



# News from The Land Between the Lakes

A new sletter for friends and fans of  
Susan Wittig Albert's *Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter*

Spring 2005

## The Cottage Tale Mysteries

Begin your collection  
Of the *Cottage Tale  
Mysteries* now, while first  
printings are still available!

**The Tale of Hill Top Farm**  
Berkley Prime Crime  
ISBN 0-425-19634-8  
HC \$22.95  
PB \$6.95, October, 2005

**The Tale of Holly How**  
Berkley Prime Crime  
ISBN 0-425-20274-7  
HC \$23.95, July 2005

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*All over the world, the young at heart  
treasure the enchanting stories of  
Beatrix Potter.*

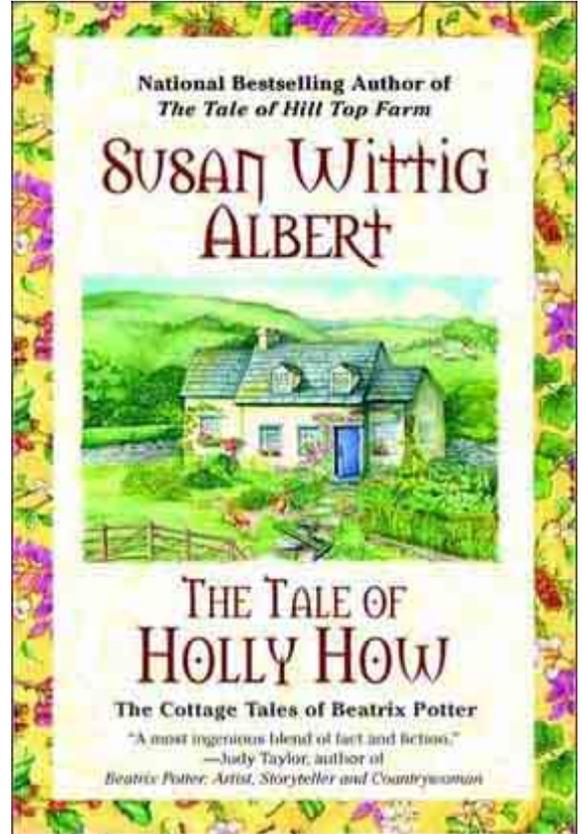
*Now, in Susan Wittig Albert's  
Cottage Tales series, discover the  
enchantment all over again.*

Gentle Reader—

When I was a child, I loved Beatrix  
Potter's books—in fact, I loved them  
so much and read them so often that I  
almost read the words right off the  
page!

I treasured Miss Potter's stories for  
the fascinating characters, her  
magical drawings, and the simplicity  
and directness of her style. When I  
grew up and had children of my own,  
I enjoyed reading the stories all over  
again and renewing my delight in the  
joy of my children.

And when I became a writer myself, I  
knew I wanted to write about her—to  
tell the story of her life and to explore  
the places where she lived, especially  
the magical village of Sawrey, deep  
in the heart of the Lake District, in a  
place I call *The Land Between the  
Lakes*. I hope you will join me in this  
exploration, and that you will share  
with me in the pleasure of learning  
about Beatrix Potter.



### Praise for *The Cottage Tales*

“A stellar tribute to the famous children's author. As  
charming as the ‘little books’ themselves, this is  
sure to delight Beatrix Potter fans and cozy lovers  
everywhere.” —*Publishers Weekly*  
Starred Review

“Enchantment.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“A most ingenious blend of fact and fiction.”  
—Judy Taylor, author of *Beatrix Potter, Artist,  
Storyteller, and Countrywoman*

“The English country village resonates with charm  
and humor, and sleuth Beatrix positively shines.”  
—*School Library Journal*



Professor Galileo  
Newton Owl

“An exceptional mystery novel where we not only get to see some puzzles solved, but we get to meet some wonderfully rich and vibrant characters. The reader also gets a wonderful picture of English village life and a tantalizing look into the heart and soul of one of the world’s most famous children’s writers.”  
—*The Looking Glass Review*

## How the Cottage Tales Came to Be: The Story Behind the Books

Like many stories, this one goes back a few years.

