

Noel, Eric, Marjorie, Winifrede, Norah, Joan, Hilda and Beatrix Moore

The eight Moores were the children of Annie Carter, Beatrix Potter's last governess. In April 1883, three years before her marriage to Edwin Moore, Annie Carter was appointed companion and teacher of German to Beatrix, an appointment that came as a surprise and disappointment to her pupil who, at seventeen, had hoped that her education might be at an end.

Miss Carter was a revelation to Beatrix. Only three years older in age, she was a great deal older in experience. She had lived in Germany as a student and had already been earning her own living for some years before she was employed by Mrs Potter. Annie and Beatrix found that they enjoyed each other's company and they became friends. Miss Carter stayed with the Potters in their house in Bolton Gardens for two years before she left to prepare for her wedding, and when she had departed Beatrix wrote in her journal: 'I have liked my last governess best on the whole – Miss Carter had her faults, and was one of the youngest people I have ever seen, but she was very good-tempered and intelligent.'



Annie Moore, Beatrix Potter's last governess, with her two youngest daughters, Beatrix and Hilda

Annie Blanche Carter and Edwin Harry Moore were married in 1886 and went to live in Bayswater in London, where their first child, Noel, was born on Christmas Eve 1887. Soon after Noel's birth the young family moved into 20 Baskerville Road, a newly-built house overlooking Wandsworth Common. It was the house in which Annie would spend the rest of her life, dying there just a week before her eighty-seventh birthday in 1950.

Edwin Moore was a self-taught civil engineer and his job took him away from home – sometimes for as long as six months, as it did when he was working on the Aswan Dam in Egypt. As a consequence much of the bringing up of their quickly-growing family fell to Annie, and it was no easy task. By the time Noel was four he already had a brother, Eric, and two sisters, Marjorie and Winifrede (Freda). Four more girls would complete the family of eight, Norah (Bardy), Joan, Hilda and Beatrix.

Annie and Edwin Moore were totally opposed in their political views, she a Primrose League Tory and a firm Church of England believer, he a dedicated Socialist who became a member of the Communist Party. Their differences led to monumental arguments and constant warring. Their youngest child, Beatrix, recalls those quarrels over eighty years later: 'We children used to kick each other under the table whenever Father started politicking. He blamed everything on the capitalist system – even the mice in the cellar. Mother had an "At Home" every Thursday, with tea and cakes on a cakestand, and if Father was at home he used to shout through the door, "You are all parasites."'

In spite of the quarrels, Edwin returned from his lengthy tours abroad with presents for his family, and one year he brought a grey parrot from Entebbe, Uganda. 'We had to take turns to clean out the cage and none of us liked doing it because the parrot always bit us. Father taught the bird quite a vocabulary, much to our Mother's fury. She was particularly cross when, calling one of us, the parrot would answer, "Coming!", and then no one would appear. It could say clearly the name of each member of the family and at night, when the cloth was put over its cage, it would clear its throat and solemnly bid us all goodnight. Father spent hours trying to teach it to sing *The Red Flag* but it could only manage the first two notes which were repeated monotonously over and over again.'



Edwin Moore, Annie's husband, in about 1914

Annie Moore was very strict with her children, sending them to bed or shutting them in the box-room when they were disobedient. She took them to church on Sunday morning and evening and the children were sent to Sunday School in the afternoons as well, with Bible reading a feature of every day. The house was full of religious pictures, in pride of place a print of Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* in front of which Beatrix had to kneel before her Confirmation.

But it was not all strictness and religious fervour. There was often fun and gaiety, with frequent parties, and the encouragement of wild hide-and-seek games all over the house. A regular visitor was Annie's old pupil and friend, Beatrix Potter, who was driven over the Thames in her own pony and trap or in her mother's larger, two-horse closed carriage. With a straw bonnet tied under her chin and carrying a basket containing a rabbit or a cage of lively white mice, this shy and retiring woman was always a welcome guest. The contrast between the noisy, bustling south-

London home and her own rather severe and staid household both excited and intrigued her. Beatrix knew each of Annie's children from birth and followed their progress with interest and delight. When they were ill or when she was away from London she sent them letters, full of accounts of what she had been doing and seeing, and usually illustrated by quick pen sketches. When there was no news to report she sent them stories and it was Annie Moore who later suggested to Beatrix that perhaps some of her letters might make good books.



The eldest of the Moore daughters, Marjorie

As each new book came out Beatrix sent Annie an early copy, and when Beatrix married and went to farm in the Lake District, leaving London for good, she never lost touch with her old friend. She sent a Christmas card each year with a dedication that varied from 'to Annie B. Moore with love' in 1927 to 'from B. Heelis to ABM' in 1938. Christmas was a time for generous celebration in the house in Wandsworth Common and the *pièce de résistance* on

the dinner table was always a large turkey sent down from Hill Top Farm by Beatrix.

