



# News from The Land Between the Lakes

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

Issue Number 2

## The Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter

### The Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter By Susan Wittig Albert

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

**Book Two:**  
**The Tale of Holly How**  
Berkley Prime Crime  
ISBN 0-425-20274-7  
HC \$23.95, July 2005  
PB \$6.95 July 2006

**Book Three:**  
**The Tale of Cuckoo Brow Wood**  
Berkley Prime Crime  
ISBN 0425210049  
HC \$23.95, July 2006

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*Gentle Reader,*

*As a writer, some of my own favorite "reads" are the letters written to me by people who have enjoyed my books. I save these (yes, I'm an inveterate paper-saver!) and when I'm feeling blue, I go back and read them over again. Here are a few of the marvelous letters you've written about the Cottage Tales. I can't thank you enough for your enthusiastic support.*

*Susan Albert*

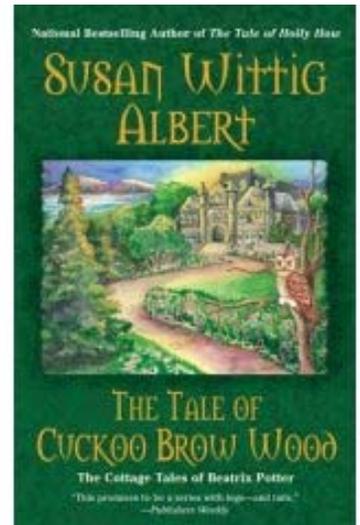
I am in LOVE with the new series about Ms. Potter! I finished the first book last night, smiled the whole way through it, could not WAIT to get home from work to read it. . . I am going to share my copy with all my friends (all of whom are readers) and some day, with my grandchildren.



I was completely enchanted by *The Tale of Hill Top Farm*. I loved the atmosphere and the characters you created in that tiny English village. I loved the way you brought Beatrix Potter alive while staying true to the basic details of her life. I loved the way the animals talked and the way you gave them very individual personalities. I loved your use of the local dialect and Bertha's choice of words like *percadillo* and *spectacularizing*. Your book had a quiet charm with enough spice and humor to keep it from being sentimental or mundane.



I have just finished reading *The Tale of Hill Top Farm*. WOW--it brought back my own happy childhood memories of Beatrix Potter's books. Thank you for returning an old friend to me. . . I am anxious to pass it on to my mother for her to read.



### Praise for *The Cottage Tales*

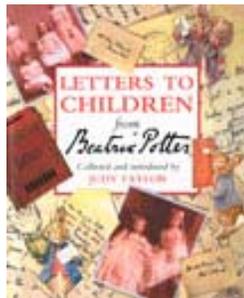
"A stellar tribute to the famous children's author. As charming as the 'little books' themselves, this is sure to delight Beatrix Potter fans and cozy lovers everywhere."  
—*Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

"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*

## Beatrix Potter's "Little Letters"



Beatrix Potter is famous for her charming "little books" for children. But her writing for children includes more than just books.

She wrote a great many delightful letters, as well, replying to the many letters that children wrote to her from all over the world, often enclosing their own drawings, or sending presents.

These have been collected for us by **Judy Taylor**, Potter's British biographer, in a wonderful volume called **Letters to Children from Beatrix Potter** (Frederick Warne, 1992)

Of course, we all remember Miss Potter's most celebrated letter, written to her former governess's son: *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.*

But Miss Potter also wrote other letters, often assuming the identity of her

storybook characters. Here is an imaginary exchange between Mrs. Josephine Rabbit (Peter's mother) and Mrs. Tiggy Winkle, the laundress.

Mrs. Tiggy Winkle  
Cat Bells

Dear Madam,

Though unwilling to hurt the feelings of another widow, I really cannot any longer put up with *starch* in my pocket handkerchiefs. I am sending this one back to you, to be washed again. Unless the washing improves next week I shall (reluctantly) feel obliged to change my laundry.

Yrs. truly,  
Josephine Rabbit

Mrs. Rabbit  
Sand Bank  
Under Fir-Tree

If you pleas'm.

