

Celebrating 100 Years Of Peter Rabbit - A Beatrix Potter Trail

By Penelope Parkin | 13 December 2002

Tags: watercolour | landscape | sketch | illustration | drawing | London

Trail



The original Rabbit family. Illustration from The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1902, 2002.

Updated January 2007

Just over 100 years ago, on 4 September 1893 in Eastwood, Cunkeld, a well-educated young woman sat down to write a letter to a little boy who lay ill in bed. It began,

'My Dear Noel,

I don't know what to write to you, so I shall tell you a story about four little rabbits whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter'.

It was to become one of the most famous letters ever written.

The writer of the story was of course Beatrix Potter and the recipient of this first, rough draft of 'The Story of Peter Rabbit' was Noel Moore, the child of Annie Carter, one of Beatrix's former nannies.

The first page of the picture letter to the young Noel Moore. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1971.



Happily Noel relinquished his account of Peter's exploits in Mr McGregor's Garden long enough to allow Beatrix to publish the story, which today stands as a tribute to an inspired children's storyteller loved by all generations.

Beatrix Potter was born at **No. 2 Bolton Gardens, South Kensington** on 28 July 1866. Christened Helen Beatrix, her parents called her by her middle name to avoid confusion with her mother, also named Helen.

Painting & Drawing

- Portraits
- Landscapes
- Cartoons and Graffiti

Related listings

Watercolour Classes with Michele Webber

7 September 2010

Gainsborough's House

Open Exhibition

13 February — 18 April 2010

Ferens Art Gallery, Hull

Box of Delights Art and Craft Open Day at Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery

28 November 2009

Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery

[More related listings »](#)

Sites we like

Government Art Collection
Government Art Collection

The Wordsworth Trust

Abbot Hall Art Gallery

i-Map the everyday transformed

Ruskin Online

[More sites we like »](#)

Related resources

Art Deco Plate Painting
Gladstone Pottery Museum

Search



News
Pixel perfect Pre-Raphaelites on new BMAG website

Advertisement



Site we like: The Big Draw



The home of a fledgling author. Courtesy of a private collector.

Taught by governesses at home, Beatrix and her brother Bertram kept a menagerie of pets, including Peter, a rabbit bought in the **Uxbridge Road, Shepherds Bush** (for 4/6').

Peter often featured in drawings and letters, many of which can today be seen in the **Victoria and Albert Museum**.



Beatrix often visited the large natural history sections of The South Kensington Museum and **The Natural History Museum** where she enjoyed researching the creatures and fossils that she found on family summer holidays to Scotland and The Lakes.



Could the contents of one of these jars have inspired the Tale of Mr Jeremy Fisher? © the Natural History Museum.

Many of her findings, particularly in the field of mycology (fungi) led the young Beatrix to approach the **Royal Botanic Gardens** with various theories. Sadly though they were not interested in her work and refused to discuss it as she was female.

Queen Charlotte's Cottage at Kew Gardens - if they'd said yes would we ever have met the likes of Squirrel Nutkin or Ginger? Image courtesy of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.



Eventually, the **Linnaean Society of London** agreed to read out one of Beatrix's papers about mould spores. It is a shame to learn though, that once more, despite the paper's merit, being female, she couldn't be admitted in order to read it out herself.

A career in mycology swiftly curtailed, Beatrix turned to writing. Retrieving the letter she sent to Noel Moore, she published the first edition of 'The Tales of Peter Rabbit' herself. It was re-printed by publisher **Frederick Warne and Co.** in 1902.

Little realizing how popular her tales of Peter and his friends would be, Beatrix set to work on her second book, 'The Tailor of Gloucester'. It was published the same year.



Cheeky, but clever!
Illustration from The Tailor

Gunpowder, Treason and Plot
Show Me - www.show.me.uk

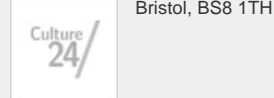
House Tour
Cannon Hall Museum, Barnsley

[More related resources »](#)



Related venues

University of Bristol, Special Collections



Bristol, BS8 1TH

Freud Museum



London, NW3 5SX

Cuming Museum



London,
Southwark, SE17
1RY

[More related venues »](#)





of Gloucester by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1903, 2002.

