

Tolkien

MAKER OF MIDDLE-EARTH



Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth

Teacher's guide

This pack offers an overview of the exhibition's structure, summarising the themes of the ten cases and highlighting a selection of exhibits. There is far more to see in the gallery, with over 230 items on display.

We have also included some ideas for discussion questions or follow-up activities for each case, which might be useful in focusing students on key themes before, during, or after your visit. Some questions require students to have read *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*, but others can be used for those new to Tolkien.

We hope that this information will help teachers and group leaders to plan an enjoyable visit to *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth*.

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Exhibition Introduction

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien—Oxford don, Professor of Anglo-Saxon, and internationally renowned scholar of Old and Middle English—is now most widely known as the creator of Middle-earth and author of the best-selling fantasy book, *The Lord of the Rings*.

This devoted husband, father of four, dedicated teacher and assiduous scholar, found time to write stories and poems, invent languages and scripts, and draw landscapes and intricate designs for his imaginary world of Middle-earth.

How did one man invent a world and fill it with peoples, languages and legends? How did he create a mythology spanning thousands of years of history, complete with its own creation story? Where did this epic work come from? Who was J.R.R. Tolkien?

Exhibition Overview

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|-----------------|--|
| CASE 1 | Reading Tolkien – ‘like lightning from a clear sky’ |
| CASE 2 | Childhood – ‘born with a talent for language’
Student Days – ‘the beginning of the legendarium’ |
| CASE 3 | Relief map of Middle-earth |
| CASE 4 | Sheer Invention – ‘New patterns of old colours’ |
| CASE 5 | <i>The Silmarillion</i> – ‘the Silmarils are in my heart’ |
| CASE 6 | The Professor’s Study – ‘From time already mortgaged’ |
| CASE 7 | <i>The Hobbit</i> – ‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit’ |
| CASE 8-9 | Mapping Middle-earth – ‘I wisely started with a map and made the story fit’ |
| CASE 10 | <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> – ‘it is written in my life-blood’ |

Summary of exhibition cases

1 READING TOLKIEN

A large wall case introduces visitors to the extraordinary range of Tolkien's published output. It contains a visual bibliography of his published works, including academic, literary, and posthumous works, as well as translations. Letters of appreciation from an array of admirers, including Terry Pratchett, Joni Mitchell and Princess Margrethe of Denmark, hang in front of the wall of publications. Their words invite visitors to explore further.

2 CHILDHOOD AND STUDENT DAYS

This case introduces some key elements in Tolkien's childhood: his early years in South Africa, the sojourn in rural Sarehole, the loss of both parents, and his school-days in Birmingham. Themes of love, loss, dislocation and belonging are subtly explored.

The reverse of the case looks at his student days at Oxford, including his romance with Edith and the impact of war. The focus is on undergraduate life, camaraderie, romantic love, and finally bereavement following the loss of so many close friends in the war.

3 RELIEF MAP OF MIDDLE-EARTH

Visitors will be able to walk around a 3D map of Middle-earth and trace the journeys of Frodo Baggins and his companions in *The Lord of the Rings*.

4 SHEER INVENTION

This large wall case looks at the enormous scope of Tolkien's creativity beyond Middle-earth, from his visionary paintings in the *Book of Ishness* to the tale of *Roverandom* written for his children, and from doodles on newspaper to the later paintings of plants in a Japanese style.

Summary of exhibition cases

5 THE SILMARILLION

A large wall case explores the complex history of Tolkien's work on The Silmarillion over his lifetime, from the earliest manuscript versions contained in the *Book of Lost Tales*, to his later work on Elvish heraldry. Two key stories will be highlighted - the *Children of Húrin* and the tale of *Beren and Lúthien*.

6 THE PROFESSOR'S STUDY

The large case in the centre of the room is an abstract representation of his study at home. In this space many of his roles overlapped; writer, artist, friend, father and teacher. The case brings together his academic work, his alliterative verse, his friendship with the Inklings, and the stories created for his children.

7 THE HOBBIT

This long low case showcases the watercolours, line drawings and maps drawn for publication, which reveal Tolkien's own vision of Middle-earth. These items are interspersed with draft manuscripts on loan from Marquette University, showing the evolution of the story.

8-9 MAPPING MIDDLE-EARTH

Two small tower cases hold maps drawn for *The Lord of the Rings*; a testament to the creative effort needed to produce a world which was believable, coherent and true within in its own bounds.

10 THE LORD OF THE RINGS

This large wall case contains an astonishing range of manuscript material and original artwork highlighting the huge amount of detail that lay behind this book and the enormous effort that went into its creation.