Indeed I apologize sincerely for the starchiness & hope you will forgive me if you please mum, indeed it is Tom Titmouse and the rest of them; they do want their collar that *starchy* if you please mum my mind do get mixed up. If you please I will wash the clothes without charge

for a fortnight if you will give another trial to your obedient servant & washerwoman

Tiggy Winkle

Mrs. Tiggy Winkle  
Cat Bells

Dear Mrs. Tiggy Winkle,

I am much pleased with the getting-up of the children's muslin frocks. Your explanation about the starch is perfectly satisfactory & I have no intention of changing my laundry at present. Nobody washes flannels like Mrs. Tiggy Winkle.

With kind regards,  
Yrs. Truly,  
Josephine Rabbit

There are a great many more "little letters" like these in Judy Taylor's charming volume, some of them illustrated with Miss Potter's pencil and watercolor illustrations. Also included are photographs of the miniature letters; each one, folded, becomes its own envelope, sometimes with a tiny stamp drawn in red crayon. Judy Taylor builds the collection around the stories of the children who received the letters, together with their photographs, so that we can read Miss Potter's letters in the context of the children whose lives were touched by her work.

*The dumplings had been peeled off Tom Kitten, and made separately into a bag pudding, with currants in it to hide the smuts.*

**The Roly-Poly Pudding**  
By Beatrix Potter  
1907

### How to Make Roly-Poly Pudding

6 ounces of flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
4 ounces of sultanas or raisins  
3 ounces of butter  
Water

Sift flour and baking powder. Cut the butter into the flour until the butter is in pea-sized bits. Mix in the sultanas or raisins. Add water to make a paste stiff enough to roll out. On a floured board, roll to a 9x11" rectangle. Fold over. Put into a pudding or bag or roll in foil, sealing the edges well. Boil for about one hour.

# The Tale of Holly How: An Excerpt

## Chapter Five

### Sarah Barwick Makes a Mess

The afternoon had turned overcast and sultry, and Sawrey drowsed in the growing July heat. Clouds of tiny midges—thunderflies, people called them—very small and black, and thought to be a sign of a coming storm, gathered in the air all over the village. In the garden of Tower Bank House, they annoyed Dimity Woodcock no end. She had tucked a sprig of rue behind one ear and a sprig of southernwood behind the other, hoping that the herbs' strong scents would fend them off, but to no avail. And whilst thunderflies didn't bite or sting, they got in one's eyes and one's mouth and were certainly aggravating.

The garden had been without rain for too long, and Dimity was trying to catch up with the gardening chores, which probably seemed as overwhelming to old Fred Phinn (who came twice a week to putter around the borders) as they did to her. The lettuces, past their prime, were ready to bolt; the parched-looking roses and lupines, drooping with heat exhaustion, pleaded for a good sprinkle; and the couch grass, chickweed, and groundsel, always especially insubordinate at this time of year, were clearly plotting a major invasion of the flower borders.

But between the thunderflies getting into her eyes and the disagreeable recollection of Lady Longford's words still ringing in her ears—not to mention the ominous cloud of second thoughts regarding the Flower show that hung over her head—Dimity could not keep her attention on her tasks.

At last, with a sigh of exasperation, she threw down her garden trowel, got to her feet, and brushed the leaves off her skirt. There was no use in trying to work when she was vexed—and she was certainly vexed this afternoon. What she needed was a cup of tea and some good, strong, mind-rattling conversation. And the only place in the village where she could get both together was just on the other side of the stone wall along the edge of the garden, at Anvil Cottage, where Sarah Barwick lived.

Sarah Barwick was a newcomer to Sawrey. In the previous autumn, she had inherited Anvil Cottage upon the death of Miss Agnes Tolliver, an elderly lady who had been greatly respected for her many good works. The villagers were astonished when they learned that Miss Tolliver had not left the cottage to her nephew, as everyone naturally expected, but to the daughter of a man whom she had loved in her youth and been forbidden to marry. Most people in Sawrey had an inborn wariness when it came to "off-comers" like Miss Barwick and Miss Potter, who had purchased Hill Top Farm at about the same time that Anvil Cottage landed so unexpectedly in Sarah's lap.

However, the villagers understood that such things, whilst regrettable, were beyond their control, and most had had settled

into a cautious acceptance of their two new neighbors.

