

Libby Joy and Judy Taylor
(eds), *Beatrix Potter: Thirty
Years of Discovery and
Appreciation*

The Beatrix Potter Society, 2010 (available from the
Sales Manager, 19 Bladon Way, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9
OAD, £21.75, including p&p)

In celebration of its 30-year anniversary, the Beatrix Potter Society has published a selection of essays edited from illustrated talks given to members over this period. They form a fascinating pick-and-mix of subjects that have not been covered in the society's Beatrix Potter Studies and other publications, and expose diverse aspects of her life, influences, interests and controversies. It includes chapters on the clothes she illustrated through precise observation of historic styles in her own experience and in museums; on her stern and meticulous care as a book designer; on the importance of photography in her life and work, and on the influence of her Unitarian background, among others. The essays are illustrated in colour and black and white.

The chapter on Beatrix Potter's Furniture, by 'our own' Bill Cotton is the most obviously relevant for members of the RFS, and it demonstrates her genuine interest in the vernacular pieces that she sought out as furnishings for the farms she purchased and eventually left to the National Trust, many of them illustrated in her children's books. In her correspondence with her friend the Boston bookshop owner, Bertha Mahony Miller, she revealed her keen observation of regional crafts and furniture design traditions. She noticed, for example, the differences in finial and spindle forms on rush-bottomed chairs, and the distinctive carved motifs on built-in Lake District cupboards; she remarked on the fact that pillars on the upper stages of court cupboards had receded to become decorative drops by the later years of the 17th century, and she described (and drew) details of carving and structure

that would do credit to a modern cataloguer.

The chapter shows some of the furniture types, including clocks, that were illustrated in her children's books, by no means all of them from the Lake District. The chair in which the Tailor of Gloucester dozed before his fire was a spindle-turned type from Sussex, and the oak dresser with mahogany cross-bandings to the drawers and central doors in *The Tale of Samuel Whiskers* represented a west midlands tradition.

In the context of such a wide-ranging series of essays this chapter provides a taster for the general reader rather than a specialist study for the furniture historian, but such an attractive book will delight all who have been touched by one or other of the many facets of this gifted and complex woman.

Noël Riley