Helen Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) secured a place among the immortals of English literature with her books for children, starting with *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902). Less well known is the fact that she was also a major conservationist who devoted the latter part of her life, and all of her fortune, to preserving the landscapes and farming practices of the Lake District in northwest England. By the time of her death, she had written and illustrated 33 books and amassed over 4,000 acres of crucial hill-farm property. She bequeathed the land to the nation via the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, an institution her father helped found.

In northwest England and southern Scotland, the Old Norse term “fell” is used both in the names of peaks (for example, Scafell Pike is England’s highest mountain), and as a synonym for the high, boggy moorland country. The Lake District, with its bleak open fells, protected valleys and multitude of lakes and tarns (steep-walled mountain pools), includes some of the most glorious and popular scenery in Britain. Names like Windermere, Esthwaite Water, Coniston, Rydal Water and Grasmere have been deeply embedded in the English consciousness since Wordsworth, Coleridge, de Quincy and Ruskin made the Lake District a focus of the Romantic Movement in 19th-century literature. Its remote, harsh beauty readily conjures up thoughts of the sublime, but when Beatrix Potter first visited, late-Victorian-era prosperity threatened to bring ever more tourism and development to the region. At the same time, the indigenous economy, which was based on herding sheep on the fells, was declining rapidly. Without her efforts, much would have been lost.

As a young woman, Beatrix Potter would have seemed an unlikely savior of any rural economy. She grew up in smoky London, in a dysfunctional family of considerable affluence. Her father was loving but distant, a barrister with artistic aspirations. Her mother was snobbish and repressive; she tried to raise her daughter—in what seems almost a caricature of Victorian sexism submission—to be nothing more than a highly educated helpmeet who would manage the household and never have a life of her own. Beatrix Potter was saved from total subjugation by her intelligence, her love of natural history, an active fantasy life and a deep love of the country.

Rupert and Helen Potter sowed the seeds of their daughter’s liberation through the simple fact of spending every summer in the country, where they stayed at a series of rented houses, first in Perthshire, Scotland, and later in the Lake District. Various relatives also had country estates that Beatrix Potter visited. In the countryside she thrived; strangely, her mother allowed her freedoms there that were denied in London. Young Beatrix was able to roam on her pony, and all of nature was open for her to explore.

**The author of *Peter Rabbit* was a complex woman whose quest for autonomy helped save a crucial part of the English countryside**

Encouraged by her father (who was especially interested in photography), various tutors and governesses, and the painter Sir John Everett Millais (a family friend), Beatrix Potter quickly developed a talent as a watercolorist. She remained lonely, shy and lacking in self-confidence, however, and her personal development was slowed further by a two-year bout with rheumatic fever that started when she was 19. Even in her twenties, she was quite childlike, often sunk into fantasies, but she steadily developed as an illustrator and eventually sold some of her drawings to be published as cards. During visits to the Natural History Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, she exercised her skills in dry-brush watercolor on a wide range of subjects, from costumes (a waistcoat famously reappeared in *The Tailor of Gloucester*) to archaeological remains, plants and animals. In London also, she and her younger brother kept a considerable menagerie that included bats, frogs, newts, snakes, tamed mice and rabbits.

All these experiences led her to become an astute student of algae and fungi. From painting fungi, she had become interested in their biology, encouraged in the summers by a Scottish naturalist named Charlie McIntosh (the model, later, for Peter Rabbit’s nemesis, Mr. McGregor). Beatrix Potter developed a skill for culturing fungal spores and became convinced that macroscopic fungi like mushrooms and toadstools must grow from subsurface mycelia as do other molds. Further, she became attracted to the concept that lichens are a symbiotic combination

*Keith Stewart Thomson is professor emeritus of natural history at the University of Oxford and senior research fellow of the American Philosophical Society. His latest book is Before Darwin: Reconciling God and Nature, published by Yale University Press. Address: Oxford University Museum, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW, U.K. Internet: kthomson@amphilsoc.org*
The idyllic beauty of the Lake District landscape, as seen in this view towards the village of Little Langdale, might have been dotted with buildings and crossed with roads if not for the pastoral sensibilities and sharp business acumen of Jemima Puddle-Duck’s creator.

The High Country

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.

