

# SIGNALS

**THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY**

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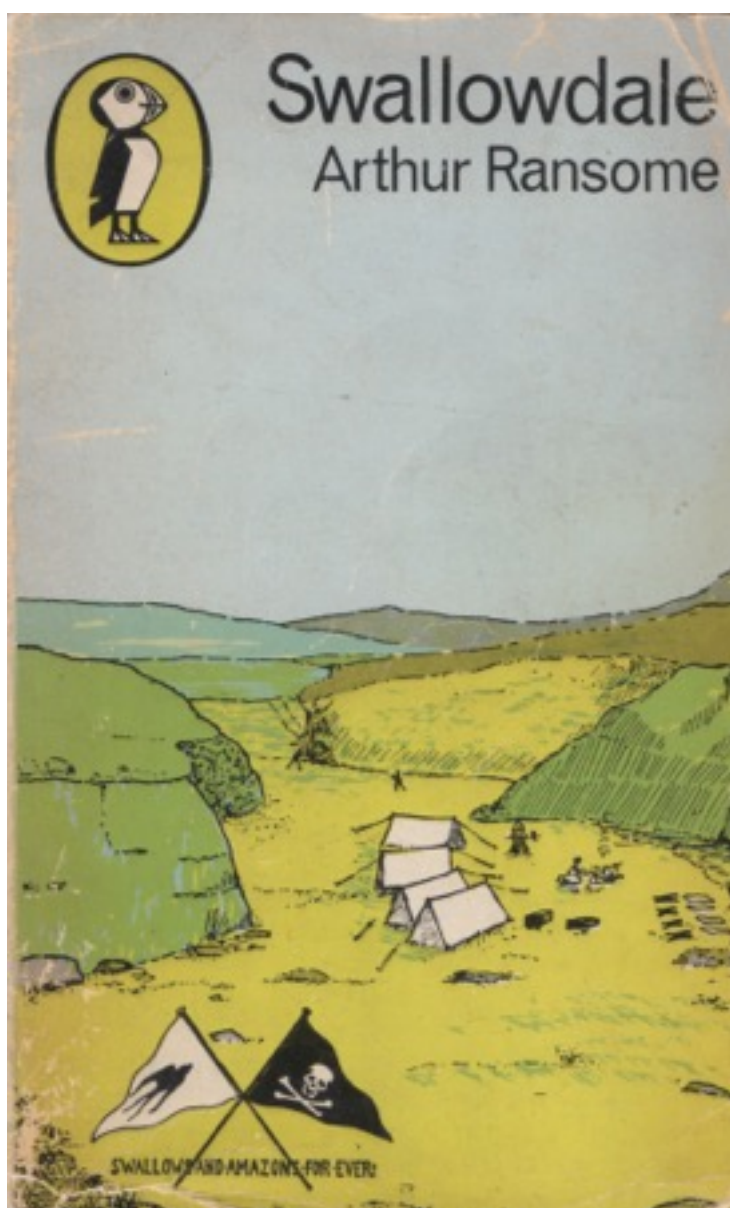


**SWALLOWDALE**  
*at 90*

**DISCOVERING  
SWALLOWDALE(S)**

**SAILING  
SWALLOW**

**WHO WON  
THE  
AusTARS CUP?**



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**SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2021 with IAGM REPORT**

# The Arthur Ransome Society

Limited Company, No 03386251

Registered Office: Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kirkland, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5AL

Company Secretary: John Pearson, Mas d'en Clarimon, Route de Paloll à la Selva, F-66400 CERET, France  
email: tarsinfo@arthur-ransome.org website: www.arthur-ransome.org

**President: Libby Purves OBE**

**Honorary Vice Presidents: Christina Hardymnt, Ted Alexander, Ted Evans**

## TARS Board 2020/2021: Elected Trustees



**National Chair**  
**Peter Wright**  
0121 443 2910  
peterwright180  
@btinternet.com



**Company Secretary**  
**John Pearson**  
+33 468 833458  
tarsinfo@arthur-ransome.org



**Treasurer**  
**Susan Gouldbourne**  
01271 831520  
susan@ttars.co.uk



**Diana Wright**  
01249 750472  
dianaw986  
@gmail.com



**Vice Chair**  
**Mike Glover**  
01432 378205  
michaelglover  
52@sky.com



**Kirstie Taylor**  
0131 664 3947  
28 Orchardhead  
Road  
Edinburgh  
EH16 6HN



**Marc Grimston**  
07961 454896  
marcgrimston  
@gmail.com



**Krysia Clack**  
01904 642971  
steve@ksclack.  
plus.com  
**Overseas Members Representative**



**Peter Willis**  
01394  
387907  
peterwillis1144  
@gmail.com

## Regional Representative Trustees



**East**  
**Brian Key**  
01245  
263579



**North**  
**Elizabeth Williams**  
01913  
844759



**Midland**  
**Julian Blue**  
07856  
262042



**Scotland**  
**Linda Hendry**  
lochanhead  
@gmail.com



**South**  
**Iain Khan-Gilchrist**  
07760  
454767



**South West**  
**Barry Gouldbourne**  
07971 933561

**Membership Secretary**  
**David Middleton**  
memsec@arthur-ransome.org



**Overseas co-ordinators:** **Canada:** Ian Sacré +1 604 984 2295 [canada@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:canada@arthur-ransome.org)  
**USA:** Robin Marshall +1 941 726 1974 [45starsus@gmail.com](mailto:45starsus@gmail.com) **Australia:** David Stamp +61 3 9592 2714  
[australia@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:australia@arthur-ransome.org) **New Zealand:** Barbara and Neil Robertson 04 473 6383 [newzealand@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:newzealand@arthur-ransome.org)  
**Japan:** Mikako Tarashima +81 3 6421 5668 [japan@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:japan@arthur-ransome.org)



# SIGNALS



## THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY MAY-AUGUST 2021

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### From the Editor

## Of books and boats

It's a matter of amazement – and of course gratification – to me, and to us all, I hope, that here we are 90 years after the publication of *Swallowdale*, and people are still interested in Arthur Ransome – in discussing him, analysing him, writing about him and reading him. And by 'people', we can include no less a figure than Philip Pullman – see page 39.

In this issue, we introduce an important new book about Ransome by Alan Kennedy: the intriguingly titled *A Thoroughly Mischievous Person* (page 38), as well as a significant new play – *Red Skies* (p11), which attempts to unpick the perennial enigma of Ransome's Russian years, and their aftermath.

Each in its way has something to say about why and how we find Ransome so fascinating. In his books he drew on mythology (or fairy tales if you prefer) to give them the extra, almost invisible, dimension that makes them such a satisfying read at whatever your stage in life. And in (as I think Kennedy implies) using them to work through some of the unresolved issues in his own life, he somehow mythologised himself – a process assisted by his ambiguous path through the complexities of the Russian Revolution.

All this might seem a bit heavy-duty for what's supposed to be a sort of verbal welcome-mat to the issue, but interest in literary figures, and movements, tends to go in cycles and I've a feeling Ransome is due an upturn. Also, what with the cancellation of the IAGM weekend, there's no Ship's Log so we're short of the usual summer jollity – which I hope the people at the Hoathwaite Camp will remedy for the next issue. Photos and reports please!

And there are always the boats! In this issue, two dinghies that were perhaps never meant to sail. One is of course *Swallow*, the film prop that found an afterlife of her own. I'll leave you to hunt for the other one. And on page 39, the fate of Ransome's last boat is sadly confirmed in a new book about its builder.

*Peter Willis*

**This issue's cover:** The best book cover of *Swallowdale*: Ransome's own picture of the secret valley. But does it exist?

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## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES from Peter Wright

Hopefully by the time you are reading this, life will have returned to something like normality; I do hope so. The Covid pandemic has been a hard time for everyone, so being able to return to our regular TARS activities such as camping, hiking, sailing or just meeting each other for a yarn, will be wonderful.

As restrictions in the UK were gradually lifted, it meant that in June I was able to go hiking and wild swimming in Wales with the Midlands region. It was a super day and the swimming brought back memories of my youth, when I would regularly swim in the River Wharfe. In those days it was not called "wild" swimming, as is the current fad, but just the norm, as the *S&A* books perfectly illustrate. I've booked to go camping and sailing with TARS at Coniston in August, offering the chance to swim around Wildcat Island again, although another Tar has suggested we should try twice around! I'll let you know how I get on.

Several members have told me that the pandemic afforded them the time to catch up on their reading and many of you used the time to re-read all twelve books in the *S&A* series – well done. I too did much reading, and in Bruce Lockhart's *Memoirs of a British Agent*, came across this interesting description of Ransome, "Ransome was a Don Quixote with a walrus moustache, a sentimentalist, who could always be relied upon to champion the under-dog, and a visionary, whose imagination had been fired by the revolution. .... an incorrigible romanticist, who could spin a fairy-tale out of nothing, he was an amusing and good-natured companion."

He also describes Evgenia Shelyepina (note his spelling with a y) as "an extremely able and tactful secretary", describing how she helped him gain

urgent access to Trotsky to successfully resolve a pressing issue. He goes on to say, "This minor triumph I owe entirely to Shelyepina. I rewarded her later, when she wanted to leave Russia, by giving her a British passport – an illegal act, for which I hope I shall not be held responsible today." I love reading what other people wrote or thought about Ransome and Evgenia. Would someone like to use the Red Slipper fund to undertake further research to compile a dossier or Mixed Moss article on what else is in print on how others saw them? It would complement and sit wonderfully alongside the excellent TARS DVD, *Encountering the Ransomes*.

As you know, Covid played havoc with many of our arrangements, not least the cancellation of both the IAGM weekend and the literary weekend. We were, however, successfully able to hold our formal AGM meeting via Zoom and it was pleasing to be able to greet members, particularly from overseas, who had not previously been able to attend this event. As ever, the Members' Forum proved lively and a number of useful suggestions have been taken away by the board to consider. Details can be found elsewhere in this edition of Signals.

We have rolled forward the planned 2021 IAGM weekend on the East Coast to 2022, but as the Royal Hospital School could not accommodate

us in our usual May slot, we have decided to hold it over the August bank holiday weekend. It will be interesting to see if this suits more members, especially families, as this will still be during school holidays.

This has also enabled us to bring forward the Literary Weekend to 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> April, thus only slipping by half a year. We have secured a prestigious venue – St Edmund Hall in Oxford – so book the date now and watch out for the full programme in the winter edition of Signals.

Enjoy the autumn and I hope you can take part in some suitable adventures. Swallows and Amazons for Ever!