In 1995, my husband Bill and I wrote a book called *Death at Gallows Green*, in our Victorian mystery series. As we did in other mysteries in this series, we planned to feature a real person. We chose Beatrix Potter to star in our mystery.

It really wasn't an accident, of course. I loved Beatrix's enchanting tales when I was a child, and when I became a mom and read them to my children, I loved them even more. And when Bill and I chose her as a main character for our book, I had the chance to do some serious research about her life and her work.

That's when I found out about the way she grew up, as the lonely child of strict Victorian parents, whose greatest pleasure was drawing animals.

I learned about her wide-ranging interests, the great variety of her art work, and her continual struggles for independence from parents who preferred to keep their only daughter at home with them. I found out how she came to write and publish *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, first as a picture-

letter for the son of her former governess, then (after it was repeatedly rejected by London publishers) as a self-published book, and finally as a runaway best-seller.

And then I learned about her tragic love affair with her editor, Norman Warne, who died just one month after she accepted his proposal of marriage—a marriage that her parents angrily disapproved.

Already, as you can see, I was entranced with this fascinating artist. But there was still more to discover! I found out about her love of the Lake District, and her purchase, in 1905, of a little farm on the outskirts of the village of Near Sawrey. And when Bill and I visited the village, I knew I had to write about this enchanted place, which still looks much as it did when Miss Potter lived there.

I thought about this for the next several years, while I worked with other projects. I was already writing two mystery series—the China



### Hill Top Farm, Near Sawrey

Bayles herbal mysteries, and the Robin Paige Victorians. Did I have the time and energy to write another? I wasn't altogether sure!

But in 2002, I suggested the idea to my editor, Natalee Rosenstein, at Berkley. Within a few months, I had a contract for the first three books. And in October, 2004, *The Tale of Hill Top Farm* was published. The story is more complicated than this, of course. And in the Fall 2005 issue of this newsletter, I'll tell you more about it.

Read  
*Death at Gallows Green*  
By Susan and Bill Albert,  
writing as Robin Paige  
ISBN 0425163997

## The Tale of Hill Top Farm: “A Gentle Mystery”

Spiced with gentle mystery and peopled with earthy and endearing villagers and village animals, *The Tale of Hill Top Farm* introduces Beatrix Potter at a critical point in her life. It is October 1905, and her fiancé and editor, Norman Warne, has just died.

Beatrix meets this terrible loss with characteristic fortitude. Instead of falling to pieces, she defies her parents to buy a farm—a 34-acre scrap of rolling hillside and meadow in the Lake

District.

But it's not easy for a city lady to take up farming! First she has to confront the suspicions of the villagers, who look on her as an “off-comer” who isn't really entitled to own a farm.

And then there are the mysterious goings-on in the village. A much-loved and respected lady is found dead, and a valuable miniature painting is discovered missing from her cottage. The Parish Register turns up missing and the School Roof

Fund disappears, its loss blamed on the young schoolboy whom Beatrix has befriended.

But none of these mysteries seem to daunt Miss Potter, who takes them all in her capable stride. And with the help of some clever village animals—Tabitha Twitchit, the senior village cat; the wise and cunning Crummet; and the courageous terrier, Rascal—all of the mysteries are solved and life in the Land Between the Lakes returns to its usual peace and tranquility.

“Because you are fond of fairy-tales . . . I have made you a story all for yourself, a new one that nobody has read before.”

—Beatrix Potter, 1901

## About Susan Wittig Albert: “A Brilliant, Entertaining Author”



“Susan Wittig Albert is a brilliant, entertaining author, one of the best writers around.”—*The Dallas Morning News*

You probably already know several things about Susan. Perhaps you’ve read her best-selling China Bayles herb and gardening mysteries—there are thirteen of them at last count, plus a collection of short stories. Or maybe you’re a fan of the Victorian/Edwardian mysteries she co-authors with her husband, Bill Albert.

But there is something that you might not know about her. She has also written a great many books for young adults. In fact, you might have read a few of the YA novels she wrote as Carolyn Keene or Franklin W. Dixon, the pseudonyms used by writers of the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys mysteries.