Reading Tolkien

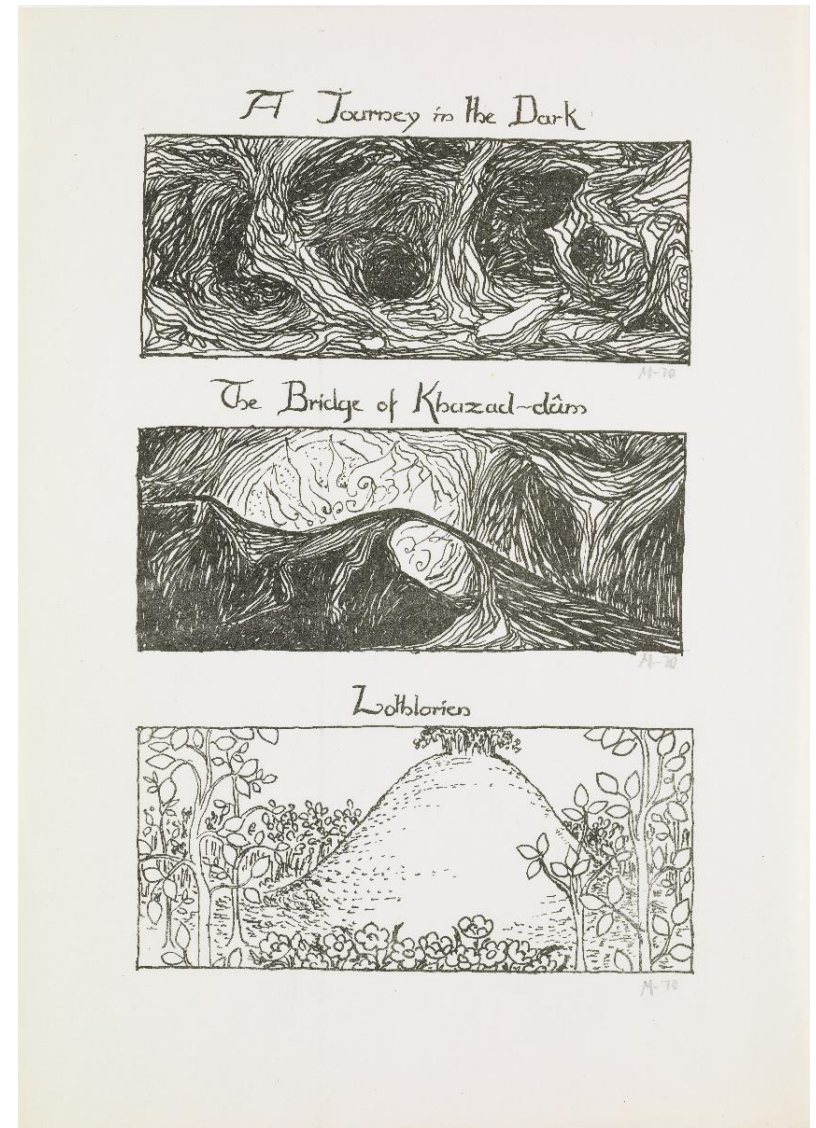
Tolkien received lots of fan mail during his lifetime.

Poets and princesses, boys and girls, rich and poor alike wrote to tell him how much they had enjoyed his books.

Margrethe, Princess of Denmark

Margrethe, Princess of Denmark (now the Queen of Denmark) wrote to tell Tolkien how much she had enjoyed *The Lord of the Rings*. She included copies of her own illustrations for the book; one for each chapter.