***"Being able to return to our regular TARS activities will be wonderful"***



## **Your Action Required on Data Protection and On-Line membership**

### **Have you replied?**

Recently, you will have received either an email or letter from the TARS membership team, asking for your permission for TARS to store your membership details on-line. It is extremely important you reply to these. Let me explain why:

TARS needs to hold certain personal information about you, such as your name and address, to enable you to receive our magazines. Given this, we have to act in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and subsequent Regulations. These place obligations on TARS to manage the information we hold on you, openly, honestly and lawfully.

A key component of the regulations is that you as members should have control over and access to your own personal data. In particular, **you must give a positive consent for us to hold your data**. Paradoxically, paying a fee to be a member of TARS is not in itself deemed sufficient consent, you must indicate to us you are happy for us to hold and use your data.

Additionally, we have been advised (by the Alliance of Literary Societies and others) that many of our old membership practices are no longer in line with current regulations. Holding information on personal computers and sending files via email is deemed far less secure than utilising a specialist on-line tool and storing details “in the cloud”. In addition to greater security, there are two other main benefits to moving to on-line membership: 1) it allows you, through the TARS website, to see, control and change your own information (but no one else’s) and 2) it considerably reduces the burden on the membership team who have previously had to maintain our files manually.

For these reasons, in May, the Board decided to move to using an on-line membership facility. It also provided us with the ideal opportunity to seek the positive consent from you the regulations require – hence the recent communication.

**Thank you to those of you have already replied to the email or letter. As yet, however, many of you have not yet done so. Can I please urge you to respond as soon as possible to the original email, letter or subsequent reminders (which also contain further explanatory details) to ensure TARS is complying fully with the Act and subsequent Regulations.**

*Peter Wright – TARS Chairman*

# 2021 IAGM REPORT

**The 23<sup>rd</sup> International Annual General Meeting of the Arthur Ransome Society took place on Saturday 29 May 2021, on Zoom. This was the first TARS IAGM to be held online. 51 memberships (some represented by more than one person) took part in the meeting. Several Overseas members participated, from Australia, Canada and Japan and probably others. There were two apologies for absence and nine by proxy votes.**

## Welcome by TARS President Libby Purves

Unable to be present, Libby had prepared a video which was projected to the meeting. In it she encouraged TARS members to resume their adventures post-pandemic, with due regard for forward planning and safety.

## Minutes of the 22<sup>nd</sup> IAGM, held at Lyndhurst on 26 May 2019

These minutes (printed in the September-December 2019 *Signals*) were adopted as a true record of that meeting. There were no matters arising.

**Peter Wright** reminded the meeting that in 2020, in the absence of a formal IAGM because of the pandemic, a number of decisions had been adopted by proxy voting, in particular to adopt the 2019 accounts, to elect Diana Wright and Marc Grimston to the Board and to amend the Society's rules 'Leading Lights', mainly in order to revise the system of membership categories.

## Chairman's Report

Peter's written report forms part of the IAGM documentation and may be found on the TARS website (members' section, under Society information, IAGM, next IAGM, IAGM papers including proxy voting form).

In presenting the report Peter drew particular attention to the following points:

- the impact of the pandemic: this had not been entirely negative, since it had led to many meetings and other events being held online, allowing a wider geographical spread of members to take part;
- the contribution made during the year by the new TARS website and the social media;
- the contribution and achievements of TARS junior members;
- an increase in the number of members over each of the first four months of 2021;
- the effort in favour of greater sustainability: electronic distribution of the magazines, recyclable cover for the copies sent by post.

Peter concluded by thanking all the many members who had made a contribution to TARS activities during the year.

## Secretary's Report

**John Pearson** said that, as an 'overseas' member himself, he was pleased that the present online meeting had allowed wider geographical participation. He thanked members for all the help they had given him in the course of the year in dealing with the range of issues that had been raised with him. Any member who considered that TARS could be run differently and better should not hesitate to tell him so.

## Treasurer's Report

**Susan Gouldbourne** presented TARS accounts for the year ending 31.12. 2020. These showed an overall surplus of £359 as compared with a deficit of £1933 in the previous year. After discussion the meeting approved the accounts (Proposal 1 on the agenda) subject to their audit, which was in hand; vote: 53 votes in favour (including nine proxy votes) and two abstentions.

## Appointment of Examiner

The meeting approved Proposal 2 on the agenda (To approve Sally-Ann Balment as independent examiner of the accounts for twelve months from the date of this meeting) by 52 votes (including nine proxy votes) in favour and two abstentions.

## AusTARS Cup

**Peter Willis** announced that the AusTARS Cup for 2021 was awarded to **Brian Hopton**, recognising his contributions to TARS. (See also page 8)

## Other Business

The Chairman said that the postponed 2021 Literary Weekend would probably be held in 2022 in Oxford, on the last weekend of March or the first weekend of April.

## Date and place of next IAGM

To be organised by Eastern region at the Royal Hospital School, Holbrook on the Shotley peninsula, Suffolk, over the English and Welsh Bank Holiday weekend, 26-29 August 2022.

## 2021 MEMBERS' FORUM

The Forum was held immediately after the IAGM.

- Christopher Kirwin said that the IAGM had shown the merits of the online meeting format. A straw poll indicated general agreement with that view; the Board would discuss the matter at its autumn meeting;
- Hilary Weston said that her challenge scheme for Guides had now been going for five years, during which she had distributed 4359 Swallows and Amazons challenge badges;
- It was suggested that *Signals* should include an annual record of the names of all TARS members known to have died;
- Linda Hendry said she would welcome more feedback about the TARS Twitter and Facebook accounts; Jules Blue said he would welcome more feedback about *The Outlaw*;
- Alan Hakim said he had been very glad to see Peter Willis's article on Amazon Publications in the most recent *Signals* (pages 8 and 9 of the May-August 2021 issue). The next book in the series would be 'Ransome Centre Stage' – the scripts of the various plays put on over the years by TARS members, derived from AR's writings. It was also hoped to publish, when the pandemic situation allowed the necessary checking, an updated and expanded version of Claire Kendall-Price's walking guide *In the Footsteps of the Swallows and Amazons*;
- Several members drew attention to the merits of the magazines *Furthest South* and *Tarsus/North Pole News* published by TARS overseas groups. Copies of these were held on the TARS website;
- An effort was in hand to improve the operation of the junior members' log book scheme;
- Paul Green said that there were still some places left on the Coniston camping and sailing week planned for 6-15 August 2021;
- There was a feeling that communications between members in some of the UK regions could be improved, for example by sharing the email addresses of consenting members. Special concern was expressed at the current shortage of active members in Southern region;
- It was reported that Chris Birt still hoped to organise in 2022 a TARS trip to eastern Europe;
- Susan Gouldbourne said that the TARS 'books to schools' scheme also covered books to libraries;
- Winifred Wilson said that Moat Brae House hoped to reopen on 18 June.

There was a general feeling that participants had enjoyed both the IAGM and the Members' Forum. Special thanks were addressed to Carla Johnson for her technical management of both events.

*John Pearson, TARS Secretary*

# NEXT YEAR

**Note these dates now!**

## Literary Weekend

**1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022**

## OXFORD

We are pleased to announce that the next Literary Weekend will be held in April 2022 in Oxford, at **St Edmund Hall**, otherwise known as Teddy Hall, one of oldest teaching institutions in the world, established in 1286. Located in the heart of Oxford, it makes a perfect venue for our weekend of stimulating talks, sightseeing and camaraderie. The small and accessible campus has everything close at hand, including a large lecture room with space for our library and stalls, good single and twin rooms, a large dining hall, bar and pleasant courtyards and gardens.

**Speakers:** We welcome and invite talks from TARS members; if you would like to speak at the Weekend, either a short cameo or a longer presentation, please contact Peter Wright as soon as possible, either by email: [peterwright180@btinternet.com](mailto:peterwright180@btinternet.com), or by phoning him on 0121 443 2910. We will announce the full programme of speakers and all other details in the next *Signals*, along with the booking form. In the meantime, **please book the date in your diary now.** New members or first-time attendees will be particularly welcome.

## IAGM Weekend:

**26-29 August**

**Royal Hospital School,  
Holbrook, Suffolk**

Note the new time of year!  
More details in the next *Signals*



## AusTARS CUP WINNER

# Brian Hopton

An improbable impresario,  
profiled by Peter Willis

Evgenia Ransome is sitting at a small table. “Slippers! For vot does he vant such slippers!” she muses, pouring herself a drink. She is downstage. Above her, on another level, her husband is silently but visibly struggling over the manuscript – it’s the draft of *Swallows and Amazons* - on the desk in front of him, while the ‘Muse’ represented in modern dance hovers at his shoulder. It’s an extraordinarily perceptive insight into Evgenia’s mind – both funny and sad at the same time, and it proved to be one of the highlights of the last ‘physical’ AGM, in the New Forest in 2019.

Evgenia’s monologue was the work of Brian Hopton, dramatist to the Southern Region for many years in the late 90s/early 2000s. This year he’s the recipient of the AusTARS Cup, and his plays are coming out in book form from Amazon Publications later this year.

Brian, now in his 80s, has been a quiet but effective member of TARS ever since he joined the Southern region in its early years. Paul Crisp, occasional regional chairman, recalls “In the very early days he formed a sub-group in North Kent. He and his family (wife Pauline and son Tim) would organise the whole of the catering for events, no matter how far they had to bring food. He and Tony Parslow – they became great friends – would do much to ensure that the region’s main summer event, the camp at Cobnor, was a great

success.” Brian was also a mainstay of the London ‘Bohemians’ – monthly after-work pub meet-ups.

But it was the plays with which he made his reputation, and enlivened so many Southern AGMs, involving juniors (my daughters included) as well as grown-ups (including myself in second-policeman sort of roles). Some were dramatisations of scenes from the books, which he would write, produce and even paint the backcloths for. But a number used a format he devised, and called the Sparkinson Interviews – a nod to both the Michael Parkinson TV programmes and to Brian Sparkes, who played the interviewer, and his wife Diana who appeared in various guises, including Evgenia and the Great Aunt. Other members of the repertory company included Gilbert Satterthwaite, Paul

Crisp (Col. Jolys) and Jill Goulder (both Nancy and Molly Blackett, and Cook at different times). The remarkable thing about his work was his insights into the character of the interviewees. “He is quite an AR scholar,” says Paul Crisp.

Brian’s own introduction to Ransome was preceded by what proved to be an idyllic wartime move from Tooting, South London when he was

two, to stay with his grandparents for the duration, at Painswick in Gloucestershire. “It was brilliant, living in a large cottage – this was the time I was aware that I was alive.” Laurie Lee – not that Brian knew him then – lived in Slad, on the other side of



Brian ‘in character’ as the Tall Dutchman  
Below: Molly Blackett (Jill Goulder) is  
‘Sparkinsoned’ by Brian Sparkes



the valley, seemingly, according to his writings, growing up the same way.

It was after he came back, seven years later, to a Tooting maisonette, that the nine-year-old Brian discovered Ransome in Tooting Library. "I was attracted at first by the dust cover – I can't remember which one, but I immediately wanted my own dinghy, which I never got of course..."