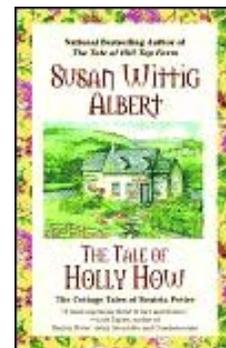
But if the village thought that Miss Barwick might become another Miss Agnes Tolliver, they were mightily mistaken, for it soon became clear that she was one of those "New Women" who were always pointing out ways that women could take charge of their lives and change things for the better.

The most striking evidence of this was her appearance, for Miss Barwick, whilst she occasionally dressed like all the other respectable Sawrey ladies in a dark serge skirt and a white cotton blouse, much preferred to wear trousers. In fact, she had several pairs in different colors—black, brown, blue, and dark green—all fully cut for maximum comfort, and she wore them on every possible occasion. Dimity privately thought that Sarah looked quite smart in her trousers, and even her brother Miles had been heard to comment that it was rather a sensible get-up, if somewhat outlandish. But the rest of the village could express nothing but consternation.

The second thing that had alarmed the village was Miss Barwick's green bicycle. Bicycles had long since ceased to be a novelty, of course. Henry Stubbs bicycled to and from his work at the ferry landing every day, and the boy who carried the newspaper from Hawkshead came on a bicycle, as did several of the men who worked on outlying farms. And there was the Esthwaite Vale Cycling Club, sporting gentlemen who cycled as fast and as far as they could through the moors and fells. Sarah Barwick, however, was the only female in the district who regularly rode a bicycle, and in *trousers*! The village was shocked, and several had forcefully suggested to the vicar that he discuss the matter with Miss Barwick, which he wisely declined to do.

Dimity herself suspected that behind this criticism was the recognition that women who rode bicycles enjoyed an unusual degree of mobility, and that mobility led to independence, and *that*—as all of the men in the village very well knew—might create all sorts of problems. Why, a wife who rode a bicycle to Hawkshead in the afternoon might not arrive back home in time to cook her poor husband's supper, and him bone-weary after a day's hard work. And if she was gadding about on her bicycle, who would iron his shirts or scrub the floor?

Yes, indeed, in more ways than one, Miss Barwick was a danger. . . .



*All at once, at his elbow, a little voice spoke. "My name is Pigwig. Make me more porridge, please!"*

