



News release

V&A and National Trust – two of the world’s largest Beatrix Potter collections – come together to tell her life story in V&A exhibition

Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature

12 February 2022 – 8 January 2023

The Porter Gallery

vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/beatrix-potter-drawn-to-nature

- Rarely seen objects, including personal letters written throughout Potter’s life, to go on display alongside family photographs, early sketchbooks, manuscripts and scientific drawings
- Artworks from some of her most famous storybooks, including *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle* and *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* will feature alongside sketches of the real-life animals, places, art and literature that inspired them
- Exhibition explores Beatrix Potter’s passion for animals and the natural world, including her study of fungi and the legacy of her conservation work in the Lake District
- This family-friendly exhibition will transport visitors of all ages into the world of Beatrix Potter’s books and the Lake District through interactives, trails and immersive experiences

Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature will be the first exhibition to tell the complete life story of Beatrix Potter, one of the best loved authors of Children’s fiction in the 20th Century. Realised through a major partnership with the National Trust, this playful and interactive exhibition will invite visitors of all ages to rediscover this household name and explore the breadth of Potter’s achievements and multifaceted life, from storyteller to natural scientist and conservationist.

The exhibition will showcase over 240 personal objects including rarely seen letters, manuscripts, sketches, coded diaries, family photographs, examples of commercial merchandise and personal artefacts. It will celebrate her early talent for storytelling, her business acumen and her fascination with the scientific study of the natural world, as well as her passion for sheep farming and conservation – a legacy still felt today.

Across four sections, the exhibition will follow Potter’s journey from London to the Lake District, where she eventually settled. The first section, **Town and Country**, will provide a backdrop to her childhood in South Kensington in London; **Under the Microscope** will highlight

Potter's interest in natural science; **A Natural Storyteller** will reveal her almost accidental journey to becoming a best-selling author; finally, **Living Nature** will follow Potter to the Lake District and celebrate her profound impact on the natural landscape.

Visitors will leave the exhibition having met the real Beatrix Potter, an exceptional woman, determined to gain success and respect in notoriously closed-off male dominated fields: from the field of science and mycology to the fells of Cumbria.

Annemarie Bilclough, Frederick Warne Curator of Illustration at the Victoria and Albert Museum said:

"Beatrix Potter was a town mouse longing to be a country mouse. Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature invites visitors to follow her journey from Victorian London to the Lake District fells. Visitors will be familiar with the extraordinary legacy of Potter's storybooks, but in this exhibition will discover how her talent at making her characters real emerged from a long-standing curiosity for the small details of nature, which could have led her down a different career path. We hope to inspire the next generation of artists and storytellers, but also natural scientists, conservationists and farmers. Potter's story shows that through talent, passion and perseverance, life can take unexpected twists and turns and great things can grow from inconsequential beginnings."

Helen Antrobus, Assistant National Curator at the National Trust said:

"We're delighted to be working in partnership with the V&A to shine a light on the full life and legacy of a remarkable, multifaceted woman. The National Trust is proud to care for the items and places which were special to Beatrix. From Hill Top, her traditional Lake District farmhouse filled with trinkets and furniture and still presented as it was in Beatrix's lifetime, to the vast Monk Coniston estate and fourteen traditional Lakeland farms with their flocks of Herdwick sheep. Thanks to her pioneering conservation efforts and generous bequest of her homes, farms and land to the National Trust, we're able to continue her legacy caring for the landscape, traditions and Lakeland way of life that inspired Beatrix so they can continue to inspire others."

About the exhibition:

The first section **Town and Country** will explore Potter's upbringing and family life in Bolton Gardens, South Kensington. This section will include key objects from Potter's early years, including an album of family photographs taken by her father as well as artwork and furniture from the family home. Visitors will also be introduced to some of the family's regular holiday locations which inspired the backdrop to Potter's books. Highlights include Beatrix's earliest drawings and sketchbooks dating back to age 8 and personal illustrated letters sent home during family holidays.

In **Under the Microscope**, the schoolroom shared by Beatrix and her brother Bertram at Bolton Gardens will be re-imagined. On display will be some of their earliest observational sketches, from the schoolroom menagerie to a cabinet used by Beatrix and Bertram to store their collection of butterflies, beetles, bird eggs, shells, rocks and fossils. For the Potter children, the schoolroom was a loud and busy space where they could indulge in their shared interest in

scientific observation and their collection of pets (smuggled into the room by Beatrix and Bertram) including rabbits, mice, frogs, bats, and lizards. Beatrix – who had more than 92 pets during her lifetime – took inspiration from some of them for her stories, notably her domesticated rabbits Benjamin Bouncer and Peter Piper.