Brian left school at the age of 16, sent to work in an advertising agency run by a friend of the headmaster, for £1 a week. He worked his way up to become a production manager – a fraught existence between the creative people ("The clients always mucked you about.") and the print deadlines "A lot of pressure – we did full-page ads in the daily newspapers – had to get them there by 10pm or it wouldn't go in."

He and Pauline moved into their present home in Bexley 52 years ago – "I used to belong to a fishing club, we used to go through Bexley and I thought it was lovely."

As for the plays, "I can't describe why I did all this – it never entered my mind to do anything like that," he admits. His first venture into dramatics was as producer/director for 'The Great Aunt Returns and Leaves' by Gill Gordon. "I realised these two or three chapters at the end of the book were quite separate," he now explains. "There's a farce in there – this great person (originally played by Diana Sparkes) comes on stage and destroys each of the characters one by one."

One of Brian's great talents has always been persuading others to get involved and bringing out the best in them. Jill Goulder, who collaborated on scripts as well as appearing on stage, says of Brian that "he's modest about his extensive contributions to the gaiety of TARS. He persistently furthered celebration and detailed study of AR and his works and life. He's definitely a hero. He told me after the New Forest event that he struggled to deal with our surprise encomium but talked to Pauline and eventually worked out that he just had to accept that he was worthy of a standing ovation."

Of his own work, Brian says simply: "Everyone gets a gift from the Almighty, and mine was a huge dollop of vivid imagination sprinkled with a fine dusting of rat cunning and perhaps an ability to see and use the skills and talents of others."



## This year's Amazon Publication 'RANSOME CENTRE STAGE'

Over the years, regional, and sometimes national, TARS meetings have from time to time put on informal dramatisations of key moments from the *Swallows & Amazons* series. These may not have had the polish of West End hits, but they have given great pleasure to members at the time, and we at AP think it wrong to let them be forgotten.

So this year we offer you *Ransome Centre Stage*, a compilation of such drama scripts as we have been able to retrieve from dusty files.

At present, we have several items from Southern Region, led by Brian Hopton, whose award of the AusTARS cup this year recognises his significant contributions to the region for many years, especially in these "Amazon Dramatics".

Scottish Region has produced some 'duologues', but rumours of some productions by Northern Region have led to nothing. AusTARS have supplied a delightful variety of 'radio scripts' and even a 'musical' of *Winter Holiday*, obviously intended for intimate winter meetings when it's dark at teatime, and nothing ever happens. Not true when AusTARS are around! (And you should see the teas they provide.)

There are no contributions at all from some UK regions, which is unexpected. If any readers have a script filed away which they think should be preserved, please get in touch with me immediately, it's not too late yet to include it.

We are also including what can be found of *Bohemia in Durham*, a memorable dramatisation of a Chelsea evening in 1903, performed at the 2001 Literary Weekend. Nobody seems to have retained the complete script. We have the programme and the report in the Transactions, and I have kept my own part. Has anybody else kept theirs? If so, again, let me know.

So the result may be the traditional 'slim volume', but we hope you will be interested in reviving memories – or seeing what you missed. Or reviving a production. There will of course be plenty of illustrations. You might be famous!

Since the quality of the book always depends on the subscription income (last year's book was upgraded to hardback when the orders came in) please send in the order form on the enclosed leaflet now (or contact me if it's disappeared) and we shall produce the best possible book for you.

Alan Hakim  
awhakim@btinternet.com





## Armenians out and about

Karen Babayan's *Swallows and Armenians* narrative continues to expand into new media.

The touring exhibition will touch base at the at the Queen's Hall Arts Centre, Hexham, 18 September-30 October, with the full collection of stunning portraits and some beautiful landscapes from the Guzelian collection by WG Collingwood, including his 'Swallow,' above, Dora Altounyan and Titty.

A dramatisation of the book is currently under development with actor-musicians from the Guildford School of Acting.

### ... and an opera

Now *Swallows and Armenians* the Opera by Cumbria Opera Group is on its way – scheduled for 10 July next year in Lowther Castle gardens, Cumbria.



From left: Shakeh Major-Tchilingirian, dance artist, Zena Ashbury (an extra in the 1974 film *Swallows & Amazons*), Rahel Guzelian (Titty's daughter), Karen Babayan, and Persia Babayan-Taylor (director of the playscript R&D)



Crossfields interior, at the last conference in 2019, photo Stephen Bernhard

### ARNSIDE

## Crossfields' second conference

Crossfields of Arnside, best known to Tars as the builders of Arthur Ransome's *Swallow* and *Coch-y-bonddhu*, is the subject of a second conference on the history of this Cumbrian yard, organised by Arnside Sailing Club, on 16 October. It is to be chaired by Eric Crossfield, TARS member and great grandson of William Crossfield, who set up the boatyard in the 1890s. The yard, now closed, was a significant builder of yachts and workboats, including the famous Morecambe Bay Prawners. More details via [arnsidesailingclub.co.uk/crossfields-of-arnside-and-their-boats-conference/](http://arnsidesailingclub.co.uk/crossfields-of-arnside-and-their-boats-conference/)

### A village by the sea - with Peggy Blackett

Arnside – and Crossfields – are also set to feature in the next series of BBC4's *Villages by the Sea*, expected later this year. Geraint and Helen Lewis with *Peggy Blackett*, their replica of *Coch-y-bonddhu*, took part in filming for the programme recently.

On 10 June we had a day out in Arnside with the BBC, *reports Helen*. "The series is presented by Dr Ben Robinson, archaeologist, of Historic England. This episode will trace Arnside's origins and history in boatbuilding and seafaring. As Crossfields built the original *Swallow*, plus *Coch-y-bonddu* of which *Peggy* is a replica, when the researchers got wind of us they were keen to get us on board. In fact it was they who got on board with *us* and it was a squeeze! Ben must be about 6ft 6 and together with the camera, director and Geraint we were well down in the water.

### Restoration of Cochy

Other contributors include boat builder John Hodgson, who restored *Cochy*, and did his apprenticeship with Crossfields. It was fascinating listening to him describing the state *Cochy* was in when she was found and what he had to do to get her back together; how he stabilised her by impregnating her timbers with epoxy and how she was never really meant to be sailed, only exhibited! (Ooops! - *PW*) The whole event took place at high tide which gave us just under 1.5 hours of usable sailing time.

The crew were delighted with the footage they captured both on and off the water and using a drone - saying it wasn't often a planned shoot gets entirely into the 'can' but then *we* have done this before!



## THEATRE

# ‘Red Skies’ staged at last - online screening planned

‘Red Skies’, the original play by Ivan Cutting for his regional theatre company Eastern Angles went on the road in July, visiting about 20 venues in and around Suffolk, followed by a week at their home theatre in Ipswich. Plans were in hand as we went to press to film a performance to be made available online after the tour. For further details of this, check their website, [easternangles.co.uk](http://easternangles.co.uk)

*Peter Willis writes: Red Skies is essentially an attempt at unpicking the abiding enigma of Arthur and Evgenia Ransome’s relationship, what actually happened in Russia and why they were so reluctant to talk about it. It’s the result of extensive research by Ivan Cutting, who wrote and directed it, but on-stage the inquisitor is George Orwell, who could perhaps have met the Ransomes (in Southwold, aboard *Selina King*) but almost certainly didn’t.*

However, what he brings to the relationship provides a unique viewpoint from which to observe the Ransomes, and despite his inquisitorial aims, a sort of friendship, based on fishing develops.

Strong performances all round, nuanced to match the writing, from Philip Gill and Sally Ann Burnett as Arthur and Evgenia (left), Laurie Coldwell as Orwell (below) and Bronte Tadman as Sonia Orwell.



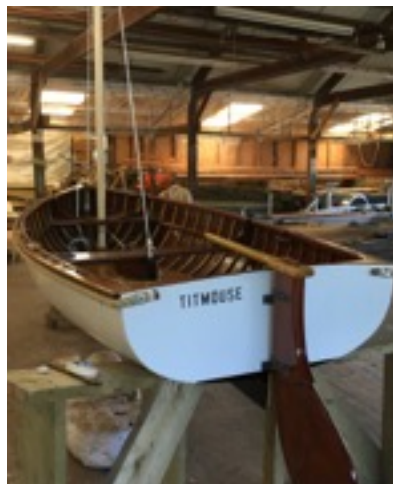
## Broads Cruise is back next year

The Hunters Yard ‘Coot Club’ Broads cruise, postponed last year due to Covid, is now to take place next year – July 23-30 2022.

Six of the fleet’s *Teasel*-style yachts (one actually was the *Teasel* in the BBC TV adaptation) have been reserved. Famously engine-less, they now have quiet electric motors to cope with the Broads’ busy traffic.

Contact Neville Khambatta, Tars member and chairman of the Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust, on 01692 678263 or [info@huntersyard.com](mailto:info@huntersyard.com).

Meanwhile the yard has been busy refurbishing (right) the sailing dinghy that played *Titmouse* in the TV adaptations.



## TARS Eastern Europe trip... 2022?

The TARS’ tour to the Baltic states and St Petersburg – already twice postponed due to Covid – is still potentially on.

Organiser Chris Birt, after discussion with the travel agents, is now looking for a date next year, possibly in June/July.

Members who have already signed up are being kept updated, but if anyone else fancies joining the expedition – 13 days in Riga, Tallinn and St Petersburg – you are invited to contact Chris on [christopher.birt75@gmail.com](mailto:christopher.birt75@gmail.com) or 01997 420013 for more details.

## TARS Book Group goes Zoom!

The first online meeting of the new TARS Book Group is scheduled on Zoom for **Saturday October 23 at 6pm**. Any TARS members welcome

Discussion topics: Our three Summer books: *Spylark*, *Voyage of the Sparrowhawk* and *Lark*, plus your suggestions for winter reading

Join Zoom Meeting  
[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86729682678?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86729682678?pwd=ZDhEL2ZhRlE0N3dOc3kzNE1tckdnUT09)  
 pwd=ZDhEL2ZhRlE0N3dOc3kzNE1tckdnUT09

Meeting ID: 867 2968 2678  
 Passcode: 603330

More details, including copy-and-paste address, international contact details for the Zoom meeting on our TARS website page: **Members Area > Society Information > Book Group**

## Belle's further finds in Arthur Ransome's Leeds

Ahoy there! Belle in Leeds here again. Hopefully you enjoyed my previous article where I wrote about the houses in Leeds that Ransome lived in. Here is some more about Ransome and Leeds

### But first, back to 2 Balmoral Terrace

When I started working on my last article I wrote a letter to the owner of 2 Balmoral Terrace to ask if I could visit the garden to get some pictures. I did visit. A lovely couple live there, and have done for 40 years. The house (*above right*, from one side, and *below*, from the other) is beautiful inside and out and they have an enviable book collection!

