



Professor Gallileo  
Newton Owl

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“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*

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“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

## 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 hillsides 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 school-boy 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.