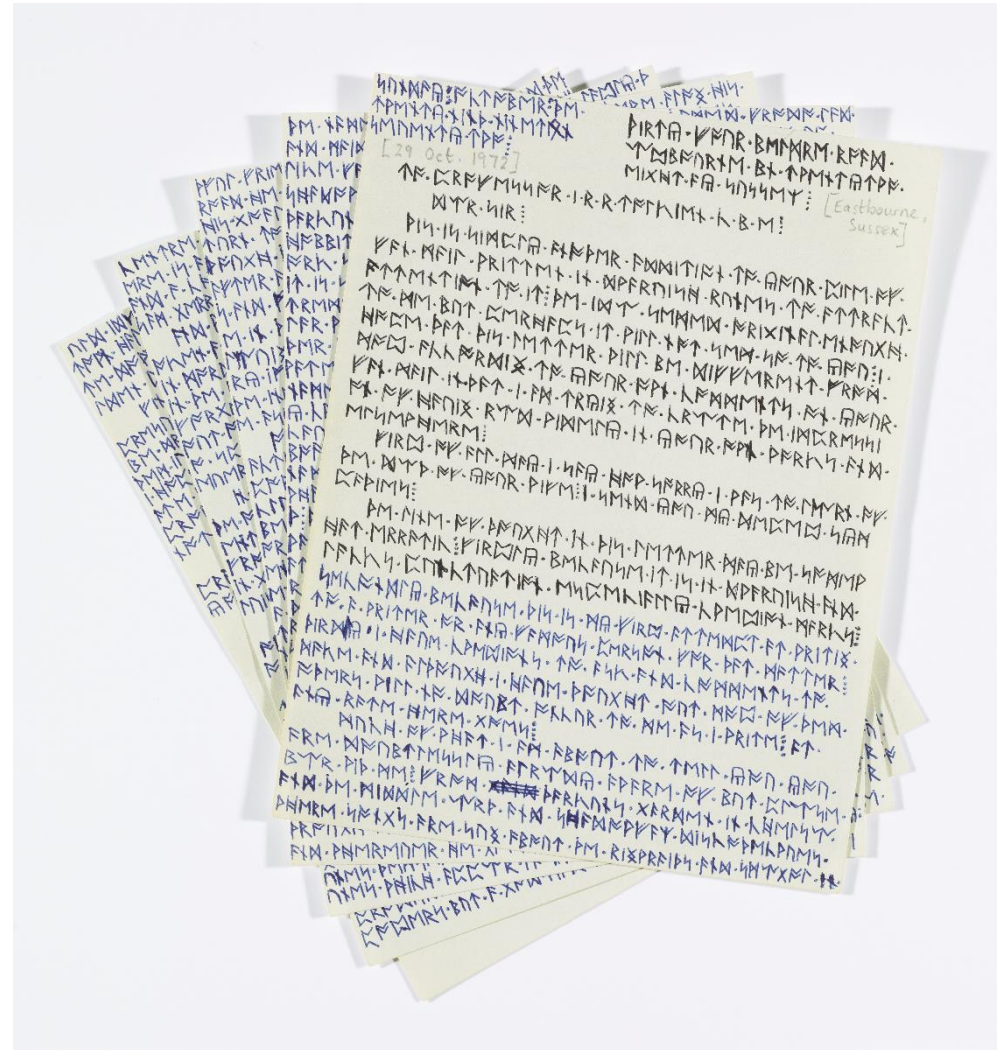
Tolkien family papers



Letter from a fan written in runes

Tolkien was a Professor of Anglo-Saxon and an expert in Anglo-Saxon runes, an angular script which was useful for carving letters into hard surfaces like wood and stone. He invented his own runes for *The Lord of the Rings*, and called the alphabet, the Cirth. He also invented an Elvish script which he called Tengwar.

Tolkien family papers



Reading Tolkien – Questions

- Why do you think people made the effort to write letters to Tolkien?
- How might fans express their views today?
- Write a fan letter to one of your favourite authors, explaining what you like about their work.

Childhood

Tolkien was born in 1892 in Bloemfontein, in what is now South Africa. He returned to England when he was three years old and was brought up and educated in Birmingham and the surrounding area.

His father died when he was a young child and his mother died when he was twelve years old. He lived with his younger brother, Hilary, in the care of a guardian, Father Francis Morgan.

Photograph of Hilary & JRR Tolkien

This photograph was taken in Birmingham in 1895 during an extended holiday from South Africa to visit family. Tolkien (standing) is three years old and his younger brother, Hilary, is eighteen months old.

The photograph may have been taken to send to their father in Bloemfontein; they hadn't seen him for five months.

MS. Tolkien fotogr. 4, fol. 6



‘What is home without a mother (or a wife)’

Tolkien was twelve years old when he drew this picture of himself and his uncle Edwin, sitting by the fire, sewing. His mother was in hospital in Birmingham and he was living temporarily with his uncle in Brighton.

He drew this picture for his mother, both to amuse her and to let her know that he was missing her. She died later the same year.



Childhood – Questions

- Does what you see in this case affect your understanding of the relationship between Frodo, an orphan, and his uncle, Bilbo?
- Is family an important theme for Tolkien? When mothers and fathers are not present, who offers guidance and support to key characters?
- Considering the different attitudes and experiences of elves, men, and hobbits, how do you think Tolkien felt about death and the desire to escape death?

Student days

Tolkien was a student at Exeter College, Oxford. He studied Classics (Latin and Greek) for two years and then changed to English, so that he could study the languages of Old and Middle English.

He met his future wife, Edith, whilst he was still at school. During his time at university, they became unofficially engaged.

The First World War broke out when he was a student and he completed his degree course whilst also training for the army in the Officer Training Corps.

'Exeter College Smoker'

He drew this design for a concert programme when he was a student at Exeter College. It shows the view along Turl Street from the corner of Exeter College. Rowdy, drunken students can be seen carousing in the street. Overhead the university Proctor and his 'bulldogs', who policed the students, are depicted as watchful owls.

Tolkien family papers



Photograph of Edith Bratt

Tolkien met and fell in love with Edith when he was still at school in Birmingham. They were both orphans and they lived for a time in the same lodging house.