They told me how members of The Arthur Ransome Society used to come and have picnics in the garden and read extracts of the books to each other, when they came to the area for meetings.

### The 'Little Owl Society'

They also told me that Ransome's mother was a member of the 'Little Owl Society', a group of well-meaning women, and that she was president of the Society for two years and meetings were often held in the house. I was shown some notes from these meetings and they used to discuss papers such as "Does the spirit of the times tend to increase or decrease the special feminine influence of women in the world" and "Ought the social position of a convicted prisoner have any influence in determining the punishment". I think it would have been an interesting experience to attend one of these meetings!

### His mother's last home: 28 Grove Lane

Despite Ransome's adventures abroad and his love of the Lake District he retained a fondness for Leeds, often visiting his Mother's house at 28 Grove Lane, *right*, until she died in 1945. On our lockdown walks earlier in the year we visited the property (it is near 2 Balmoral Terrace) and found out it is now a children's nursery.



### Briggate, then and now

Whilst not a place he lived, in his autobiography Ransome also mentions going to a bookshop on Briggate.

Briggate, which is now one of the main pedestrianised shopping streets in Leeds is also where the original city grew from, dating back to 1207.

Above left is a postcard picture of a bustling Briggate circa 1900. Beneath it is a photograph from January 2021 showing a very different Briggate, one that Ransome would likely not recognise even if it wasn't for the lack of people due to the Covid lockdown!

The photograph is taken from a similar position to the postcard but roadworks meant we couldn't get a better angle. What was the Cafe Royal, on the far left in the older photograph is now a McDonalds, just out of shot in the new photo.



## THE SIGNALS PROFILE

# Peter Wright

## Amiable enthusiast with a passion for active admin

Enthusiastic. Amiable. Supportive. Outgoing, in at least two senses - a lover of the great outdoors, and always keen to join in, whether it be a quiz, a hike, a challenge of his own devising. And a talent for organising, inspiring and motivating people. He is of course TARS Chairman Peter Wright, who has just embarked on his second term in that role.

Born in the mid-fifties, he grew up in Leeds, initially just a few streets from where Arthur Ransome was born. His early reading included Edward Ardizzone's Little Tim books, and John Ryan's Captain Pugwash.

Unlike some Tars, he admits to an early love for Enid Blyton's Famous Five and Secret Seven, before discovering Arthur Ransome after seeing the BBC TV serialisation of *Swallows and Amazons*.

"What appealed to me was that here were children enjoying the same type of activities I loved: camping, hiking, cooking over open fires and birdwatching. My family had a long association with the Scout movement (my first scout camp was at the age of one!) and many holidays were spent under canvas, and Saturdays hiking amongst the Yorkshire Dales and moors. I continue to enjoy these activities today thanks to TARS events." His family also has strong Methodist roots "all the way back to John Wesley".

At Aston University he studied town planning, which became the basis of his 39-year career with Birmingham City Council. Christine, his wife of 39 years, boasts that she's never read any of the books, but enjoys attending TARS events and has made many friends with Tars.

He's had better luck, if you look at it that way, with their offspring. "When my daughter Emma got married, I was very pleasantly surprised to hear that she and her partner enjoyed reading the stories aloud to each other in bed! Her partner worked in youth drama and subsequently went on to produce a version of *Swallows and Amazons* musical."

Peter himself discovered TARS in 1999 through a visit to the Windermere Steamboat Museum (now Windermere Jetty). As well as seeing *Mavis*

(*Amazon*) and *Esperance* there, he also bought a copy of Christina Hardyment's *Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint's Trunk*. "Reading that book was the highlight of my holiday – it answered so many questions I had long puzzled over, particularly about the location of that mysterious lake in the north." He also joined TARS, but being a non-driver due to an eyesight problem, it took him a while to attend his first national event – the 2001 Literary Weekend in Durham.

"I foolishly agreed to write up my experience of the event for Mixed Moss," ('Losing my virginity with 120 TARS,' MM2001 and well worth looking up!) and his fate was sealed. "I was asked to join the committee to organise the next one and I've been helping to organise Literary Weekends ever since!"

He did a stint on the Board, 2004-10 as Overseas Co-ordinator, chaired the Literary and Resources Committee, and rejoined the Board four years ago in order to take over from Chris Birt as Chairman.

"As a firm believer in doing things rather than just talking about them, I couldn't help

bringing my local government management experience to the job and so alongside maintaining the fun activities, I've tried to run an efficient, tight ship. My main goal has been to try to stem the decline in membership (we appear to be succeeding), reverse the deficits in our budget (achieved) and ensure TARS is up to date with our legal requirements. Much of our success has been due to our new web site, moving from traditional printers to on-line printing and being fortunate in having an enthusiastic and helpful Committee."

Being chairman hasn't blunted his appetite for the 'fun' side of being in TARS, including setting himself the somewhat gruelling challenge of reading all the winners of the Carnegie Medal (his report is in the current Mixed Moss) and getting out and about, up and down Kanchenjunga, wild swimming in Wales and taking his grand-daughters Liberty and Imogen on their first TARS family camp with the Midland region. **Peter Willis**





## OTHER AR ENTITIES 3: SAIL RANSOME

# Swallow: from the screen to the water

Peter Willis reports on how the ‘star’ from the 1974 *Swallows and Amazons* film became available for AR fans to sail



Above: Filming *Antiques Roadshow* at Windermere Jetty last summer: Rob Boden is interviewed by expert Rupert Maas who values *Swallow* at £20-30,000 as a result of her film association.



At the 2011 London Boat Show: Above, Sophie Neville, Titty in the film, came to be reunited with *Swallow*, and stayed all day, chatting to visitors. Below: Artist Guy Venables refreshed her name



(Boat Show photos: Dan Houston)

Surprise all round when the Antiques Roadshow expert valued *Swallow*, the dinghy from the 1974 *Swallows and Amazons* film, at £20-30,000 – about 10 times her original estimate – earlier this year. It was, as Rupert Maas explained, her association with “that iconic film” that “spreads the magic dust”.

As it happens it had also ensured her survival for over 35 years after the film was made, and then another decade to the present day. Turks, a Thames boatbuilder with a sideline in providing maritime film props, hoarded them all against possible further use in a big depot near Chatham Historic Dockyard. In 2010 they decided to have a clear-out with a huge online auction of boats.

Among them was *Swallow*, and two Tars, Rob Boden and Magnus Smith, decided to launch an appeal to raise funds to buy her. About 85 people, including broadcaster John Sergeant, contributed what turned out to be just enough to secure her with a winning bid of £3,850 – about £5,500 including ‘extras’. I got peripherally involved through working on *Classic Boat* magazine, and because Magnus was a neighbour of mine.

In January 2011 she caused immense interest when she appeared, alongside several much more distinguished boats on the huge *Classic Boat* stand at the London Boat Show. Sophie Neville turned up on the opening day with a carrier bag full of press cuttings and memorabilia. Guy Venables, CB’s in-house artist, refreshed the name on her transom with gold leaf. Princess Anne, who opened the show, lingered fondly as she toured the stands.

The next question, obviously, was what to do with her. The equally obvious answer was: sail her. But that raised a number of problems. For one thing she wasn’t even a proper sailing dinghy. As far as we could judge, she’d been a rowing-boat and possibly a boatyard knockabout, maybe at the William King yard in Burnham-on-Crouch. Sophie recalls the cast gong down to Burnham to get some sailing lessons, and the initials WK are clearly engraved on the inside of the transom. An extra thwart had been rather crudely added, with a hole to take the mast.

Like the ‘real’ *Swallow* – Ransome’s own boat – and her version in the book, she didn’t have a centre-board, but unlike *Swallow* her keel wasn’t deep enough to grip the water under sail. And her years in storage had led to a fair bit of deterioration. Lake District boatyard Pattersons came to the rescue and did the needed work free of charge. Safe sailing also required a proper sail that was not so likely to split in a sudden gust.

Over the years, *Swallow* has visited many parts of the TARS world. Her first year, 2011, was exceptionally busy, including the Southern Region’s Chichester Harbour camps, the Broads, the Beale Park Boat Show with its lake beside the Thames, the Thames itself, the Orwell, Gloucester, Shropshire and of course the Lakes, including Coniston and Windermere.

She stayed mostly in the Lakes in 2012, down south in 2013, including the TARS IAGM at Beaulieu and the Southern Region’s



*“Many families cruising for an entire day on their own... or a magical day for non-sailors with a volunteer skipper”*

Cobnor camp. Then back up north to the Lakes for 2014. In 2015 and 2016 she was in East Anglia. She attended a charity showing of her own film which filled the Woodbridge Riverside cinema twice over, visited the Aldeburgh Yacht Club, and took part in the Old Gaffers’ ‘Swamazons’ weekend on the Walton Backwaters. 2017 was a quiet year; ‘issues with repairs and transport’, according to the log. 2018 was again fairly quiet, and followed by a fallow year in 2019 when both Rob and Magnus had health issues, and again in 2020, when the same could be said of the rest of the country.

This year, things are picking up again – Swallow is planning to join the TARS Coniston camp at Hoathwaite (6-15 August, so probably over by the time you get to read this).

If you want to sail Swallow, you probably can. In her first active year, over 300 people got to sail her, and the idea of rescuing her was to make the experience available to Ransome fans – hence the name of the website, [sailransome.org](http://sailransome.org). Lots more details there, including the email address for Magnus Smith – [info@sailransome.org](mailto:info@sailransome.org). Contact him – and include your phone number. Before anyone can sign up for a sail, as Magnus explains,

“The insurers demand I assess whether a sailor has enough experience to be safe, before they skipper *Swallow*.” This has resulted in many families cruising for an entire day on their own. Luckily there have always been just enough volunteer skippers available, so that non-sailors can be taken out on the water for a magical day too. Magnus has always been evangelical about introducing people to the delights of the sport.

Sail Ransome is a Community Interest Company – a legal entity, though not a charity, with its own bank account and public indemnity insurance. Apart from that, and the standards it demands where sailing is involved, it is a simple, low-maintenance and informal organisation – never more so than where it comes to funding. There is no fixed charge to sail *Swallow* but, as it says on the website, “we would like you to contribute to *Swallow*’s upkeep” – normally after your sail, when, it’s hoped, you can take into account the amount of enjoyment the experience has brought you, and perhaps the level of affection for the little boat that it has engendered.

It sounds precarious as a ‘business model’ but it seems to have worked so far. There’s more than enough in the kitty for a coat of varnish, but Magnus and Rob don’t plan to be over-generous with that. One of the things that appealed to the man from Antiques Roadshow was that she hadn’t been ‘over-restored’.