The success of her books gave her confidence, the income from their sale gave her some independence. The year that Warne died, she bought land in the village of Near Sawrey, buying Hill Top Farm, and the children’s books progressively lost their appeal. She had hit upon a winning formula for her books: a simple story, a whiff of danger, much naughtiness and a cast of carefully anthropomorphized animal characters—never overly cute—whom she drew brilliantly in authentic settings.
flood. All the difficulties that beset hill farming, which made so many farmers willing to sell out to “Mrs. Heelis,” were visited on her. One problem concerned the sheep. The authentic Lakes breed was, and is, the Herdwick Sheep, a cold-hardy animal adapted to graze the harsh uplands. Typically, each farmer has a small piece of his own lowland pasture for overwintering. The rest of the year, his flock grazes on a portion (a “heaf”) of the communal, open-range fells, which are inaccessible except on foot. Each year, new Herdwick lambs learn from their mothers the territories to which they will return the following year. “Heafed” lambs then stay on their territories without supervision—a useful trait unique to the breed. However, Herdwicks produce a coarse wool useful only for carpets. Crossing them with other breeds would have produced finer wool, but the less-hardy offspring would neither fend for themselves nor graze the fells evenly. Bracken fern would take over the grassland, for example. Preserving the tradition of hill farming, based on the Herdwick sheep, required constant attention to breeding and land management. But without this effort, a way of life and an entire landscape would have been lost.

Through all this, the timid girl from London (simply portrayed by Renee Zellweger in the recent movie Miss Potter) became transformed: first into the writer and artist familiar to all, and then into a doughty 50-year-old who tramped the hills and won prizes for her livestock at agricultural fairs. It is as if she had become a character in one of her own books. She took an important role in local affairs, fiercely resisting the attempts of industrialists to develop the region. She also campaigned successfully to bring in a representative of the Queen’s District Nurses Association, a charitable organization that brought medical care to rural areas. But her compassion had limits. Having grown up with every privilege that money could buy, she refused to improve her properties with gas lighting or even indoor bathrooms. And, somewhat surprisingly, she always opposed the notion of women’s suffrage.

She had become an astute businesswoman, and the incompetence of her publisher Frederick Warne (run by the brothers of her dead fiancé) was a constant trial. She found it difficult to get earnings statements or royalty payments promptly. Her ideas for dolls and ceramics based on her characters—marketing notions that were ahead of her time—were never properly followed up. Then, in 1917, Harold Warne, the managing partner, was arrested for fraud. With survival of the company in jeopardy, Potter stepped in to sort things out and, importantly, to preserve her income.

Beatrix Potter was a very basic sort of conservationist. Even though the Lake District includes many regions of ancient woodland transformed by sheep grazing, she was not concerned with restoring the landscape to its primeval state. She wanted to preserve a particular quality of the environment and its associated way of life as she had first encountered them—a unique, rather inefficient rural economy rather than a set of natural habitats. At her death, the total estate of farms was valued at 211,000 pounds (between $14 million and $35 million today). Beatrix Potter’s land is now a central part of the National Trust’s contribution to the Lake District National Park, which, at 885 square miles, is England’s largest and most popular scenic reserve. Ironically, her fame now swells the tourism that threatens to overwhelm the land she worked to save.

Bibliography
Welcome to The Beatrix Potter Society. Full of information about Beatrix Potter, her work, like Peter Rabbit and many more. Join us as a member! New Card! The Gathering Winter Fuel card is a new Beatrix Potter card for the Holiday Season to send to your friends and family and support The Beatrix Potter Society. Society Members can gain a 15% discount! Every purchase you make at our online shop helps The Beatrix Potter Society. We do send worldwide! Festive Gathering 2020 Quiz. Beatrix Potter is regarded as one of the world's best-loved children's authors of all time. From her first book, The Tale of Peter Rabbit, published by Frederick Warne in 1902, she went on to create a series of stories based around animal characters including Mrs. Tiggy-winkle, Benjamin Bunny, Jemima Puddle-duck, Mr. Jeremy Fisher and Tom Kitten. Today Beatrix Potter's original 23 tales are still published by Frederick Warne, alongside a wide range of other formats including baby books, activity books and gift and sound books. Beatrix Potter was an English writer, illustrator, mycologist and conservationist. She is famous for writing children's books with animal characters such as The Tale of Peter Rabbit. Potter was born in Kensington, London. Her family was quite rich. She was educated by governesses. Beatrix Potter was a famous English children's author, illustrator, natural scientist and conservationist. She is most known for writing more than 20 books for children, including The Tale of Peter Rabbit and The Tailor of Gloucester. July 28, 1866 (age 77). Kensington, Kensington and Chelsea, United Kingdom. Potter was extremely interested in natural science and had a passion for drawing. She collected fossils, studied artefacts and was into entomology. Beatrix Potter Biography - Beatrix Potter was an English author, who was born on 28 July, 1866. Undeniably, she was the most loved author of the 20th century. She belonged to the caste of English Unitarians. Her childhood was very lonely and she had very little contact with people.