*Pigwig Bland*  
By Beatrix Potter  
1913

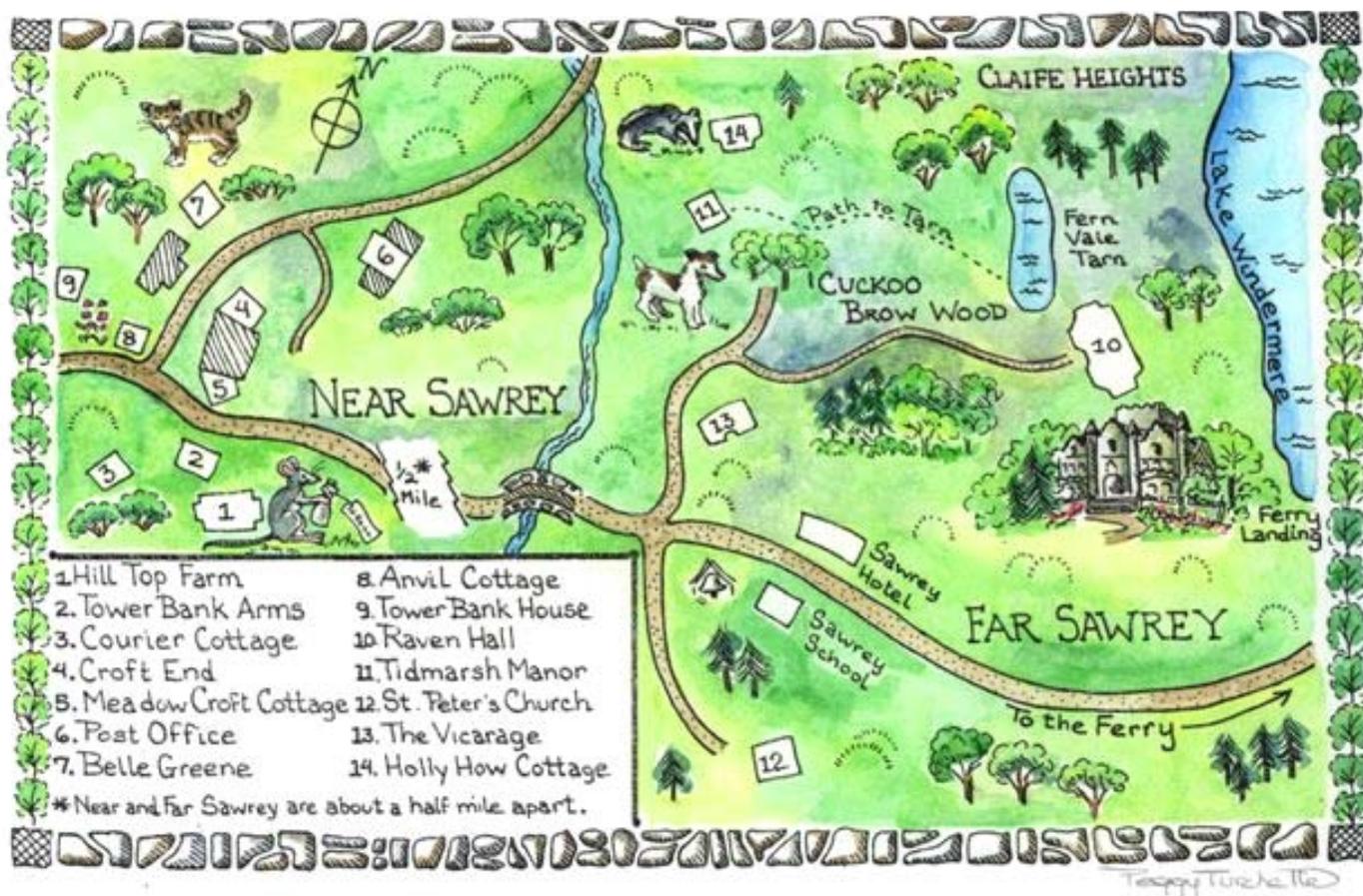
## How to Make Pigwig's Porridge

For each person:

2 tablespoons of coarse or medium oatmeal  
1 cup water  
Salt  
Creamy milk  
Cinnamon

Bring the water to a boil in a saucepan and add the oatmeal, stirring. When boiling resumes, lower the heat and simmer for ten minutes, then add salt and stir. Cover again and simmer very gently for another ten minutes. Serve with creamy milk and a sprinkle of cinnamon.

## Map for *The Tale of Cuckoo Brow Wood* The Third of the *Beatrix Potter Cottage Tales*



### *Mapping the Land between the Lakes*

I love playing with maps! They often tell me a great deal about a place I have visited. And when I am writing about a real place, they help me to fix the scene in my mind.

I had visited the Lake District several times before I decided to write about the twin villages of Near and Far Sawrey. Back home, I studied the maps we had brought back. But these were modern maps, and the Lake District was greatly changed from Beatrix Potter's day.

So I did some research into available maps and found that the most authentic map of Beatrix's Lake District was the Ordnance Survey Map that was published in 1890, based on surveys made in 1888. This large-scale map shows all the buildings of the village (including Hill Top Farm, of course!),

with all the local place names. There is Cuckoo Brow Wood (where Professor Owl lives), and Hawkshead Flat, and Dog Holes. I love these names and enjoy playing with them. And I love the landscapes that the maps depict.

To create the maps for the books, I worked with artist Peggy Turchette. I made a list of all the places in the book, then put them on a roughly-sketched map (very rough!). Peggy took my sketches and turned them into lovely hand-drawn maps, with keys to help you find your way around. The one above is the map to the third book, *The Tale of Cuckoo Brow Wood*.

You'll find maps to each book's setting at the beginning of the book, and also on the Cottage Tales website, [www.mysterypartners.com](http://www.mysterypartners.com).



**Susan Wittig Albert** is the author of *The Cottage Tales of Beatrix Potter*, as well as the China Bayles herbal mysteries. She and her husband Bill, writing as Robin Paige, are the co-authors of a dozen Victorian-Edwardian mysteries featuring Kate and Charles Sheridan.

For a full list of the Alberts' books, visit their website at [www.mysterypartners.com](http://www.mysterypartners.com)