“I began writing stories for young readers when I was still a teenager myself,” Susan says.

“I hoped to some day become a full-time writer.”

Then she got sidetracked. She went to college, took a Ph.D. at Berkeley, and began a highly successful university teaching and administrative career that took her to the University of Texas, Tulane University, and Southwest Texas State.

In 1985, though, she decided that the time had come to explore that early desire to be a writer. She left the university and began to write, enjoying an immediate success. “I sold my first book project without an agent,” she says, shaking her head in disbelief. “And when the second and third proposals sold, as well, I knew I was onto something.”

Over the next seven years, working by herself or with Bill, she had written over sixty books for middle- and high-school readers, including books in the famous Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys series, and series such as Sweet Valley Twins, Roommates, Sweet Dreams, Seniors, and others.

But in the early 90s, she felt it was time to try her hand at adult fiction. She turned to mysteries, with the publication in 1992 of

*Thyme of Death*, the first book in the China Bayles series. She and Bill followed this success in 1994 with their first historical mystery, co-authored under the pen name of Robin Paige. It was through that series that she was re-introduced to Beatrix Potter, and began to think that perhaps it was time to write for young people again.

“I have felt for some time that there is a need for more family fiction,” she says. “We need stories that families can read and enjoy and discuss together. I think that the life and times of Beatrix Potter is that kind of story. And when Miss Potter’s animals—Tabitha Twitchit, Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, Tom Thumb, and Jemima Puddleduck—volunteered to be in my stories, I knew I was writing for youngsters, as well as the young at heart.”

So, with the publication of *The Tale of Hill Top Farm* and *The Tale of Holly How*, the first two books in her new series, Susan has come full circle, back where she began. How does it feel? “It feels great,” she says. “I love what I’m doing. I wouldn’t trade my job for any other in the world!”

## The Tale of Holly How: “Enchantment”

It is July, 1906, and Miss Potter has returned to Hill Top Farm to see how her animals are faring. She plans to buy some sheep from a local shepherd, old Ben Hornby. But when she goes to fetch them, she finds Ben lying at the foot of a cliff, dead.

What’s happened? Did Ben fall off the cliff accidentally? Or did someone have a grudge against him?

This mystery isn’t the only crisis that faces the village. Lady Longford plans to hire an entirely unsuitable man as head

teacher at Sawrey School, displacing the much-loved Miss Nash. And Miss Martine, her ladyship’s companion, has dark designs on Caroline, her ladyship’s granddaughter.

And even worse, the Hill Top badger sett has been raided and its residents kidnapped or an illegal badger-baiting. This spurs Bosworth Badger into action, with the help of his friend, Professor Gabriel Newton Owl, D.Phil. Together, they organize a thrilling raid to rescue the victims from certain death.

And who could guess that old Ben’s death and the badger-baiting might be related? Why, Miss Potter, of course! And it is she who ultimately saves the day—and the life of Lady Longford.

The second in Susan Wittig Albert’s outstanding new series, *The Tale of Holly How* is woven of historical fact and fascinating fantasy. Creative and innovative, it is the kind of story that Miss Potter herself might have enjoyed, if she were invited to read it today.

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“[*The Tale of Hill Top Farm*] is a book for all ages, but it seems to fit the bill perfectly for middle-schoolers who are looking for mysteries and like animal stories. . . . Beatrix is not only an artist and illustrator, she is a first-rate sleuth. We bet this series will appeal to you and your middle-school mystery fan.”

—*The Detroit Free Press*

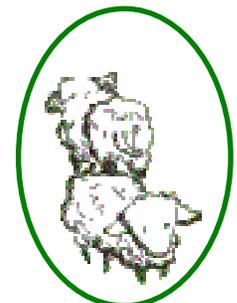
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“Enchantment for fans of Beatrix Potter . . .”—*Kirkus Reviews*

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*"I think one of my pleasantest memories of Esthwaite is sitting on Oatmeal Crag on a Sunday afternoon, where there is a sort of table of rock with a dip, with the lane and fields and oak copse like in a trough below my feet, and all the little tiny fungus people singing and bobbing and dancing in the grass and under the leaves all down below, like the whistling that some people cannot hear of stray mice and bats, and I sitting up above and knowing something about them."*

—Beatrix Potter, 1896

"Far from being purely child-centered, [Beatrix Potter's] writings for children always share a fine balance between presenting things from a child-like point of view while at the same time periodically confronting a young audience with essentially adult examples of language and understanding. In this way young readers are both at home in her books and also conscious of traveling towards new experiences. Approaching her stories is therefore like meeting an old friend also capable from time to time of mounting the odd shock or surprise."