This photograph was taken when Edith was seventeen and she gave it to Tolkien as a keepsake in 1909. Tolkien's guardian told him to concentrate on his studies and banned him from dating until he was 21, but Tolkien and Edith waited patiently for each other.

They married in 1916 during the First World War, shortly before he was sent to France where he fought at the battle of the Somme.

MS. Tolkien photogr. 16, fol. 1



Student Days – Questions

- How might Tolkien's relationship with Edith have influenced his depictions of Arwen and Lúthien?
- Tolkien's first year report describes him as 'very lazy' – which activities was he enjoying at Oxford instead of studying?
- Thinking about war machines, shellshock, trench warfare, and the relationships between officers and soldiers from more humble backgrounds, do you see links between Tolkien's writing and his experiences as a soldier in the First World War?

Relief Map of Middle-earth

Based on Tolkien's hand-drawn maps (also on display), the topography of Middle-earth has been re-created by Factum Arte using a 3D printer. The model is made out of a translucent white Perspex and sits on top of a plasma screen, lighting it from below, whilst a projector throws colour and moving images down onto it from above. This highlights key places in *The Lord of the Rings*, and shows the routes taken by different characters, enhancing the visitor experience by showing Middle-earth in a new dimension.

Relief Map of Middle-earth – Questions

- Looking at the model of Middle-earth, can you think of key points in the narrative when geographical features affect the plot of *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*?
- Do you like to trace the characters' journey on a map when you read Tolkien's work?
- Can you think of another book you've read which would benefit from the inclusion of a map? Why?

Sheer Invention

A man of many talents, Tolkien seems to have had an endless store of creativity. He wrote poems and stories, and invented languages and new alphabets. He also drew and painted strange scenes, beautiful landscapes and intricate designs.

'Eeriness'

A painting of a lonely wanderer in a dark wood was made by Tolkien when he was a student at Oxford.

It may be an early iteration of the wizard, Gandalf, who first appears in *The Hobbit* as 'an old man with a staff...a tall pointed blue hat, a long grey cloak, a silver scarf over which his long white beard hung down below his waist, and immense black boots.'

MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 10



'Owlamoo'

Tolkien had four children and many of his stories and pictures were created for them. His son, Michael, had recurring nightmares about 'a large sinister owl-like figure that perched on high furniture or pictures and glared at you.' Tolkien drew the sinister owl and in doing so, was able to dispel Michael's night-time fears.



MS. Tolkien Drawings 88, fol. 32

Sheer Invention – Questions

- Do the items in this case give you a different impression of Tolkien as an artist and a writer?
- Do any of these drawings link to his writings about Middle-earth?
- Tolkien often drew 'The Tree of Amalion', with leaves and flowers of all shapes and sizes to represent the poems and legends that filled his mind. Do you have ideas and projects that you don't find time to pursue?

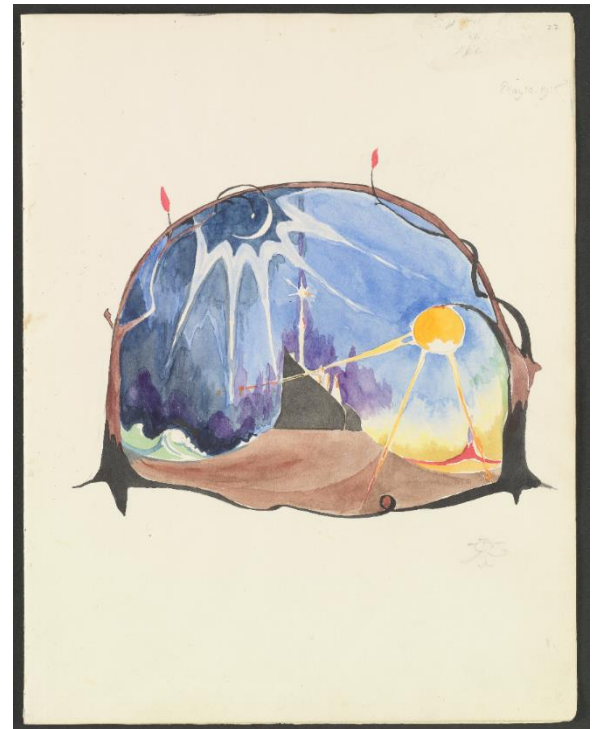
The Silmarillion

The Silmarillion is the history of the Elves, told from the creation of the world to the end of the First Age of Middle-earth. It covers thousands of years and relates a bitter history of vengeance, treachery and death, interspersed with tales of heroism, sacrifice and love. Tolkien worked on it throughout his life but never completed it. It was still unpublished when he died.

'The Shores of Faery'

Tolkien made this painting of Kor, the city of the Elves in Valinor, when he was student at Oxford. It shows the Two Trees, bearing the light of the sun and the moon and indicates that some of the key features of his invented mythology were already in existence.

