



0. Mrs. WILLIAM HEELIS - Story Preface

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This photo depicts Beatrix Potter with William ("Willie") Heelis. Beatrix married Willie (five years younger than she) on the 13th of October, 1913. By this stage of her life, Beatrix Potter had already published most of her "little books."

As royalties from her books - and inheritances from relatives - made Beatrix more wealthy, they also made her more independent.

She was able to buy additional property in the Lake District - including working farms - and hire shepherds to watch after her flocks of Herdwick sheep. Her interests turned from writing children's books to running her farms, breeding sheep and enjoying her new life.

A Lake District property lawyer, whom Miss Potter met as she contemplated her real-estate acquisitions, helped her greatly and became a close friend. Beatrix married that lawyer - William ("Willie") Heelis - in London on the 13th of October, 1913. He was five years younger than she.

Mr. and Mrs. Potter, now in their seventies, also opposed this match. Forty-seven years old, and with most of her little books already published, Beatrix made her own decision. Her parents attended the wedding and signed the register. By all accounts, Willie and Beatrix were very happy together.

Willie's great-nephew, John Heelis, gives us some insight into their relationship with his book, *The Tale of Mrs. William Heelis*. It turns out that Willie's sisters had also opposed the marriage:

It is not so generally known that Willie's sisters at Appleby also disapproved of his choice of Beatrix. While acknowledging that her father was a barrister, they felt that the Potter family background was trade and dissenter while the Heelis family were yeomen, Church of England and the professions. (Heelis, page 2.)

Four days after the wedding, the *Westmorland Gazette* noted this about Beatrix:

The bride is a successful exhibitor at local agricultural shows of shorthorn cattle and her name is known now all over the country for those charming books for children which have become so deservedly popular. (Heelis, pages 2-3.)

While on their London honeymoon, the couple visited the now-grown Beatrix Moore - one of Annie Moore's children and Beatrix's goddaughter. She:

... remembered being highly amused when Willie and Beatrix ... told her that their first priority on returning home would be to meet a new bull at the railway station. (Heelis, page 5.)

In fact, as the new Mr. and Mrs. Heelis drove up their driveway, "there was a white bull calf in the back of the car." (Heelis, page 5)

Throughout the years, people have always wondered whether Miss Potter actually liked the little people for whom she wrote stories. John Heelis addresses that question in various ways. In one passage of his book - on the fourth page - he notes that she "was particularly good with the children" of the Heelis family:

She helped to pay for the education of several of them and took great interest in their progress.

Beatrix also took great interest in the Lake District and, following those early discussions with Hardwicke Rawnsley, did all she could to help preserve the beauty, and tranquility, of the area.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Mrs.-WILLIAM-HEELIS-Miss-Potter>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Mrs.-WILLIAM-HEELIS-Miss-Potter>

Media Stream



Beatrix Potter and Willie Heelis

Photo, courtesy [Friends of Peter Rabbit](#).

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Beatrix-Potter-and-Willie-Heelis>



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