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When Was The Hobbit Published And By What Company

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The Enduring Question of Origins: When Was The Hobbit Published and By What Company?

For generations of readers, **The Hobbit** has served as the perfect gateway into the vast, imaginative world of Middle-earth. J.R.R. Tolkien's beloved children's book, later recognized as a foundational work of modern fantasy, has sold tens of millions of copies worldwide and has been translated into dozens of languages. Yet, despite its global fame, many fans and casual readers alike often pause to ask a seemingly simple but important question: **When was The Hobbit published and by what company**? The answer is more than just a date and a name—it is a story of perseverance, editorial vision, and the birth of a literary phenomenon.

Understanding the publication history of **The Hobbit**not only satisfies curiosity but also illuminates how a manuscript about a small, furry-footed creature became a cornerstone of twentieth-century literature. In this article, we will explore the exact publication date, the pioneering publishing house that took a chance on an Oxford professor, and the chain of events that led to one of the most remarkable success stories in book history.

The Exact Answer: Date and Publisher

To answer the central question directly: **The Hobbit** was first published on **21 September 1937** in the United Kingdom. The company that took the bold step of bringing Tolkien's story to the public was **George Allen & Unwin Ltd.**(often referred to simply as Allen & Unwin). This London-based publisher had a reputation for literary quality and a willingness to take risks on unconventional manuscripts—a trait that would prove essential for Tolkien's work.

The American edition followed a few months later, released in early 1938 by **Houghton Mifflin Company**, which would become the primary U.S. publisher of Tolkien's works for decades. However, the original question—**when was The Hobbit published and by what company**—is most accurately answered with the British first edition from Allen & Unwin in 1937.

Why Allen & Unwin?

To understand why this particular company became the publisher, we need to step back to the mid-1930s. J.R.R. Tolkien was a professor of Anglo-Saxon at the University of Oxford, known primarily for his scholarly work on medieval literature and philology. He had written **The Hobbit**as a story for his own children, and a manuscript eventually found its way into the hands of Susan Dagnall, an employee at Allen & Unwin. She was impressed enough to persuade Tolkien to submit it for formal consideration.

Allen & Unwin was then run by Sir Stanley Unwin, a shrewd businessman who believed in the importance of children's literature. He did not read the manuscript himself—instead, he gave it to his ten-year-old son,

Rayner Unwin, to review. The boy's enthusiastic report, which concluded that the book would appeal to all children aged five to nine, convinced the firm to publish. This anecdote illustrates how a family-run independent publisher, rather than a large conglomerate, made the decision that changed fantasy literature forever.

The Journey to the First Edition

After securing a contract with Allen & Unwin, Tolkien worked closely with the publisher on the book's production. He was deeply involved in the illustrations—**The Hobbit** is notable for containing Tolkien's own black-and-white drawings, as well as color plates and maps. The first edition, printed in a relatively modest run of approximately 1,500 copies, sold out quickly by Christmas of that year. The positive reception prompted the publisher to commission a second impression in early 1938.

The publication date of 21 September 1937 is thus a landmark in literary history. For anyone researching **when was The Hobbit published and by what company**, these two pieces of information—the date and the name Allen & Unwin—are the bedrock facts. Yet the story does not end there. The book's success directly led to the request for a sequel, which eventually became **The Lord of the Rings**—a trilogy that would push the boundaries of publishing logistics and take another decade and a half to complete.

The Role of Houghton Mifflin

While the British publication is the primary answer, the American edition also plays a role in the global dissemination of the book. Houghton Mifflin of Boston and New York acquired the U.S. rights and published their edition in February 1938. The American version is notable for including additional color plates painted by Tolkien, as well as a slightly different dust jacket design. For American readers, therefore, the answer to **when was The Hobbit published and by what company** might differ slightly, but the foundational corporate entity remains George Allen & Unwin in the U.K.