Annie Moore played the piano well and all her children had music lessons, much to the delight of the parrot who interrupted with its own contribution. To augment the modest family income, Annie Moore gave French and German lessons and she later started a small school in the house which her own younger children attended. In spite of his political beliefs, and as so often happens with those whose own schooling has been of the most basic, Edwin Moore was determined that his children should be well educated. With the help of his sisters, two of whom lived in some comfort in Ipswich, he arranged for Noel and Eric to go to Westminster School. The girls were sent to Clapham High School for Girls, crossing the common on their bicycles with strict instructions – and in fear of punishment – not to loiter on the journey.

It was to Edwin's two sisters in Suffolk that the children were usually sent for the summer holidays, but one special year, in August 1912, Norah and Joan were invited to the Lake District by Beatrix Potter. Although by then she already owned two farms there, Hill Top and Castle Farm, Beatrix was not yet living in that beautiful part of England. She was there with her parents on the annual family summer holiday, staying in the large house they had rented for three months, Broad Leys, which stands on the eastern shore of Windermere in Bowness. From there Beatrix made the daily journey to her farms, taking the ferry across the lake and

walking the remaining mile and a half up the hill to Sawrey. During their visit the two girls went with her to Hill Top taking the newly-hatched chicks she had brought up with her on the train from London (see the letter to Augusta Burn on [page 159](#)). It was a holiday that Norah and Joan never forgot, Norah still able to convey her excitement and wonder at it over seventy-five years later.



Norah and Joan Moore with newly-hatched chicks, photographed by Beatrix's father Rupert Potter on 12 August 1912

Noel, the first of Annie's children and her favourite, was spoiled by his mother and over-protected. In 1897, at the age of nine, he contracted polio which damaged one of his legs and left him with a limp for life. Much influenced by his mother's strong religious beliefs, Noel became an Anglo-Catholic priest when he left Westminster and he worked for many years with the children of the poor at a number of churches in the East End of London. He never married and when he retired in the early 1960s, he went to live near his brother in East Sussex, becoming Chaplain to St

Mary's Convent in Buxted, a home for mentally handicapped girls run by an Anglican order of nuns. He was eighty-one when he died in June 1969.

Of Beatrix Potter's letters to the Moore children reproduced here, spanning a period of twelve years from 1892 to 1904, thirteen are known to be to Noel, the first sent when he was only four years old. The letter written to him from Scotland on 4 September 1893, recounting the story of a disobedient rabbit called Peter, has become one of the most quoted and famous letters ever written and it is Beatrix's only letter to Noel that is known to be in Britain, having been bought from a private owner by Pearson plc in 1991 and housed with the Beatrix Potter Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The others are now in the United States of America, eleven in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and one in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. A number of other letters to Noel, sold at auction in 1947, remain untraced; among them is one described in the sale catalogue as 'being the origin of "Benjamin Bunny" with drawings on every page'.

Annie Moore's second child and her only other son was born just eleven months after Noel, in November 1888. Like his father Eric became a civil engineer, but unlike his father he had the advantage of formal training, and with an engineering degree he went in 1912 to work for the Egyptian Government on Nile Bank projects. His career was interrupted by the outbreak of war, for he was a Special Reserve and joined the Royal Engineers in August

1914. Fighting throughout the war, in France, Belgium and Italy, Eric was badly gassed. He was also twice mentioned in despatches and awarded the Military Cross and Bar. (It was just after the end of the war, on 26 November 1918, that the only surviving letter from Beatrix Potter to Annie Moore was written: 'Dear Mrs Moore, I was so glad to hear Eric is safe & all of you fairly thriving – except I am afraid about yourself. You are overworked, that is all about it ...'.) When he came out of the army Eric returned to Egypt and then worked in France and the Sudan until, in 1933, he went home to England and bought a house in Suffolk for his wife and three children. On retiring from civil engineering ten years later, Eric became a fruit and poultry farmer in East Sussex. He died at the age of eighty-two in 1971.



Noel Moore and Eric in their Westminster School uniform

Most of Beatrix Potter's letters to Eric have disappeared into private collections and only two of the originals, together with Beatrix's own copy of a third, are reproduced here. It is certain that there were many more, and one in particular is of special interest. On 5 September 1893, a day after she had written the Peter Rabbit letter to Noel, Beatrix wrote to Eric from Eastwood: 'My dear Eric, Once upon a time there was a frog called Mr. Jeremy Fisher, and he lived in a little house on the bank of a river ... One morning Mr. Fisher looked out and saw drops of rain ...'. The last time that letter was seen in public was in 1947 when it was sold in the same auction with so many of Noel's letters.

