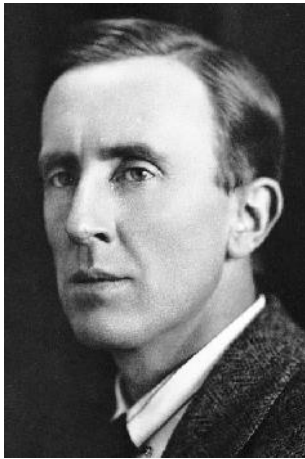
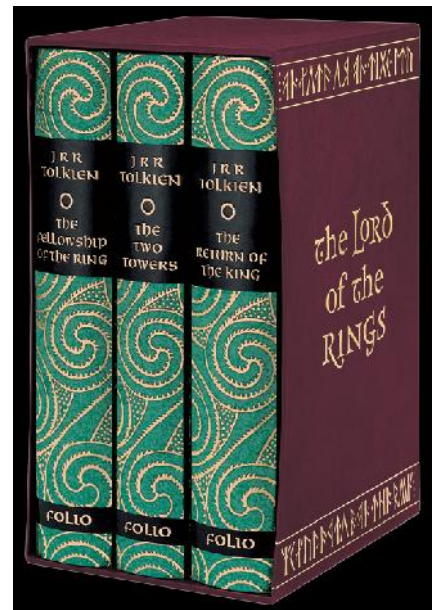


Today we go back to October 20 1955, when the final volume in JRR TOLKIEN's (pronounced 'Toll - keen') three volume work 'THE LORD OF THE RINGS' was published in the UK. The final volume was called 'THE RETURN OF THE KING', with the first two volumes being called 'THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING' and 'THE TWO TOWERS'. Over 150 million copies of 'The Lord of the Rings' have now been sold, and it has been translated into 40 different languages - it is one of the most important books published in English.



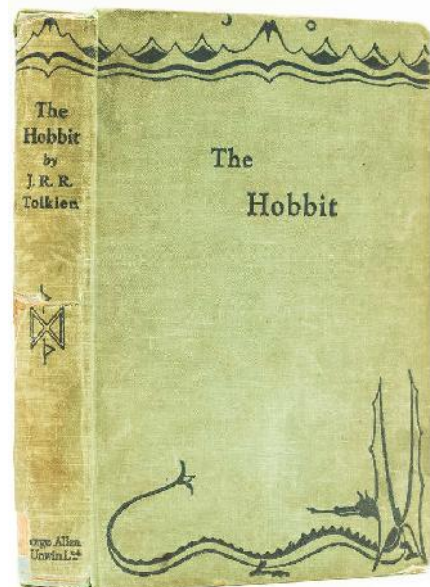
The producer of these huge selling books was an Oxford academic - based at Pembroke College, Oxford (not Pembroke College, Cambridge!). He was born in 1892 - not a great year to be born



because by the time WORLD WAR I broke out, Tolkien was 22 years old: just the right age to be called to fight in the British Army against the Germans. He knew exactly what was happening in France - how young British men were being killed left, right and centre because their commanders were absolutely useless. He was in no hurry to sign up and expose himself to the risk of being killed for absolutely nothing, like many other 22 year olds were being killed

out in France. But eventually, he couldn't put off signing up to joining the Army anymore (young men were put under a lot of pressure to join the Army, with people giving young men walking down the street in Britain white feathers - to say that they were being cowards not signing up and going to fight in France): he joined the army in 1915 and in 1916 was sent off to 'the Front' - the trenches where British soldiers camped in horrible conditions, waiting for orders to attack the trenches occupied by the German soldiers a few yards away. Tolkien was involved in the BATTLE OF THE SOMME (pronounced 'Som') in July 1916, where 125,000 British soldiers were killed. Fortunately, Tolkien survived, but a lot of the scenes that he saw during the battle stayed with him, and played a large role in the writing of 'The Lord of the Rings' when describing huge battles between the forces of good and evil in that book. Luckily Tolkien got ill in November 1916 and had to go back to England for medical treatment. He was never fit enough to go back to France and saw out the rest of the war in England.