Top: At Beale Park, 2011, with the original ‘patched’ sail

Middle: At the pictures, in Woodbridge

Bottom: A magical day out, with her new sail



## SWALLOWDALE AT 90

# Discovering Swallowdale(s)

The trouble with Swallowdale is not that nobody knows where it is, but that far too many people think they do, meaning that many others will disagree with them. A recent Facebook thread ended up with over 30 posts and suggestions including several outside the Lake District.

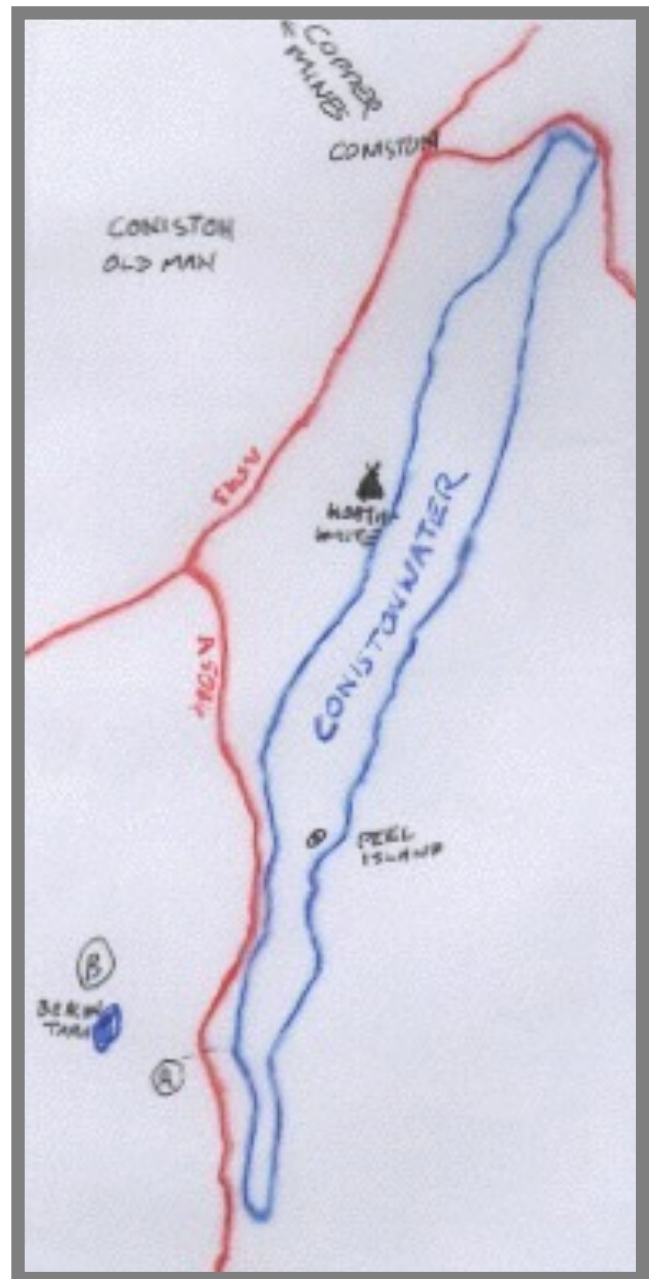
The situation isn't helped by Ransome's penchant for rearranging the geographical furniture of his Lake District. He may well have also had a deliberate intent to mythologise Swallowdale, to make it an ideal, unattainable place, a bit like the Irish Tir na Nog perhaps. It was Christina Hardyment who, in her 1984 book *Arthur Ransome and Captain Flint's Trunk*, after a fruitless round of several possible but unsatisfactory Swallowdales, declared it "a state of mind" rather than a place, and settled for a good afternoon tea with Brigit Altounyan at Nibthwaite instead.

### Camp Miter' been?

But even Christina, by the time TARS was launched in 1990, was declaring a valley at Miterdale, well to the west of proper Ransome country, as meeting all the tests (or nearly – "there is even a dark cleft in the rock, halfway up the lefthand side that looks very like a cave"). I can give you what I think is its OS map reference – on the title page of my copy of Claire Kendall-Price's *In the Footsteps of the Swallows and Amazons* is pencilled "SD164026 (Xtina's Swallowdale)".

Claire K-P herself offers a Mitredale option (starting-point SD176011). And Roger Wardale (*Arthur Ransome and the World of the Swallows & Amazons*, pp 62-5) while pinning the "real identity of the secret valley of Swallowdale" at "the foot of Beacon Hill and near to Trout Tarn" (Beacon Tarn on your OS map, SD275898), also notes that "There are many within the Arthur Ransome Society who... believe that he had the head of Miterdale in mind." Mind, he adds that there's no way of knowing whether Ransome was aware of Miterdale's existence.

Claire Kendall-Price's main choice for Swallowdale is also near Beacon (Trout) Tarn, between it and the lakeshore road (A5084), and straight up from the car pull-in that is about half a mile south of the Brown Howe picnic site. Claire describes the shore here as "a jolly good Horseshoe Cove, although without the woods coming down to the water's edge." This Swallowdale ('A' on the



sketch map) is less than half a mile from the lakeshore. (Beware though, the climb is said to be strewn with heather and bogs.)

### The 'Dale next door?

A nearby alternative was proposed with some force, and in some detail in *Mixed Moss 2017* by Prof. Ken MacKinnon, who discovered it "only yards away, just across an adjacent ridge." He identifies it as "the upper hanging valley of the Strands Beck, above Hodge Wife Gill," at SD271905, which is just north-west of Beacon Tarn ('B' on the above map). He made out a good case (hanging valley, two waterfalls, albeit no cave), but when he organised an expedition in 1992, its members seem only to have been half-convinced.

Perhaps, as ever, Swallowdale really is "a state of mind", a glimpse of perfection which no real location has any chance of fully attaining.





## Heidi's Swallowdale

*It may be rather large, but use your imagination, and it could be perfect, suggests Heidi Elks... so where is it?*

My favourite book of the twelve is *Swallowdale*. I love the idea of camping in a little hidden valley with a handy stream outside your tent and a cave in the side of the valley. Many years ago we (husband David and 18-month-old daughter, in a pack on my back - she's now married!) set off in search of Roger Wardale's 'Swallowdale'. We followed the instructions in Claire Kendall-Price's book *In the Footsteps of the Swallows and Amazons* and did actually find a little waterfall and – in my opinion – a very disappointing 'Swallowdale'. Strangely we have tried to find the valley on a few occasions since and never managed to find it again.

During the same holiday we ventured over to Miterdale, which Claire calls 'Swallowdale 2' in her book. I wasn't a fan and felt that the valley had a funny eerie feel about it that I didn't like.

So here is my 'Swallowdale', for the moment, until I find a better one. It's probably well known to many Tars – in fact a large group of Tars walked up here at the AGM in Coniston in 2019 and many Tars walk this route every year on August 11<sup>th</sup>.

My 'Swallowdale' is actually the Coppermines valley above Coniston and below Kanchenjunga (Coniston Old Man). Ransome knew this valley very well, in fact it was where he became acquainted with WG Collingwood. Ransome was lying on one of the many large rocks in the wonderful stream which flows out of the valley.

As you walk up from Coniston you can become Titty and Roger being drawn on by the sound of the waterfall. There is a lovely clear water waterfall to climb up beside and if you have never been into the

Coppermines valley before and keep your eyes down (as Titty told John to do), a wonderful (if rather large) hidden valley reveals itself.

Yes, I know the valley is too big, but use your imagination and shrink it down and you have a wonderful 'Swallowdale'. There is a waterfall at each end of the valley and a flat piece of land to put your tents. There are lots of caves around and the stream meanders across the valley floor. Well, I'd love to camp here! There is even a wonderful watch tower rock with the apt name of 'the pudding rock', which is best climbed from the side away from the valley.

So if you've been to the Coppermines before, perhaps go again and take another look at it. Keep your eyes down



as you climb up by the side of the first waterfall, ignore the road and the buildings and make your own mind up. As John says "It's a good enough place." But I repeat: this is just my 'Swallowdale'!

## SWALLOWDALE AT 90

# ‘A good sort of magic’

Peter Willis revisits *Swallowdale*

*Swallowdale* was the first Ransome book I came across. My mother had brought it back as one of half-a-dozen books from the library, and this unfamiliar green book, forbiddingly thick and with its odd illustrations, had to wait until I’d read all the others. I can still see my 11-year-old self lying on the living-room floor, propped up on my elbows, discovering and devouring it, and begging my mother not to take it back, that same morning, to the library. I think she did, but got it renewed and brought it home again, a few agonising hours later.

Evidently I enjoyed it, as it opened the door to all the other Ransome books, read in random order as the library had them on the shelves. However, since then I think it’s remained my least-read of the series.

Now that it’s coming up to its 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary – published for Christmas in 1931 – I thought it deserved a revisit.

It starts slowly, almost excruciatingly so, before bringing the cheerful prospects of more sailing fun to a juddering halt with the twin calamities of the Great Aunt’s presence and *Swallow*’s sudden, enforced absence.

This forces on the Swallows a reorientation, from the lake to the land. *Swallowdale*, both the book and the secret valley itself – it now seems to me – is all about a sort of self-discovery through developing a relationship with their surroundings: the countryside, its traditions and folklore.

One thing I always did particularly enjoy when I got to it was the visit to Swainson’s farm in Chapter IX. There’s a perceptible lifting of the mood about it, with the two old people contentedly preserving fragments of their past through his hunting songs and her patchwork quilting, and the cheerful character of Mary Swainson.

And more recently I came to realise the significance of the place, with its reiterated reference to its whiteness – the “old white-washed farmhouse,” “the cool white porch.” Surely, if the great-aunt is an alien witch, bringing an infection of gloom and despair, then Mary Swainson is there to counterbalance her – a white witch, a spirit of the place itself embodying liveness and healing –

bringing milk, laughing cheerfully, repairing Roger’s trouser-seat. Why, she’s even performing a sort of magic when we first meet her, turning the milk into butter.

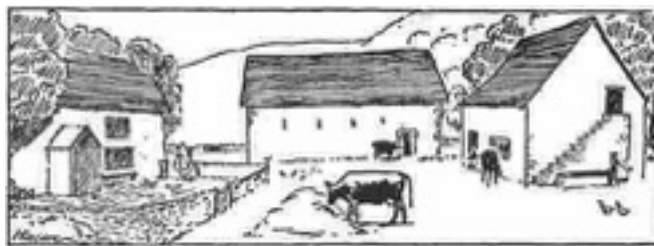
She is the very antidote to the alien great-aunt with her “black parasol” casting its spell of gloom – indeed also to Titty’s attempt at black magic (a “bad sort of magic”, according to Susan) with the candle-grease. It always seems to me that Mary is unfairly passed-over, as a minor bit of ‘local colour’ by commentators. Yet Ransome lays a lot of emphasis on her, ensuring she pops up frequently and even giving her an entirely gratuitous credit for helping to set up Wild Cat Island in the last chapter. She is the personification of a good sort of magic which the secret valley – so difficult to find – also encapsulates.