The first four of Annie and Edwin's six daughters were born within six-and-a-half years of each other. Being so close they shared everything, clothes, toys – and their interest in music. They played quartets together, Marjorie the violin, Freda the piano, Norah the cello and Joan the viola. Their parents' quarrelling made the girls determined to leave home just as soon as their schooling was finished – and the outside world came as a considerable shock to them after their strict and sheltered upbringing. Marjorie took up nursing, trained as a naval nurse at Chatham and served on board a hospital ship. Freda taught the piano at two girls' schools in south-west London and in 1936, when she was in her mid-forties, she married a constructional engineer, William Allen. He had been a

catalogue of Potter holdings in the United States of America in 1954. Although printed there, and here, in black-and-white, it is probably in colour, in the same style as the picture letter written seventeen days earlier to Lucie Carr, also from Lingholm (see [page 109](#)).

Beatrix Moore was very much the baby of the family. 'Noel was nearly sixteen when I was born so I never really knew him. Beatrix Potter was my godmother and she gave me a silver sugar bowl which I still have, but I don't remember her very clearly. I was, after all, only ten when she married William Heelis and went to live in the Lake District. But I do remember the frocks she bought for Hilda and me. Mine had beading on it and pink and blue ribbons.'



Hilda Moore aged 19

Beatrix was also the rebel of the Moore family, in sympathy with her father's political views which clashed so strongly with her mother's. To distance herself as far as possible from her mother's

disapproval, she left home as soon as she could. Armed with her London Royal Academy of Music certificate she embarked on a series of jobs teaching the piano at girls' boarding schools. In 1926, at the age of twenty-three, she went to South Africa on a three-year contract as a music teacher. While she was there she started writing, and on her return to England Beatrix determined that she would become a journalist. In the course of her work she met and married Vilgot Hammarling, who was a well-known journalist and press attaché at the Swedish Embassy in London.



An early portrait of Beatrix Moore

Beatrix Hammarling was a contributor to the first issue of *Picture Post* in October 1938 and she worked regularly for the magazine in the years to follow. After her husband's death Beatrix shared her life for many years with the war poet, Edgell Rickword. Now the sole survivor of the Moore children, she is still an active journalist.

Beatrix Potter sent no picture letters to her godchild. By the time the child was old enough to receive letters, Beatrix Potter was putting much of her energy into her 'little books', and when writing

to children she had had a new idea, sending them miniature letters as if written from one character in her books to another. Each letter was written on a narrow slip of paper that either folded into an envelope shape or fitted into its own miniature envelope, some with a stamp drawn in red crayon. The miniature letters to the Moores came in a small post bag, inscribed with the letters G.P.O. (General Post Office), which Beatrix had made herself.



The hand-made post bag in which Beatrix sent her miniature letters to the Moores

A full appreciation of these miniature letters requires a detailed knowledge of the books and as Beatrix Moore would not have been old enough to understand them she had to be content with her godmother's dedication in *The Pie and the Patty-Pan* – 'For Joan, to read to Baby'.

Most of the original miniature letters to the Moore children have disappeared in the last ten years and only those sent to Hilda have been positively identified. There are, however, transcripts of some forty of the tiny letters which were included in *Yours*

Affectionately, Peter Rabbit, published in 1983. As it is believed that many of them belonged to the Moores they are included here.



The complete Moore family, in order of seniority

Edward Hall
 Salem
 Mass.
 My dear Fred
 Thank you for your
 very interesting let. which you
 sent me a few times ago.
 I have a very long way
 in a post from the ~~city~~ ^{city} ~~to~~
 to a place in Vermont, where it
 is a hot, and there are
 great trees in the gardens & much
 of them in flower which are
 very



From The Tale of Little Pig Robinson (1930)



Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail gathering blackberries in the published version of The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1902)



Sep 4th 93

Eastwood
Dunkeld

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

They lived with their mother in a sand bank under the root of a big fir tree.

'Now, my dears,' said old Mrs Bunny 'you may go into the field or down the lane, but don't go into Mr McGregor's garden.'

Flopsy, Mopsy & Cottontail, who were good little rabbits went down the lane to gather blackberries, but Peter, who was very naughty ran straight away to Mr McGregor's garden and squeezed underneath the gate.

First he ate some lettuce, and some broad beans, then some radishes, and then, feeling rather sick, he went to look for some parsley; but round the end of a cucumber frame whom should he meet but Mr McGregor!