Also revealed in this section is Potter's passion for scientific study and mycology, showcasing several of her drawings of fungi on loan from the Armitage Museum and Library, which can still be used in scientific identification.

In **A Natural Storyteller** visitors will discover how Potter's career as an author began almost accidentally, developing from the stories included in her picture letters to family friends. The exhibition will introduce favourite characters from Potter's stories as well as the real-life inspirations behind the tales, from a dolls' house built by her publisher and soon-to-be fiancé Norman Warne, which inspired *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*, to early drawings inspired by Randolph Caldecott, which led to *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*, and original sketches of gardens and landscapes inspiring *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* and *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle*.

Also on display will be an intricately embroidered waistcoat and blue dress coat, sketched by Potter on one of her many visits to the South Kensington Museum (now V&A), which would later feature in her story *The Tailor of Gloucester*. These costumes will be shown alongside a sketch of the waistcoat and finished artwork from the book.

Lastly, **Living Nature** will celebrate the final chapter in Beatrix Potter's multifaceted story: her permanent move from her 'unloved birthplace' of London to the Lake District, to become an award-winning sheep farmer and respected member of the local community. Visitors will be transported to the lake district with a specially commissioned immersive video depicting life in the craggy fells: bringing the lakes to South Kensington and mirroring Potter's escape from the city to Hill Top in Cumbria.

On display will be key loans from the National Trust's Hill Top, including furniture and artefacts from her 'treasure room'. A highlight will be Potter's clogs and her walking cane, with its inset magnifying glass for examining curiosities of the natural world. Also on display will be an emotive last letter from Beatrix to her shepherd and long-standing friend Joseph Moscrop, on long-loan from the Beatrix Potter society.

This section will also explore Potter's friendship with Canon Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley one of the National Trust's founders, a friendship formed through their joint commitment to the preservation of the natural landscape. Beatrix Potter spent the last 30 years of her life buying and protecting land in the Lake District, eventually leaving a significant bequest of over 4,000 acres of land, farms and cottages to the National Trust.

- ENDS -

For further PRESS information about *Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature* please contact Shannon Nash on s.nash@vam.ac.uk/ +44 (0)20 7942 2502 (not for publication). A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk

Notes to Editors

- *Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature* runs from 12 February 2022 - 8 January 2023.
- Tickets will be available later this year.
- The exhibition is co-curated by Annemarie Bilclough, Frederick Warne Curator of Illustration at the Victoria and Albert Museum and Helen Antrobus, Assistant National Curator at the National Trust. It is accompanied by a major new V&A publication, available to buy for £30. For publishing enquiries please contact Sian Jones (s.jones@vam.ac.uk).
- The V&A holds the world's largest collection of Beatrix Potter objects, including drawings, manuscripts, correspondence, photographs and related materials. The collection has its origins in a substantial bequest from engineer and Potter scholar Leslie Linder (1904–73), who deciphered Potter's secret diary, later joined by other gifts, including from Joan Duke and the Linder Collection. The V&A is also home to important loans from the Beatrix Potter Society and Frederick Warne & Co. Archive.
- Supported by Kathryn Uhde.

Social Media

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About the National Trust

The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people who saw the importance of our nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. More than 120 years later, these values are still at the heart of everything the charity does.

Entirely independent of Government, the National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 778 miles of coastline and hundreds of special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

More than 24 million people visit every year, and together with nearly 6 million members and over 65,000 volunteers, they help to support the charity in its work to care for special places for ever, for everyone.

For more information and ideas for great seasonal days out go to: www.nationaltrust.org.uk

About Peter Rabbit™ and Beatrix Potter

The Tale of Peter Rabbit is one of the world's best-loved children's books and was created by author and illustrator, Beatrix Potter in 1902. The story has never been out of print since it was first published by Frederick Warne & Co. (today an imprint of Penguin Random House) and has

sold in excess of 46 million copies globally. Today over 2 million of her 'little books' are sold globally every year, whilst Peter Rabbit has appeared on books and merchandise in more than 110 countries throughout the world.

In 2022, Penguin Random House Children's will be celebrating 120 years of mischief with a global campaign to bring The World of Peter Rabbit™ to new family audiences via high profile partners and ambassadors. New digital content, commemorative publishing and consumer products will launch alongside immersive experiences and events, to ensure that families everywhere can come together to celebrate with Peter Rabbit.

www.peterrabbit.com

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