When the war ended in 1918, Tolkien started teaching English first of all at Leeds University, and then became an Oxford Professor in 1925. One day in the early 1930s he was marking some English exams done by school children (academics used to do that sort of thing) and a sentence popped into his head - 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit'. He wrote the sentence down on a scrap of paper and eventually wrote an entire story called THE HOBBIT, which started with that sentence. The Hobbit told the story of a small little creature called BILBO BAGGINS who went on a big adventure, helping some dwarves (who are



also pretty small, but a lot taller than a hobbit) recover the ancient mountain where they used to live and which they were driven out of by a huge dragon called SMAUG. On the way to the mountain, Bilbo got lost and found a magical RING, which allowed him to disappear. The ring belonged to a horrible little creature called GOLLUM, who had become horrible as a result of finding and then hanging onto the ring for so long - because the ring had a dark and dangerous power and made everyone who held it feel awful and eventually look awful. But Gollum lost the ring and Bilbo found it, and used its powers to help the dwarves win back their mountain. The Hobbit was published in 1937 and was a huge success - and has now sold 100 million copies.

The publishers of The Hobbit were overjoyed at how well the book had sold, and asked Tolkien to produce a sequel. They were expecting Tolkien to produce another book which was roughly the same size as The Hobbit - which is about 300 pages. Instead, in 1949 he went back to the publishers with a book that was over 1,000 pages long. The publishers were very scared that no one would want to read a book that was so long, so they split into three books, and published the first book - 'The Fellowship of the Ring' - in July 1954, thinking that if it did not sell well, they could always not bother publishing the other two books. Fortunately, the first book did well enough to make the publishers want to bring out the other two books - and the final, third book was published on this day in 1955.

'The Lord of the Rings' carries on the story of Bilbo's ring, but Bilbo does not really appear very much in the book - he is in the first chapter, and then disappears. Instead, the story focuses on Bilbo's nephew, FRODO. (I remember reading 'The Lord of the Rings' after I had read 'The Hobbit' and being really disappointed that the sequel wasn't about Bilbo, and thinking - who is this Frodo? But I eventually got used to him and got to love him as much as Bilbo.) It's discovered by Bilbo's friend, a wizard called GANDALF, that Bilbo's ring is hugely important. It was created centuries ago by an evil spirit called SAURON, who poured a lot of his evil and power into the ring. Sauron was killed in a battle, but so long as the ring survived, there was always a chance for Sauron to come back and take over the world. And the ring was not destroyed, but lost until it was found by Gollum. When Gandalf finds out how dangerous the ring is, he persuades Frodo and some of his hobbit friends to take the ring to some friends of Gandalf, who will decide how to destroy it. And so begins Frodo's adventure, which results in him and his best friend Sam embarking on a hugely dangerous journey to MOUNT DOOM - the only place where you can find fires fierce enough to be able to destroy the ring - while Sauron gets stronger and stronger and tries to reunite himself with the ring.

Exciting, eh? I think reading a book which is over 1,000 pages would be beyond you (I think I read it when I was about 14, on a holiday in Spain - while my family were outside in the sunshine, I just stayed in the hotel room, reading the biggest book I had ever read in my life), but when you are a little bit older, you might want to watch the Lord of the Rings film trilogy, which Peter



Jackson filmed from 1999 - 2000. The three films - named after the three 'Lord of the Rings' books - are absolutely magnificent, and the final film, 'The Return of the King' won 11 Oscars, which is the highest number of Oscars won by an individual film (though two other films have also won 11 Oscars - BEN HUR, and TITANIC). Unfortunately, Peter Jackson then went on to film 'The Hobbit' and was persuaded to turn that book into three different films. The decision seemed to be motivated just by money - three films make a lot more money than just one - and was a complete disaster. What could have been a really excellent single film turned into a boring mess when spread out over three films. Never watch it – read the book instead!