Mr McGregor was planting out young cabbages but he jumped up & ran after Peter waving a rake & calling out 'Stop thief'!

Peter was most dreadfully frightened & rushed all over the garden, for he had forgotten the way back to the gate. He lost one of his shoes among the cabbages and the other shoe amongst the potatoes. After losing them he ran on four legs & went faster, so that I think he would have got away altogether, if he had not unfortunately run into a gooseberry net and got caught fast by the large buttons on his jacket. It was a blue jacket with brass buttons, quite new.

Mr McGregor came up with a basket which he intended to pop on the top of Peter, but Peter wriggled out just in time, leaving his jacket behind, and this time he found the gate, slipped underneath and ran home safely.

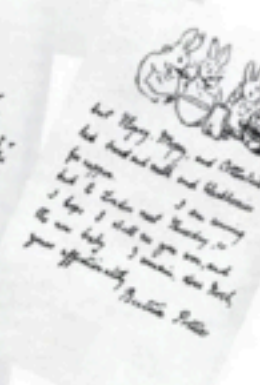
Mr McGregor hung up the little jacket & shoes for a scarecrow, to frighten the blackbirds.

Peter was ill during the evening, in consequence of overeating himself. His mother put him to bed and gave him a dose of camomile tea, but Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail had bread and milk and blackberries for supper.

I am coming back to London next Thursday, so I hope I shall see you soon, and the new baby [Norah, born on 13 July]

I remain, dear Noel, yours affectionately

Beatrix Potter



March 28. 94

Pendennis
Hotel
Falmouth

My dear Eric

.. there are a great many ships here some very large ones. There is one from Norway, and a French one unloading at the quay. Some of the sailors have little dogs, and cocks and hens on the ships. I have read about the owl & the pussy cat, who went to sea in a peagreen boat, but I never saw anything of that kind till today.

I was looking at a ship called the Pearl of Falmouth which was being mended at the bottom because it had rubbed on a rock, when I heard something grunt!

I went up a bank where I could see onto the deck & there was a white pig with a curly tail walking about. It is a ship that goes to Newfoundland & the sailors always take a pig I daresay it enjoys the voyage, but when the sailors get hungry they eat it. If that pig had any sense it would slip down into the boat at the end of the ship & row away.

This is the captain & the boatswain & the ship's cook pursuing the pig. The cook is waving a knife and fork. He wants to make the pig into sausages!

This is the pig rowing away from the sailors, it is squealing because it sees the knife & fork. This is the pig living on Robinson Crusoe's Island. He is still rather afraid of the cook & is looking for the ship through a telescope. This is the same pig after he has lived



Feb. 4th 95

2, Bolton
Gardens,
S.W

My dear Noel,

It is a long time since I have been to see you, but it is too cold to drive with my pony. I shall be very glad when the warm weather comes. I wonder if you have been making a snow-man in the garden? or feeding the sparrows, we have a great many every morning.

My rabbit Peter is so lazy, he lies before the fire in a box, with a little rug. His claws grew too long, quite uncomfortable, so I tried to cut them with scissors but they were so hard that I had to use the big gardens scissors He sat quite still and allowed me to do his little front paws but when I cut the other hind foot claws he was tickled,

& kicked, very naughty. If he were a wild rabbit digging holes they would be worn down & would not need cutting.

Here are some rabbits throwing snow balls.

I wonder if your pussycat has learned to catch mice yet. I think it would rather lap milk, it is too fine to work like a common cat.

These mice are getting away down a hole.

I wonder if those dolls have any hair still & whether they have eaten all those nice sausages.

I remain with love yrs aff
Beatrix Potter



and Nurse Mouse with a tea-cup. I hope the little mouse will soon be able to sit up in a chair by the fire.

I went to the zoo on Wednesday & saw the new giraffe. It is a young one, very pretty, and the keeper says it will grow a good deal taller.

I saw the box that it came in, the keeper says it had quite a stiff neck because the box was not large enough. They brought it by train from Southampton and they could not have a larger box because of getting through the tunnels. I also saw a new monkey [sic], called Jenny, it had black hair & a face like a very ugly old woman. A man gave it a pair of gloves which it put on, and it took a bunch of keys & tried to unlock its cage door.

I gave the elephant a lot of buns out of a bag but I did not give any to the ostriches because people are not allowed to feed them, since a naughty boy gave them old gloves & made them ill. I saw a black bear rolling on its back. I did not know that the old wolf was so good tempered.

I remain yrs aff
Beatrix Potter



From the cover of Appley Dapply's Nursery Rhymes (1917) – see also the sketch in the letter on [page 64](#)