By setting his children in this contextualised landscape, and giving them a place in their own history with the discovery of the cairn at the top of the Matterhorn/Kanchenjunga, Ransome, in hinting at a past, is also giving them a future.

He has noticeably upped the reading age from *Swallows and Amazons* in this and the subsequent books, and his characters, although only a chronological year older (and about to remain so for most of the rest of the series) are destined to mature rather fast.

With folk and fairy tales sexual symbolism is never far below the surface, and Ransome allows some brushes with puberty via allusion and metaphor. Both Julian Lovelock and Alan Kennedy liken the breaking of *Swallow*’s mast to the ‘emasculatation’ of Captain John, and there’s the ‘secret cave’ that all the locals seem to know about already. And in the next few books they are going to do some very grown-up things: co-found a real mining company, sail a yacht across the North Sea and survey an island.

Much of this no doubt passed over my 11-year-old head (rather as Young Billy’s words pass, ‘like great poetry’ over Roger’s), and some of it was awaiting me on the shelves of the library, but one thing was sure. I was hooked.



# TARS Regional Gateway

## Scotland All North of the Border

<i>Chair</i>	Kirstie Taylor	0131 664 3947	28 Orchardhead Road Edinburgh EH16 6HN
<i>Secretary</i>	Elsie Miller		elsiemiller@btinternet.com
<i>Treasurer</i>	Paul Wilson		paulwilson204@hotmail.co.uk
<i>Editor</i>	Winifred Wilson		winwilson2003@yahoo.co.uk
<i>Regional Rep. Trustee</i>	Linda Hendry		lochanhead@gmail.com
<i>Committee</i>	Sandy Allen, Chris Rosindale		

## Northern S of Border to Cheshire, Gt Manchester, Yorks, IoM, N Ireland

<i>Chair</i>	Elizabeth Williams	0191 384 4759	finnsarah1990@aol.com
<i>Secretary/Editor</i>	Helen Lewis	01229 716685	h.m.lewis55@btinternet.com
<i>Treasurer</i>	Elizabeth Haworth	01539 442050	EHaworth@fba.org.uk
<i>Regional Rep. Trustee</i>	Elizabeth Williams		
<i>Committee</i>	Kryisia Clack, Ann Farr, Veronica Priest		

## Midland Wales, Shropshire, Staffs, Derbys, Notts, Leics, Herefords, Worcs, Warwicks, Northants, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Bucks, Herts

<i>Chair</i>	Julian Blue	07856 262042	julesbluerachel@btinternet.com
<i>Secretary</i>	Paul Green	01654 791256	paul-midstars@gmx.co.uk
<i>Treasurer</i>	Mike Glover	01432 378205	michaelglover52@sky.com
<i>Editor</i>	Jane Wilson	01933 223672	jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com
<i>Regional Rep. Trustee</i>	Julian Blue		
<i>Committee</i>	Stephen Benham, Rachel Blue, Sarah Samuel, Peter Wright		

## Eastern Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Bedfordshire

<i>Chair</i>	Brian Key	01245 263579	chair.east@arthur-ransome.org
<i>Secretary</i>	Nicholas Hinde	01371 820054	sec.east@arthur-ransome.org
<i>Treasurer</i>	Nick Hancox	01493 701565	nick@nicholashancox.co.uk
<i>Editor</i>	Robert Welham	01277 214806	robertwelham5@gmail.com
<i>Regional Rep. Trustee</i>	Brian Key		
<i>Committee</i>	Ted Evans, Marc Grimston, Carla Johnson, Wendy Reis, Jackie Snowman, Peter Willis		

## Southern Gt London, Berks, Kent, Surrey, E & W Sussex, Hants, IoW, Channel Islands

<i>Chair</i>			
<i>Secretary</i>			
<i>Treasurer</i>	Iain Khan-Gilchrist	07760 454767	iainkg@gmail.com
<i>Editor</i>			
<i>Regional Rep. Trustee</i>	Iain Khan-Gilchrist		
<i>Committee</i>			

## South Western Wiltshire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Isles of Scilly

<i>Chair</i>	Susan Gouldbourne	01271 831520	susangouldbourne@gmail.com
<i>Secretary</i>	Barbara Flower	01963 350199	souwesters@gmail.com
<i>Treasurer</i>	Barry Gouldbourne	07971 933561	haccheman@aol.com
<i>Editor</i>			
<i>Regional Rep. Trustee</i>	Barry Gouldbourne		
<i>Committee</i>	Diana Dicker, Norah Fawcett, Diana Wright		

# Southern Region

**The Region currently has no committee. Iain Kahn-Gilchrist** as Treasurer is holding things together - anyone interested in helping him organise regional events or with ideas for events is very welcome to contact him on **07760 454767** or **iainkg@gmail.com**



## Cobnor camp is on! August 20-22

**There's still just time - if this issue of Signals isn't delayed - to dig out the tent, sleeping bags and wellies (and dinghy if you have one!) and head down to Chichester Harbour for Southern's traditional Cobnor Camp - near Chidham on Bosham Creek. The portals have been hired! Contact Iain for further details.**

### Iain writes...

We are still in the time of strange days. There are still restrictions and planning for the future is not at all certain.

That said, we are having our 'usual' summer camp at Cobnor Estate, by the time you are reading this, it may have already happened, or be happening. The dates are, 20 - 22 August.

We hope that things will be reasonably normal at the camp, except that the toilets are still not open. So, we are hiring portable toilets for our site.

### Zoom meetings

To try to cope with not being able to meet each other during the last year, we did hold a couple of Zoom meetings. One to count for the Birthday Lunch in January, which was the form of a friendly chat. The other was se 2 weeks before the IAGM, to allow Southern members to raise any points for the IAGM. We made this a bit more programmed, with a quiz, recipe sharing and favourite children's book sharing.

Not many people attended these Zoom meetings, about 4 or 5 each. The technology may not be available to all our members, or many people might be fed up with meeting on-line, I don't know. But , at least these meetings are free of charge and easy to organise. Going ahead we may try a few more of these.

Nothing really beats actually meeting people in person, though, and hopefully we can organise physical meetings soon. If anyone has any ideas for meetings in Autumn, or for the Birthday celebration in January, I will be very glad to hear them.

Iain Khan-Gilchrist

Regional contact



NEWS  
FROM  
THE GAELS

TARS Scotland



*Gòbhlanan-gaoithe 's Bana-gaisgich gu sìorraidh!*

After such a long time apart, we are planning (perhaps foolishly?) a couple of reunions.

The first would be quite informal, when folk just turn up on the day at the Falkirk



Wheel – not to have a boat trip unless individuals wish to **book for one themselves**. Meet any time from 11.00, and have a walk and a chat, and no doubt food – bring your own or



use the various outlets, including at the Kelpies. There are plenty of

options for exploring, quite apart from the spectacle of the world's only rotating boat lift – a choice of two canal towpaths (one of which

leads to the huge sculptures known as the Kelpies), the John Muir Way and a section of the Antonine Wall. So anything from Roman to Industrial Revolution to 21st-century engineering.



Kelpies  
© Peter Sandground

No need to book, just turn up, but if you have any questions, please contact Kirstie Taylor on 0131 664 3947. The provisional date is **Saturday 4 September**.

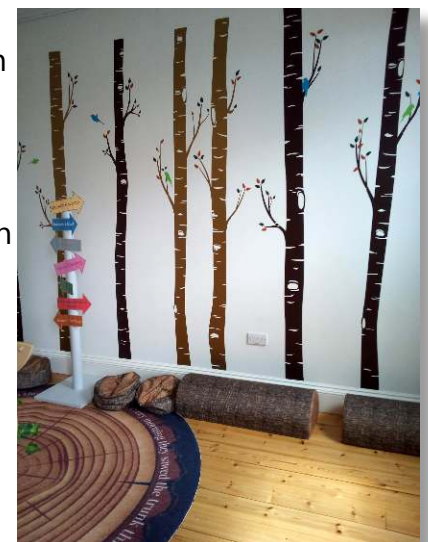
Then, on **Saturday 16 October**, we hope to have the long-awaited and -postponed Literary Day at Moat Brae, where the doors open at 10.00. The morning will be informal, to allow time for

exploring the house and garden. **You may have to book a guided tour in advance, depending on the arrangements in place at the time.**



Please check the website [www.moatbrae.org](http://www.moatbrae.org) or phone 01387 255549.

After lunch in the café, Carol Hogarth will entertain us with a talk about her love of Ransome's books in childhood, and her subsequent life in sailing and writing. Carol is the excellent journalist who wrote in the monthly magazine, *Dumfries & Galloway Life*, about TARS Library coming to Moat Brae before it opened to the public on 1 June 2019.





Carol Hogarth sailing  
Peggy Blackett

Please come and support both Carol and Moat Brae itself, where everyone is working hard to recover from having

been closed for almost half of its life as the National Centre for Children's Literature and Storytelling. For those who have been before, there will be new things to see in the house and wonderful garden: Matt the gardener has been working away on his own all through lock-down, and the results are stunning!

AND you can visit our very own TARS Library!

## Susan, Dorothea and Miss Florence B. Jack of Edinburgh

Mate Susan took *Simple Cooking for Small Households*  
(*Swallows and Amazons*, chapter 2)

"We'll cook the rabbit for supper to-night," said Dorothea .... If I can get a cookery book it's sure to tell us all about it."  
(*The Picts and the martyrs*, chapter 14)

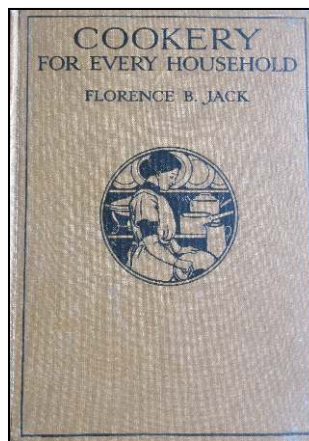
Just two people in the *Swallows and Amazons* series have cookery books, Susan and Dorothea. In fact, I wonder just how important Susan's book really was, as she seems to get on quite well on her own initiative, not really being a bookish person. Dorothea, on the contrary, always has a book to hand, mainly for pleasure, but she knew, as Dick said, that 'books always help a lot'. So which was the cookery book that Dorothea found so conveniently in the bookshop at the head of the lake? And what about Susan's book?

With a few exceptions (Knight on *Sailing*, Nansen's *Farthest north*, for example), Ransome either quoted book titles from memory or for some reason disguised the titles of real books, as he did place names. We do know that one of his close friends was Edwin Jack, godfather to Ransome's daughter Tabitha – and Edwin was a partner in the publishing firm of T. C. & E. C. Jack of Edinburgh, who published several of AR's early works.