MS. Tolkien Drawings 87, fol. 22r

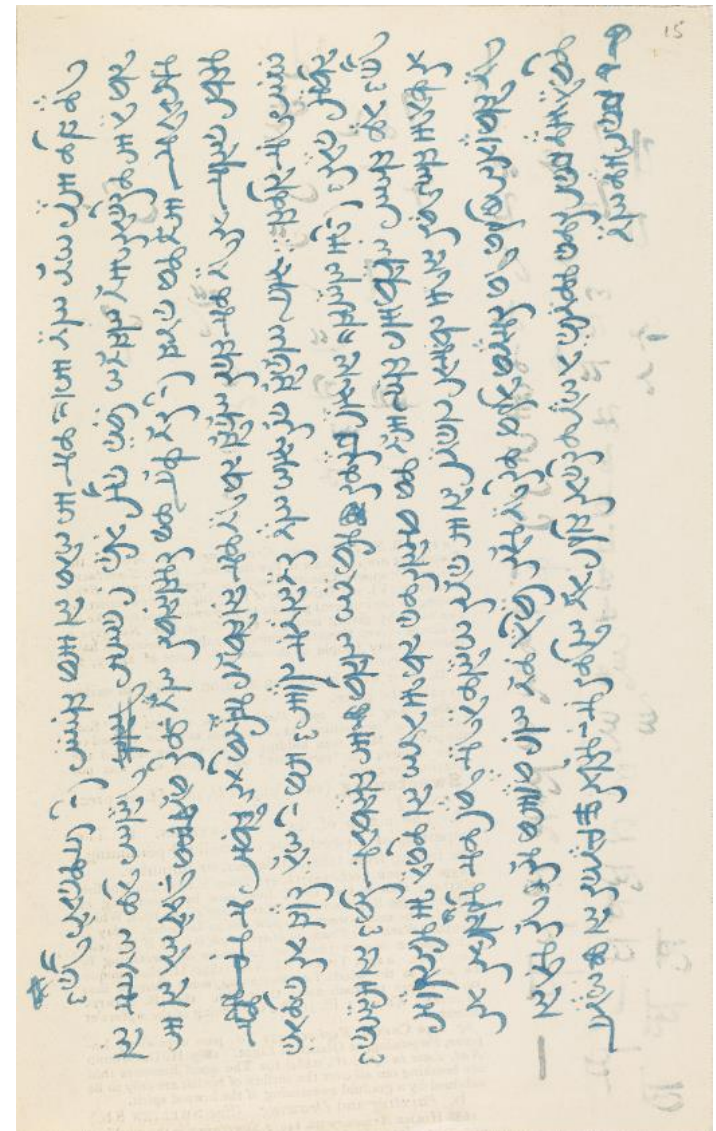


The Tale of Túrin Turambar

This page is part of the tragic tale of Túrin. It is written in an Elvish script invented by Tolkien called Rúmilian, which is read vertically from top to bottom.

The invention of languages and scripts was a key part of Tolkien's creation of Middle-earth. He claimed that he began inventing the Elvish languages before he began writing the stories.

MS. Tolkien S 1/VII, fol. 15r



The Silmarillion – Questions

- How do the stories and characters mentioned in these cases relate to *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*?
- Read the publisher's review of *The Geste of Beren and Lúthien* – how do you think Tolkien might have reacted when he saw this?
- Why do you think *The Silmarillion* was never finished by Tolkien?

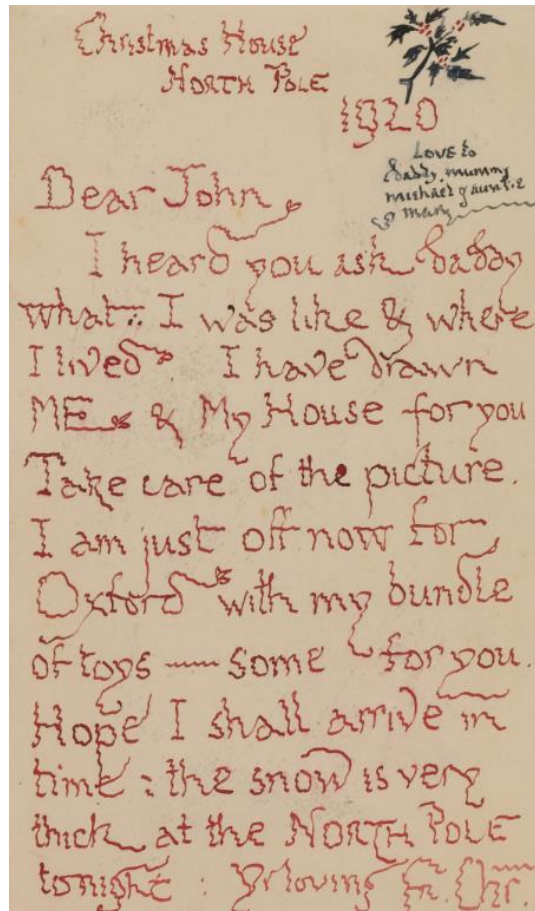
The Professor's Study

The study at home was where Tolkien kept his extensive library of books, where he wrote his lecture notes and supervised students, where his children came in the evening to listen to stories such as *The Hobbit*, and where he would paint and draw during the vacations when term-time was over.