—Nicholas Tucker

**Susan Wittig Albert**  
[www.mysterypartners.com](http://www.mysterypartners.com)  
 Email: [china@tstar.net](mailto:china@tstar.net)

## The Tale of Beatrix Potter

Beatrix Potter is best known to the world through her "little books"—the nearly two dozen children's books she wrote and illustrated between 1901 and 1913. But this intriguing Victorian woman lived many different lives, not only as a gifted artist and story-teller, but as a naturalist, a farmer, and a conservationist who cared not only for the land but for the creatures who lived there.

Helen Beatrix Potter was born in 1866 into a wealthy, London family. Much of what we know about her early life comes from her journal, which she kept in a miniature cipher that was not decoded until after her death. She was educated by governesses and had no formal education. The Potters made annual three-month visits to Scotland and the Lake District, where Beatrix took great delight in learning about the natural world and sketching what she saw.

Beatrix sketched her pets, too, and it was her drawings of her favorite rabbit, Peter Piper, which led to *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, composed in 1893 as a letter to the son of a former governess. In 1901, after several attempts to interest a publisher, Beatrix paid to have *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* privately

printed. When the little book came to the notice of Frederick Warne Publishers, they offered to publish it.

*Peter Rabbit* was quickly followed by other books, and by 1905, there were a quarter of a million copies of her stories in print.

But in that year, Beatrix's life took an unexpected and dramatic turn. In July, she received an offer of marriage from her editor, Norman Warne, on whose steady friendship she had come to rely. Beatrix's parents, however, angrily opposed the marriage. Defiantly, she accepted Norman's ring.

But tragedy struck with unexpected swiftness. Norman died only a month after their engagement, of acute leukemia. Now Beatrix knew that if she were to have a life of her own, separate from her parents, she would have to create it for herself.

It was at this point that Hill Top Farm came into Beatrix's already quite complicated life. About the time of Norman's death, she bought a small farm in the Lake District village of Sawrey, where she and her par-



**Beatrix Potter's Farm**

ents had gone on holiday.

In October, Beatrix traveled to Sawrey to inspect her new property. There, she threw herself into the Hill Top project with all the passion and dedication she gave to her books. Perhaps the challenge of dealing with the farm and making a place for herself in the village helped to divert her thoughts from her great loss.

While Beatrix was not to come to Sawrey to live for another eight years, she made frequent visits and her heart was constantly there. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that Hill Top saved her from despair. It certainly gave her a sense of new possibilities, exciting new hopes and new dreams. It is fair to say that the little farm changed the entire course of her life.

## Resources for Teachers, HomeSchool Families, Librarians

Beatrix Potter is a perennial favorite of young people, and her art, her stories, and the inspiring story of her life make for an excellent learning experience. If you plan to use *The Cottage Tale Mysteries* in your classroom or library, there are a great many resources available.

The books. Each book in this series contains an extensive historical note and a full bibliography of available print resources.

Susan Wittig Albert's website, [www.mysterypartners.com](http://www.mysterypartners.com),

will soon carry a teacher's guide and links to on-line resources and activities. Watch for it!

Other websites:  
<http://wiredforbooks.org/kids.htm>. Ohio University offers all of Beatrix Potter's books, with color pictures.

<http://www.tameside.gov.uk/corpgen1/beatrixpotter.htm>. This UK site describes Potter's early life

<http://www.peterrabbit.co.uk>. The "official" Peter Rabbit site, sponsored by Frederick Warne, Potter's publisher.



**Beatrix Potter**  
 1866-1943