The tale of clever sewing mice who finish a tailor's waistcoat, leaving the cheeky message 'NO MORE TWIST,' is based on a scrap of gossip provided by Beatrix's cousin Caroline Hutton at **Harescombe Grange** in Gloucestershire.

Hunca and Munca, Beatrix's 'Two Bad Mice' were also based on mice saved from the cook at Harescombe Grange.

More tales of woodland creatures followed based on Beatrix's early memories of vistas in Scotland and The Lake District where the Potter family spent three months every summer.

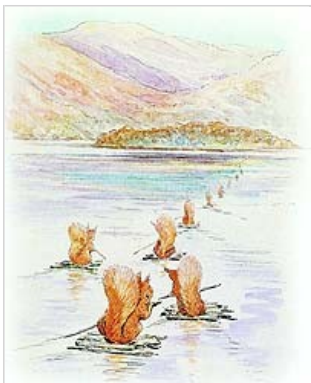
One such location was **Wray Castle** near Ambleside, on the West shore of Lake Windemere. It was here that Beatrix met lifelong mentor Hardwicke Rawnsley, a writer, who encouraged her love of nature and early watercolour painting.

A nice walk by the Lakes! Illustration from The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1908, 2002.



Rawnsley was also the vicar of Wray Church. His instincts to preserve Lakeland's beauty also made a great impact on the young Beatrix. Unsurprisingly, he became a founder of the National Trust in 1895, a cause later much espoused by Potter herself.

The Potter family spent most of their summer holidays at **Lingholm by Derwentwater** - famous for its rhododendron gardens. Here, Beatrix sketched squirrels and rabbits at Catbells behind Lingholm.



The views in 'The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin', (1903) are based on Derwentwater, Catbells and the Newlands Valley, including the memorable picture of the squirrels sailing over to 'Owl Island' to seek permission from 'Old Brown' owl to gather nuts.

Left: speed boat out of shot. Illustration from The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1903, 2002.

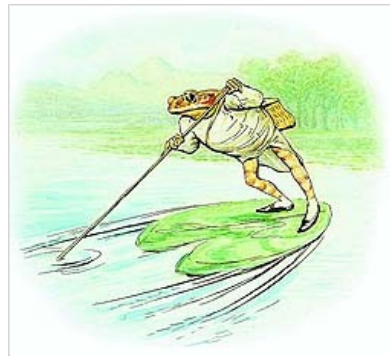
Another Potter family holiday retreat, **Fawe Park** is the basis for 'The Tale of Benjamin Bunny' (1904), in which Benjamin helps Peter Rabbit to retrieve his clothes from Mr McGregor's scarecrow. Based on her pet rabbit Benjamin Bouncer, Beatrix's fourth tale shows many scenes from Fawe Park's



kitchen gardens.



Above: Benjamin and Peter evade the grasp of an angry gardener. Illustration from *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1904, 2002.



With the proceeds of over 50,000 copies of *Peter Rabbit*, Beatrix was able to buy her first piece of Lakeland, a field at **Near Sawrey** in 1903. It was in Sawrey that she sketched frogs for 'The Tale of Mr Jeremy Fisher' (1906).

Left: mowing about on the lake. Illustration from *The Tale of Jeremy Fisher* by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co. 1906, 2002.

Beatrix was so enamoured with Sawrey that two years later she bought **Hill Top**, a farm in Sawrey. Today, it ranks as the most visited literary shrine in the Lake District, a remarkable achievement in 'Wordsworth Country'.

During the following eight years, Beatrix busied herself on her farm, breeding pigs under the direction of farm manager John Cannon. She also found time to write seven more books, mostly based in or around Hill Top, including 'The Tale of Tom Kitten' (1907), 'The Tale of Samuel Whiskers' (1908), and 'Ginger and Pickles' (1909).



Right: all the gang. Illustration from *The Tale of Ginger and Pickles* by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1909, 2002.

Hill Top remains exactly as Beatrix left it. A traditional cottage, with roses round the door, its kitchen garden is filled with honeysuckle and foxgloves. The National Trust owned **Tower Bank Arms**, which appears in 'The Tale of Jemima Puddleduck' (1908) serves bar lunches and evening meals.

Beatrix bought **Castle Farm**, opposite Hill Top in 1909. By now a considerable Lakeland landowner, she took property advice from William Heelis, a partner in a local solicitor's firm, who attended upcoming land sales on her behalf.