The first letter from Father Christmas

When his son, John, asked who Father Christmas was and where he lived, Tolkien wrote a reply from Father Christmas, starting a tradition that would continue for the next twenty-three years. Every Christmas Eve Tolkien would sit in his study and write a letter to his children from Father Christmas, accompanying them with beautiful drawings.

MSS. Tolkien Drawings 37-8



The Professor's Study – Questions

- How do you think Tolkien's academic work on Old English influenced the stories he created? You could research *Beowulf* to find out more.
- Think about depictions of 'home' in Tolkien's writings. What does home mean to different characters?
- Do you think his different audiences were important to Tolkien? Who did he write for, and how did they affect his writing?

The Hobbit

Written in the 1930s for his three young sons, John, Michael and Christopher, *The Hobbit* tells of the dwarves' quest to recover their stolen treasure from the wicked dragon, Smaug. It is filled with exciting adventures as the wizard Gandalf, the thirteen dwarves and the hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, journey into the wild.

Tolkien illustrated it with maps, charts, drawings and paintings.

Dust jacket design

Tolkien designed a continuous wraparound cover for *The Hobbit*. Using a limited number of colours, he produced this striking image based on mountains and trees. The Lonely Mountain rises in the centre (along the spine) whilst the eagles fly across the sun on the front cover, and the dragon soars through the night-sky on the back cover.



MS. Tolkien Drawings 32

'Conversation with Smaug'

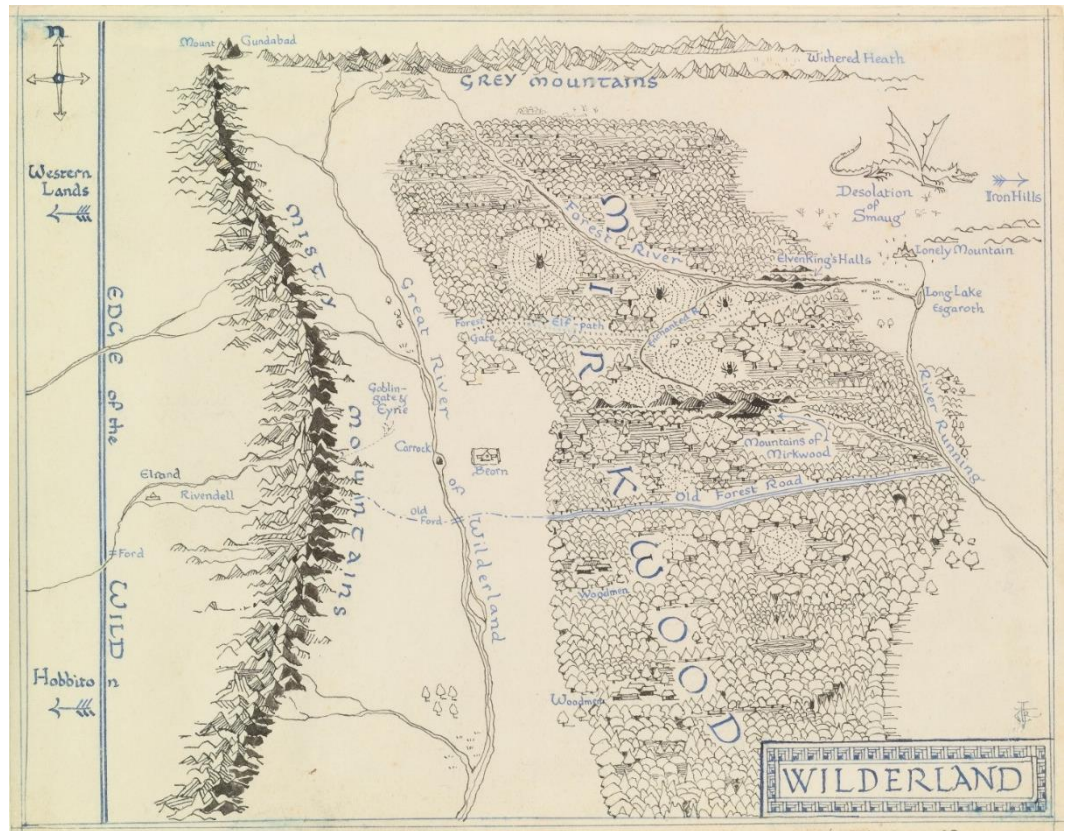
Tolkien's watercolour illustration shows the dragon lying on his bed of stolen treasure, in the caverns underneath the Lonely Mountain. The hobbit, Bilbo Baggins, can be seen bowing in the bottom corner. Luckily he is wearing a ring which makes him invisible (indicated by the cloud surrounding him). Skeletons litter the floor; a reminder, if one is needed, of Smaug's ferocity.

