

“Peter Rabbit” by Gervase Phinn

(In 1988 Gervase Phinn was appointed Senior General Inspector for schools in North Yorkshire)

I was in the small reading corner hearing one child after another read. I had decided to ask the younger children to read from “*The Tales of Peter Rabbit*” a singularly unfortunate choice as it turned out.

John a little boy of seven or eight had arrived at the part of the story when Peter Rabbit had got tangled in a gooseberry net while trying to escape from the terrifying Mr McGregor.

At this point John stopped and stared at me with tight lips and wide staring eyes.

“What a terrible thing it would be,” I said, hoping to encourage him to continue, “If poor Peter Rabbit should be caught.”

“Rabbits! Rabbits!” cried the angry little lad, “they’re a blasted nuisance, that’s what my dad says! Have you seen what rabbits do to a rape crop?”

I answered that I had not.

“Rabbits with little cotton wool tails and pipe cleaner whiskers” he sneered, “and fur as soft as velvet. Huh! We shoot ‘em! They can eat their way through a rape crop in a week, can rabbits. Millions of pounds worth of damage when it’s a mild winter”

“We gas ours” added a little girl sitting nearby, “That stops ‘em I can tell you.”

“Nay Marianne,” retorted John “gassin’ doesn’t work.”

Then looking me straight in the eyes, he added “Never mind poor old Peter Rabbit. It’s Mr McGregor I feel sorry for—trying to grow his vegetables with a lot of ‘ungry rabbits all over t’place!”

“Perhaps we should look at another book”, I suggested feebly.