Now then, a lady called Miss Florence B. Jack of Edinburgh compiled at least 17 books on

various aspects of cookery and 'domestic economy', all published by T. C. & E. C. Jack Ltd. Kirstie Taylor has done some research into the firm, which was bought by Thomas Nelson in 1915, and she thinks that Florence may have been a sister of the publishers. She would certainly have been a lady to be reckoned with in early 20th-century Edinburgh, as

FOR MANY YEARS PRINCIPAL OF THE SCHOOL OF THE DOMESTIC ARTS, EDINBURGH ...



This description is from the title page of her book *Cookery for every household*, published in 1919. Kirstie tells me that the School was so famous that it was always known as 'Atholl Crescent', its address in the city. Miss Howe herself lived

in the New Town at 26 Howe Street.



Howe Street from Northumberland Street, Edinburgh New Town



While the title is similar to Susan's one, I don't think this was the book she took aboard the *Swallow* – it might have sunk the ship, as it has over 3000 numbered recipes, 700 pages, is 5.5 cm thick, and weighs over a kilogram. But it does have recipes for buttered eggs, and six pages devoted to dealing with a rabbit. Unlike the author of Dorothea's book though, Miss Jack does tell us how to paunch and skin, clean and bone a rabbit, before we get to the actual recipes. These include the methods in Dorothea's book:

"Stew ... Fricassee ... Boiled ... Jugged ... There are about a dozen ways of doing it ... forty-five to sixty minutes according to age ..."

It could be that Dorothea's book was another title by Miss Jack, the first *Good housekeeping cookery book*, published in 1925, as it has a

gaudy paper cover ... that was covered with coloured pictures ...

The section headed 'Egg dishes and omelets' in our book runs to some 14 pages, so let's turn to boiled, which caused Dorothea so much trouble. As she says:

'There's a lot about rabbits in it. And about ways of cooking eggs. It says three and a half minutes or only three if you want them lightly boiled.'

Quite right, but Miss Jack takes three paragraphs to say so. Now for the buttered eggs:

'1325. Scrambled or Buttered Eggs

(Oeufs Brouillés)

... Although this is a simple dish it requires much care – as much care as an omelet. The aim must be to produce a soft creamy mixture nicely seasoned, and not a tough leathery mass served on spongy toast, as so often appears on our tables.

1325. Scrambled or Buttered Eggs (Oeufs Brouillés)  
4 eggs. 4 table-sps. milk or stock. 1 oz. butter. Seasoning. 2 slices hot buttered toast or croûtons of fried bread.

Although this is a simple dish it requires much care—as much care as an omelet. The aim must be to produce a soft creamy mixture nicely seasoned, and not a tough leathery mass served on spongy toast, as so often appears on our tables. First prepare the toast, cut it into neat fingers, and arrange the pieces on a hot dish. Then melt the butter in an enamelled or earthenware saucepan, add the eggs slightly beaten, and the milk or stock. Season carefully with pepper, salt, and a pinch of nutmeg. Now stir the contents of the saucepan very steadily over a moderate fire until the eggs begin to set, and the mixture is of a nice creamy consistency. An extra piece of butter stirred in at this stage will be found an improvement. When ready, remove the pan from the fire at once and pour the mixture neatly over the prepared toast. Garnish with sprigs of parsley, and send to table at once. Buttered eggs must on no account be allowed to stand. If preferred they may be dished on a hot dish without the toast, and garnished with croûtons of fried bread.

Note.—Cream or a thin white sauce may be used in place of the milk or stock. For variations of scrambled eggs see p. 325.

Probable cost. 8d.

I did say Miss Jack was a formidable lady, didn't I? And the recipe definitely includes milk – or stock, which surprised me – four tablespoons to four eggs.

First prepare the toast, cut it into neat fingers, and arrange the pieces on a hot dish. Then melt the butter in an enamelled or earthenware saucepan, add the eggs slightly beaten, and the milk or stock. Season carefully with pepper, salt, and a pinch of nutmeg. Now stir the contents of the saucepan very steadily over a moderate fire until the eggs begin to set and the mixture is of a nice creamy consistency. An extra piece of butter stirred in at this stage will be found an improvement. When ready, remove the pan from the fire at once and pour the mixture neatly over the prepared toast. Garnish with sprigs of parsley and send to the table at once ... Probable cost 8d.

Well, I hear you say, Miss Jack had never cooked buttered eggs over a campfire!

Susan's method would hardly have come up to Florence's standards:

She had now emptied the raw eggs into the sizzling butter, and was stirring the eggs and the butter together after shaking the pepper pot over them, and putting in a lot of salt.

And here is another *faux pas*.

Then she poured out four mugs of tea, and filled them up with milk from a bottle.

Miss Jack would have been horrified. In a paragraph of some 30 lines of instructions headed 'To Make the Tea', she says:

... when sugar and milk or cream are used, they should be put into the teacup before the tea ...

Time for Susan to sign up for a course at the Edinburgh School of the Domestic Arts, I think. But perhaps *Simple cooking for small households* gave her a modified version of Miss Jack's recipe.

Winifred Wilson





## WAR OR PARLEY?

In March we had an online Zoom meeting organised by Paul Green. We made mini cross bows out of two elastic bands, a crocodile clip, tape (we used Father's electrical insulation tape), BBQ sticks (for arrows and part of the main body) and paper.

Paul shared screens and provided a visual instruction – pictures and steps to follow, which was surprisingly easy to follow. Once made they were great fun to play with, and had a dangerously good aim! (Ask Father!)

The range of the cross-bow was from the bottom of the stairs to the top, at pace!

### INSTRUCTIONS

Get five BBQ sticks and tape together about an inch from the top, and then an inch from the bottom.



Next, do the same with three separate BBQ sticks.

Attach together using tape, with the three sticks making a cross-section to the others. (See picture left).

Take an A5 piece of paper, cut into two halves. Roll one half around a pencil, secure in place using tape. Remove the pencil, cut paper tube in half.

Using one half, fold the rolled paper in half and secure it onto the BBQ stick. Attach the paper to the end nearest the cross-section.

Next, tape the other rolled up half of paper on top of the other piece of paper. Make it so that you can fit your arrow through the hole.

On both ends of the three BBQ sticks attach (by hooking over) an elastic band to the ends. Attach the ends of the elastic bands together (the other ends) using tape.

Next, attach the crocodile clip (as far as the elastic band will go) down the handle (five BBQ sticks).

Stick the arrow through the arrow hole and push it down the handle so that when the clip is pressed the arrow will fly. Aim at a target (not living) and enjoy!

Next, we enjoyed a virtual orienteering activity involving Google maps. Reflecting on the secret message which Nancy hid inside her arrow in *Swallowdale*, we were tasked with choosing a location somewhere in the UK, then to write out some directions for the rest of the group to follow. We duly teamed up and, picking a 'nice and remote' (somewhere near to Barnard Castle?) spot, we gave our directions and the rest of the group were able to locate the spot we had picked, far too easily!

**Martha, Aurora and Esme Blue**

NOTE: Paul found the instructions for making the cross bow online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5pTOYKAz5I> if you would like to have a look.



## TWO DOWN – TEN TO GO?

We have just reached the end of *Swallowdale*, read together over Zoom as a shared activity by members from several regions. It was decided to give reading a rest while it was warmer and lighter in the late afternoon. If people would like to do so, Amanda is very willing to start sessions again in the autumn. Please let her know that you would like to participate, and perhaps send your suggestions for which book to enjoy next, on [nickandamanda1558@gmail.com](mailto:nickandamanda1558@gmail.com)





## RAMBLING ON THE ROACHES

We set off at 7.00 in the morning for a three-hour drive to The Roaches; we were the first to arrive but were later accompanied by the others. Just before 11.00, we started climbing up a narrow and steep staircase that wound between cliff faces and edges. We (TARS Juniors) reached the top first, where we gazed down over the adults - 100 feet below - and admired the limited view which was somewhat shrouded by a faint drizzle and a layer of cloud. As we proceeded, we came across a 'bottomless' pool where we feasted on Aurora's homemade biscuits. We (Juniors again) once more advanced ahead and idly jumped between rocks protruding from the cliff edges, frightening the adults.

At the summit, some of us climbed on top of the trig point and cherished the view, which due to the equation: square root (distance above sea level (feet)) x approximately 1.2; we concluded that the furthest distance we could see was about 50 miles. Descending down from the peak, we stopped for lunch and ice-creams, then made our way down to Lud's Church chasm.

The chasm was deep and contrasted with the surrounding landscape with a damp and musty feel. We recited extracts from the 14th century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* poem which was somewhat gory in places. The basin of the chasm was wet and muddy but when we came out, we further descended towards Three Shires' Head. An hour or so later, we arrived there and many of us dipped our feet in the rivers that separated three counties.

When we did return in a homeward direction; we were tired and one sock less than when we started. The journey back to the car was hard going but we were greeted by the warmth of the evening sunset that enhanced the landscape before us. We collapsed in our cars at about 8.30 in the evening - my (Franny's) Fitbit read 40,000 steps walked - and we bid one another farewell.

The journey home was pleasant though often disrupted by the Eurovision Song Contest that fortunately kept us awake enough to get home.

**Ben and Franny Hambleton**

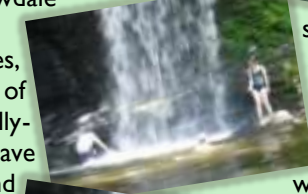


## SWIMMING IN SWALLOWDALE?

Well, the valley that we followed was deep and wooded, rather than on the moors, plus the glorious weather on 12 June meant that a great many people were out and about to enjoy it, so not very similar. However it was a small river that we swam in, with a waterfall cascading down into it, so it was certainly more like swimming in Swallowdale than swimming round Wild Cat Island.

A group of four had travelled deep into Wales, with a fifth member coming down from the north of the country. In a slight hiccup to Sarah's carefully-planned route, the car park where we should have met was closed. Fortunately another was found about a mile away and Sarah swiftly revised the route to start from there. We walked through pleasant countryside, mostly with plenty of trees to provide much needed shade. At one point Andrew rescued a cragfast sheep, or at least a lamb which had managed to get itself on the wrong side of the fence from its mother.

It wasn't long before we reached the originally intended starting point and began to work our way down the river valley. We passed many waterfalls on our way, some of them with very acceptable looking swimming spots, but often they were well below us and would have involved a steep scramble



down the bank to reach them. Finally the path brought us down to the river itself, with a lovely deep pool, partially in the sunshine.

Four of us quickly changed into swimming gear and took to the waters. It was cool, but in an enjoyable way, and we were able to stay in for a while, with a reasonable amount of space to swim in, although we found it best to keep to one side of the pool as every so often some dare devil would leap from the cliff above into the water and we didn't fancy the idea of being below them as they landed. With our swimming urge satisfied, we got dry and dressed again and turned our thoughts to lunch.