MS. Tolkien Drawings 30



Map of Wilderland

This map shows the dangers which await the hobbit as he journeys over the Edge of the Wild: the great peaks of the Misty Mountains; the dark forest of Mirkwood with its giant spiders; and the Desolation of Smaug, where the lands have been ruined and laid waste by the dragon.



MS. Tolkien Drawings 35

The Hobbit – Questions

- Do Tolkien's illustrations of locations you know from *The Hobbit* match how you imagined them? Do you prefer books to have illustrations, or not?
- Look in other exhibition cases for items that might have inspired Tolkien to create hobbits and the Shire.
- How does *The Hobbit* link to *The Lord of the Rings*?

Mapping Middle-earth

Maps were an essential part of Tolkien's world building. They give a sense of reality to Middle-earth and ensure that the descriptions in his written text are believable.

He created over thirty maps as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. He used them to visualize the journey, to plot the routes and to chart the obstacles that the travellers might encounter, such as mountains, rivers and marshes.

The first map for *The Lord of the Rings*

Some maps, such as this one, are small-scale, showing the whole region covered by the story, from Hobbiton to Mount Doom.

This was Tolkien's main working map as he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. It has clearly grown as the story has developed. Additional sheets have been stuck on with brown tape. It is worn along the folds indicating its long and frequent use, and place names have been added at different times in pen and pencil. There is even a small burn hole, probably caused by Tolkien's pipe which he always smoked when working.

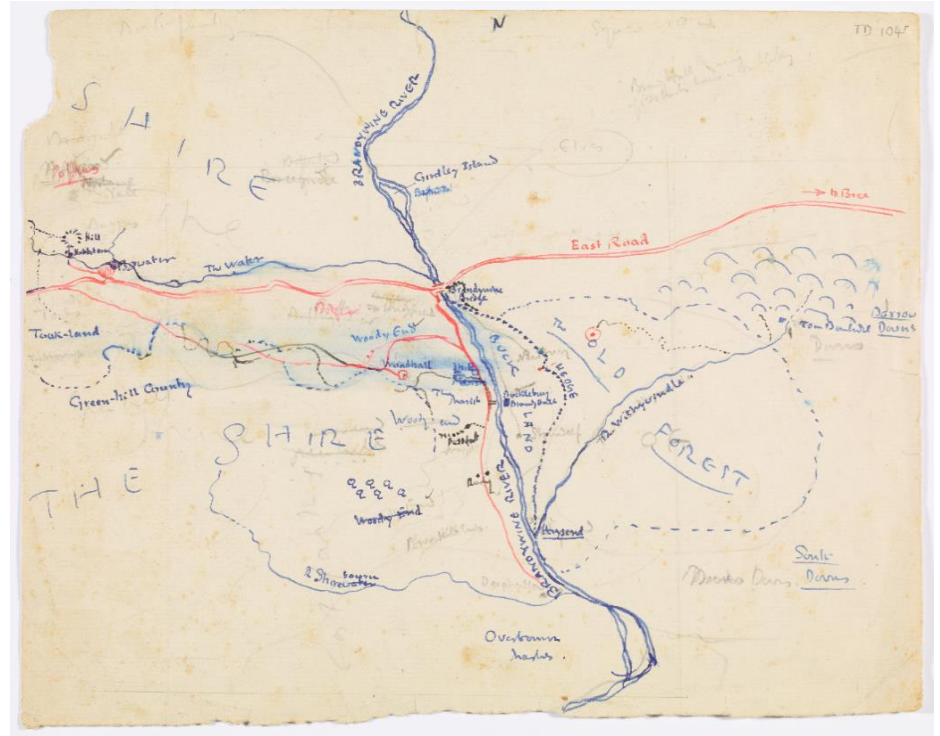
MS. Tolkien Drawings 103



CASES 8 & 9

First map of the Shire

Some maps were large-scale, zooming in on certain areas, to show them in more detail. At the start of *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins sets out from his home, Bag End in Hobbiton, but it was only in *The Lord of the Rings* that the reader discovered that Hobbiton was in the Shire. Tolkien drew this map of the Shire soon after he began writing *The Lord of the Rings*. On the back of the map there are early plot notes for the story.



MS. Tolkien Drawings 104

Mapping Middle-earth – Questions

- Think about how geographical features can be used to represent or echo emotional states. How do mountains, crossroads, marshes, forests, caves, and rivers do this in *The Lord of the Rings*?
- How would you create an imaginary world? Are maps essential, as Tolkien believed? What about languages, or illustrations?