Impressed by the country-loving Beatrix, Heelis asked her to marry him in late summer 1912. The following October, they were married at **St Mary Abbot's church in Kensington**.

A portion of Heelis's Hawkshead office is now the National Trust's **Beatrix Potter Gallery**.

Left: who's bad?! Hunca or Munca? Illustration from *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1904, 2002.

In 1923, Beatrix bought **Troutbeck Park Farm**, where she won many country show prizes for her herd of Herdwick sheep. Perhaps surprisingly though, she didn't find them very easy to draw.

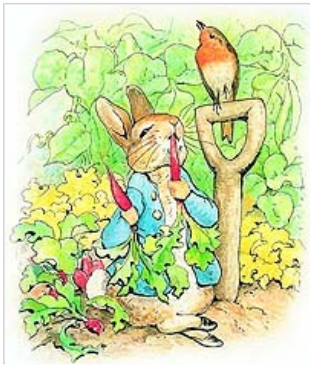
Beatrix continued to buy property throughout her life, including the **Monk Coniston Estate**, purchased in 1930. It contains 4000 acres from Little Langdale to Coniston including Tarn Hows - now Lakeland's most popular piece of Landscape.

In 1934, aware of her diminishing eyesight and ailing health, Beatrix donated many of her watercolours and drawings of fungi, mosses and fossils to The **Armitt Museum and Library** in Ambleside. A replica of her watercolour desk is also on show.



Right: Parosol Mushroom - Lepiota Procera by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., Courtesy of the Armitt Trust.

When Beatrix Potter died, on 22 December 1943, she left 14 farms, 4000 acres of land and her flocks of Herdwick Sheep to the National Trust.



Of the success of Peter and his friends, Beatrix commented: "It is much more satisfactory to address a real live child; I often think that that was the secret of the success of Peter Rabbit, it was written to a child - not made to order."

Left: gangster no. 1, Peter Rabbit. Illustration from The Tale of Peter Rabbit by Beatrix Potter. © Frederick Warne & Co., 1902, 2002.

If gallivanting around the country like Benjamin Bunny looking for Peter Rabbit's clothes is a bit much, why not explore Potter's world wrapped up nice and warm like Mrs Tiggy Winkle with our guide to all things Beatrix on the web.

www.peterrabbit.com the official Potter website from Frederick Warne and Co, publishers of Beatrix Potter

www.vam.ac.uk the Victoria and Albert museum holds a large collection of Beatrix's letters and sketches.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk gives details of National Trust Peter Rabbit Centenary events. These include talks at Hill Top, Hill Top Garden Tours, story readings at the Beatrix Potter Gallery (015394) 36269 and 36355 and Beatrix Potter Walks (015394) 47997.

www.beatrixpottersociety.org.uk a registered charity, the society's websites gives details of forthcoming Beatrix Potter events and attractions.

www.visitcumbria.com an excellent source of tourist information for those thinking of planning a visit to Beatrix Potter's properties in The Lake District.

Frederick Warne & Co. is the owner of all rights, copyrights and trademarks in the Beatrix Potter character names and illustrations.

Beatrix Potter illustrations reproduced by kind permission of Frederick Warne & Co.

All tags

[watercolour](#) | [landscape](#) | [sketch](#) | [illustration](#) | [drawing](#) | [London](#)

Referenced venues

Armitt Library and Museum
Ambleside, Cumbria, LA22 9BL

Victoria and Albert Museum
London, SW7 2RL

Natural History Museum, London
London, SW7 5BD

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3AB

Beatrix Potter Gallery (National Trust)
Hawkshead, Cumbria, LA22 0NS

Hill Top (National Trust)
Hawkshead, Cumbria, LA22 0LF

Linnean Society of London
London, W1J 0BF

 [Back to top](#) |  [Print this article](#) |  [Email this article](#) |  [SHARE](#) 



RENAISSANCE



Copyright © Culture24 unless otherwise stated.

Information published here was believed to be correct at the time of publication.

[Update your Info](#)
[Terms and Conditions](#)

[Accessibility](#)
[Sitemap](#)
[For Press](#)

[About Us](#)
[Credits](#)
[Contact Us](#)