbatical while at Prior's Court.

He said that the place on Earth he had most enjoyed visiting was the Galápagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean off the coast

of Ecuador, one of the globe's foremost destinations for wildlife-viewing.

"When she died, we decided as a family that if we could, we'd keep the collection together"



A copy of *The Hobbit*

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The first 200 Puffin books

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Shelves and shelves of Puffins!

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Paul High with his collection of books

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