Context: Why the Publication Details Matter

The question **when was The Hobbit published and by what company** is more than a trivia point. It sheds light on the nature of the publishing industry in the 1930s, a time when independent houses like Allen & Unwin could take chances on first-time authors. The book was originally categorized as a children's story, though its complex mythology and linguistic depth soon attracted adult readers as well.

Moreover, the publication date places **The Hobbit** in the final years before World War II, a period that saw the rise of other classic children's books such as **The Wind in the Willows** (revived in popularity) and the early works of C.S. Lewis. The timing is important because the war delayed the sequel's writing and publishing schedule, adding to the mystique of the original volume.

Reception and Immediate Aftermath

Upon its release in September 1937, **The Hobbit** received warm reviews. Critics praised its inventive storytelling, its appealing protagonist Bilbo Baggins, and the vivid world of dwarves, elves, and dragons. The book was compared favorably to the works of Lewis Carroll and Kenneth Grahame. Sales were strong enough that Allen & Unwin quickly ordered subsequent print runs, proving that their gamble had paid off.

For those who ask **when was The Hobbit published and by what company**, it is also useful to note that the first edition is now a highly sought-after collector's item. A pristine copy of the 1937 Allen & Unwin first edition can fetch tens of thousands of pounds at auction—a testament to the book's enduring value.

Later Editions and Revisions

Tolkien was not entirely satisfied with the first edition. Before the publication of **The Lord of the Rings**, he

The Hobbit—the "Riddles in the Dark" scene—to better align it with the lore he was developing about the One Ring. The revised edition was published in 1951 by Allen & Unwin. Thus, when answering **when was The Hobbit published and by what company**, it is essential to specify the edition. The 1937 original differs in some details from the text most readers know today.

The Legacy of Allen & Unwin

George Allen & Unwin Ltd. continued as Tolkien's primary publisher for the rest of his career. After the enormous success of **The Lord of the Rings** in the 1950s and 1960s, the company became synonymous with quality fantasy and scholarly publishing. However, the corporate landscape shifted over time. In the 1980s, Allen & Unwin was acquired by HarperCollins, which now holds the rights to Tolkien's works. Nevertheless, the original answer to the question—**when was The Hobbit published and by what company**—remains unchanged: 21 September 1937, by George Allen & Unwin.

How This Question Fits into Broader Tolkien Scholarship

Fans and researchers frequently revisit basic publication data to trace the evolution of Tolkien's legendarium. Knowing **when was The Hobbit published and by what company** helps contextualize the development of his ideas. For instance, the time gap between **The Hobbit** (1937) and **The Fellowship of the Ring**(1954) allowed Tolkien to mature as a writer and deepen the mythology. The publisher's role was not merely passive; Allen & Unwin's encouragement and patience during the long wait for the sequel were crucial.

Additionally, the publication company's identity influenced the book's distribution. Allen & Unwin had strong ties to bookstore chains and libraries across the British Empire, giving **The Hobbit**a solid start in English-speaking markets. Houghton Mifflin handled the American side, but the core relationship was always transatlantic. Thus, for a student of literature or a curious reader, the direct answer is straightforward, but the implications are rich.

Conclusion

In answering the question **when was The Hobbit published and by what company**, we uncover a fascinating story of a small independent publisher recognizing genius in a manuscript written for bedtime stories. The date—21 September 1937—and the company—George Allen & Unwin—are not mere footnotes; they are the foundation upon which the entire edifice of modern fantasy publishing rests. From that modest first printing of 1,500 copies, **The Hobbit**has grown into a global cultural touchstone, inspiring films, games, and a devoted fandom.

Whether you are a collector seeking a first edition, a student researching publication history, or a fan revisiting Bilbo's adventure, remembering these core facts enriches your appreciation of the journey. The answer to **when was The Hobbit published and by what company**will always lead back to that autumn day in 1937 and the visionary team at Allen & Unwin who gave the world one of its most beloved stories.

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