The Lord of the Rings

Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* as a sequel to *The Hobbit*. It began as a children's story but turned into a long, dark, epic tale for adults.

It took him twelve years to write and it was not published until eighteen years after *The Hobbit*, when Tolkien was in his sixties.

It has become one of the best-loved books of all time.

Final page from the Book of Mazarbul

As the Fellowship pass through the Mines of Moria, they discover evidence of fierce fighting and find the remains of the Book of Mazarbul, which records the defeat of the Dwarf Kingdom.

Tolkien recreated three pages from this book. He burnt the edges with his pipe and washed them with dark brown and red paint to resemble dirt and blood stains.

MS. Tolkien Drawings 75

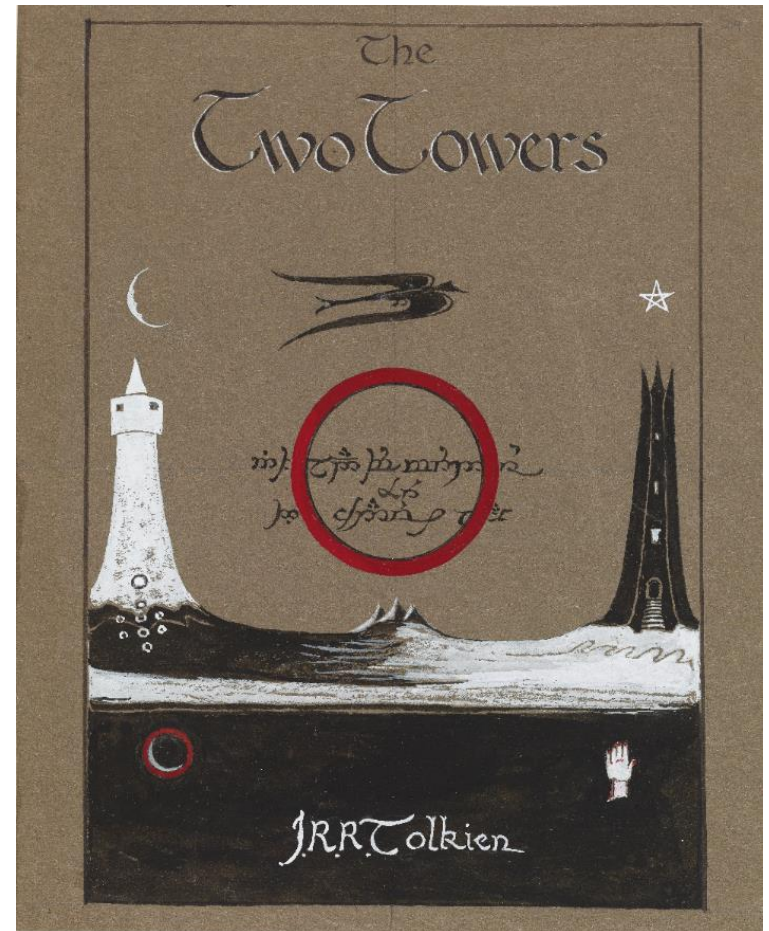


CASE 10

Dust jacket design for *The Two Towers*

The Lord of the Rings was such a large book, that it was published in three volumes. Each volume was given its own subtitle and Tolkien designed a different cover for each one.

His design for the second volume, *The Two Towers*, shows the ghastly, white Tower of the Moon (Minas Ithil) where the Ringwraiths lived, and the black pronged tower of Orthanc, where the evil wizard Saruman dwelt.



MS. Tolkien Drawings 90, fol. 29

The Lord of the Rings – Questions

- *The Lord of the Rings* and some of its three volumes had their titles changed as Tolkien wrote them. Titles affect a reader's expectations; which book would you rename?
- What do the items in this case tell us about Tolkien's creative process?
- Tolkien took great care over his cover designs, including features that readers would only understand once they finished the book. Can you design a cover for one of your favourite books? You could leave the title out, and see whether other people can guess the book.
- Was Tolkien seeking to create more than a story?

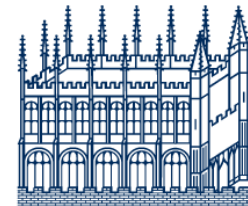
Useful information for teachers

- Group bookings can be made through the Ashmolean and Bodleian Box Office on 01865 278112. Tickets are free, with a £2 booking fee. The maximum group size is 30, including accompanying adults. Please arrive on time for your booked entry slot, or unfortunately we cannot guarantee admission.
- Depending on your group's interest in Tolkien, we recommend planning to spend between 30 and 60 minutes in the exhibition.
- There is no photography permitted in this exhibition, for copyright reasons.
- For further information, please contact education@bodleian.ox.ac.uk

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