After this it was time to bid farewell to our lovely swimming hole and wend our way back to our cars. We decided that it was simplest to return along the route by which we had come and enjoyed it just as much on the return, seeing things from a different perspective

Just before reaching the car park we passed a small shop at which Peter very kindly treated us all to an ice cream. We will have to hope that Susan would not have thought it was too soon after our swim!

**Jane Wilson**



# FORTHCOMING EVENTS IN MIDLAND REGION

With a bit of luck and a following wind all these events will be able to take place as programmed, but do keep an eye on the TARS website and contact the event organiser in case changes have had to be made.



## GET TO KNOW TITTY Saturday 18 September

Come and meet Sophie Neville, who starred as Titty in the 1974 film of *Swallows and Amazons* at her childhood home in Frampton Mansell, Gloucestershire. In the morning we'll hear her tales of recording the film and seeing some of her artefacts from it. There's also a possibility her mother, Daphne, may show us her pet otter! After lunch (please bring your own) there's an opportunity for boating on the magnificent lake. You are encouraged to bring your own canoes, paddleboards or small craft, but please do bring life jackets/buoyancy aids. Two coracles and a punt may also be available to use.

Alternatively, (or as well) we can take a walk down the beautiful Golden Valley along the towpath of the adjacent Thame and Severn canal. Spaces are limited, so if you haven't already booked, please contact Peter Wright by either emailing peterwright180@btinternet.com or phoning him on 0121 443 2910. 11:00am start. Please note, this a wholly outdoor event. Peter will send out final details to those attending a week beforehand.

## CHRISTMASSY EXTRA-VAGANZA Sunday 12 December

Your committee will provide a variety of activities of about 15 minutes each to share with you. 4pm-6pm on Zoom. Contact Jules on julesbluerachel@btinternet.com for a link and details of any material you may require.

## AGM & MUCH MORE Saturday 15 January

The Midland Region AGM and Junior Parley will be held at 13:00 at Hereford Waterworks Museum. Come and share your ideas for activities that we could enjoy together or join in via Zoom. Arrive from 12.00 and bring a packed lunch.

This will be followed by an illustrated talk by Jenny Weddick about her adventures on tall ships and a tour of the original pumping station which has working steam engines from 1895. A riverside ramble will also be possible for those who would enjoy it.

Contact Jules on julesbluerachel@btinternet.com to get further details and directions or the Zoom link.



## RIDE THE RAILS Saturday 16 October

Enjoy a steam hauled 28-mile round trip of approximately 2½ hours on the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway. Pre-booking will be essential due to Covid restrictions. Please book on www.gwsr.com. Times for the day were not available at the time of going to press. Adults £25, children £10 (Midland TARS Junior fees will be refunded by the region).

For further information please get in touch with Jules Blue on julesbluerachel@btinternet.com

## TELL US A TALE IN OXFORD Saturday 12 February

Come to Oxford to explore traditional tales and literary connections based around the Story Museum. More details will be provided in the next issue of *The Gulch*, for now please register your interest in the event with Sarah Samuel by e-mailing sarah@sarahsamuel.plus.com or phoning on 07952 587273.



## GET KNOTTED! Sunday 21 November

Bring along a knot that might be useful in TARS activities (eg bowline, clove hitch) to share with others over Zoom. Show how to tie it and what it can be used for. (If there are too many to work through during the online meeting then others can be e-mailed out to those interested.) You are welcome just to watch if you don't know your knots.

For those bringing along a knot, please can you pre-supply Jules (by October end) with a working diagram/picture so that a tutorial of the operation of the knot can be shared.

The meeting will take place from 4-6pm on Zoom. Please e-mail Jules Blue on julesbluerachel@btinternet.com for a link.

## AMAZON ARCHERY Saturday 26 March

Try a day with the Centaura Field Bowmen at Aston-on-Trent near Derby. During the morning they will train us at the butts, then after lunch there will be the opportunity to be escorted around their woodland trail to try our hands at a wide variety of 'animal' targets at different ranges and elevations.

Date is to be confirmed, but this is the most likely. Meet at 11am and bring a packed lunch. Cost £5 per person, with fees for Midland Juniors paid by the region. For further information and to book please get in touch with Paul Green on paulmidtars@gmx.co.uk or 01654 791256.

Please send copy for the next issue of *The Gulch* to jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com by 1 October

The icons shown by events above indicate which categories they cover for the Junior Log Book scheme:



Adventure Event



Nautical Event



Discovery Event



Titty's Challenge  
(Able Seaman Log Book)



Susan's Challenge  
(Mate Log Book)



John's Challenge  
(Captain Log Book)





## Northern Despatches

**We consider ourselves lucky to have in our area not only Ransome sites in the Lake District but also AR's birthplace of Leeds. Northern members warmly welcome Tars from all UK regions and particularly overseas**

### Rusland June 3rd

Helen and Geraint Lewis, Kirsty Nichol-Findlay, Robert Thompson and Liz Haworth gathered at the grave in Rusland churchyard at 6.30pm on June 3rd to remember Arthur and Evgenia as we do every year. A posy of garden flowers included white heather was left as usual but it was rather dwarfed by the build up of fir cones that visitors have left. Someone had kindly included this area when they mowed paths around the churchyard. Covid restrictions meant that the Reading Room was closed so we missed the usual gathering for a picnic and walk so we didn't stay long.



### The Northern Region AGM

was held this year via ZOOM on Saturday March 20<sup>th</sup> at 1pm. Because of ZOOM we were able to welcome some members who had not previously been able to attend an in-person event; 19 members in all. Conversely the apology list was only three members long.

Elizabeth Williams reported on the 2020 Covid Year first of cancellations and frustrations, and then growing ingenuity and optimism. All committee activity now takes place on-line, saving not only time but travelling expenses too. It is likely that business will be conducted similarly in the future. There will be some opportunities for in-person events later in the year – restrictions permitting. It was recommended that we all keep on eye on the website and social media groups for news of event planning.

Elizabeth Haworth could not report on much financial activity, except to say that we were in a strong position and to recommend all members to nominate their local school to receive a set of books.

Krycia Clack gave us an update on the doings of the Board and it was encouraging to have a wider view of Tars' activities, especially the planned new book club and reports of the imaginative ways the Regions have found to connect with each other and reach out to prospective new members

The NR Committee was happy to remain in post unchanged for another year.

The meeting continued as a 'social' with members invited to introduce us to books they had found helpful during this last difficult year. Some of these are included on the following pages.

### Forthcoming Northern Region events

**Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October:** Visit to Swallows and Armenians, Karen Babayan's exhibition in Hexham (more details, see page 8) with optional visit to the Railway at Alston. Contact Helen Lewis

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> December:** Inn-Formal at the Red Lion Lowick. Contact Helen Lewis

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> January:** AR's Birthday Lunch at Barton Village Hall nr Preston, contact Veronica Priest

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February:** Visit to Seven Stories in Newcastle to view the David Wood archive. Contact Elizabeth Williams

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March:** AGM by Zoom.

**Robert Thompson - *Trosečníci z Vlastovky – (Swallowdale)* literally “Castaways from the Swallow.”**

A Czech edition noted mainly for the superb sepia-style illustrations by Zdeněk Burian created initially in the 1940s, but not used until 2015. It was August 1999 when I acquired my first foreign edition – a Danish copy of *Winter Holiday*. Since then I have managed to find nearly all of the available translations, bizarrely not by visiting the relevant countries! All my 175 copies have been collected via the Internet or from individual contacts. I particularly like the non-Ransome illustrations.



**Ann Farr - Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: a history of a fascination*. London, Granta, 2017 (paperback).**

As a fan of Robert Macfarlane’s writing generally, and having read some of his other books, such as *The old ways: a journey on foot*, I’ve enjoyed dipping in and out of this book which examines not only the history of conquering the world’s peaks but tries to work out exactly what it is that drives people’s obsession about climbing mountains. Macfarlane himself is a passionate climber. On p.19 (ch.1) there’s a paragraph which describes how mere physical structures or features of the landscape – and he includes here polar regions, deserts, jungles and others – “become much more than these in the human mind... they are also products of human perception; they have been *imagined* into existence down the centuries.”

Ch 6, entitled *Walking off the map*, begins, to my surprise, with words from Swallows and Amazons: “*All the most exciting charts and maps have places on them that are marked ‘Unexplored’*”. I had never thought to find Ransome references in such a book as this, but a further surprise was to come a few pages later with the appearance of the endpaper map by Stephen Spurrier from S&A. Macfarlane uses this to show that in the children’s minds the ends of the lake are the ‘terrae incognitae’ of the Arctic and the Antarctic, and the High Hills and the Great Hills are the ‘unexplored’ peaks, Macfarlane’s mountains of the mind. Thus a lake and its surroundings can be transformed into an entire unknown world, in the imagination, no matter that the real lake is swarming with boats and people.

It’s a fascinating book, and I would commend Macfarlane’s writing to anyone with an interest in the landscape and people’s relationship with it over time. I just never expected Ransome to feature in it.

**Kirsty Nichol-Findlay – *The Lion’s Paw* by Robb White (1946) republished by A.W. Ink Publishing Robb White’s Books, Santa Barbara, California 93108. ISBN 978-0-9820932-0-7**

I have several times bought this book in recent years, for grandsons (who enjoyed it greatly) and quite recently to have one for myself. The lion’s paw is the name of a rare shell, and the name of the yacht.

This fine novel has an enticing yellow-and-black cover of a yacht making sail through encroaching jungle with dangerous creatures lurking. But the opening chapter is so unlike that cover!

Not even Ransome has surpassed it. A 12-year-old girl gazes out from an upstairs window into a dull courtyard – and looks across to the window of her little brother’s quarters opposite. It is his ninth birthday, but he may not have remembered that. Nothing can match our gradual awareness of the children’s situation, as we decipher the sign that reads clearly the other way.

I first borrowed this from the Children’s Library above the Red Robin Tea-rooms in Upper Hutt when I was ten, but never had my own copy – perhaps because it’s American, it was not available in our bookshops in New Zealand. It was only when I sat next to an American librarian at a TARS conference more than twenty years ago and asked her if she could identify the book, that, six months later, I heard from her - she had. For some years it had been a recommended book for American school children and was in school libraries. Ah! I re-read it with great pleasure.

See what you think. The only bit I wasn’t sure of (when ten, and still now) was the barefoot-on-the-gravel. I couldn’t have done that. But perhaps Penny’s feet were already hardened. And the desire for a pet alligator – never! But there you are. I’d have felt more comfortable with an armadillo, but they were in the wrong landscape for that – we are in the Florida Everglades – and while Timothy-armadillo never came, the little alligator did.

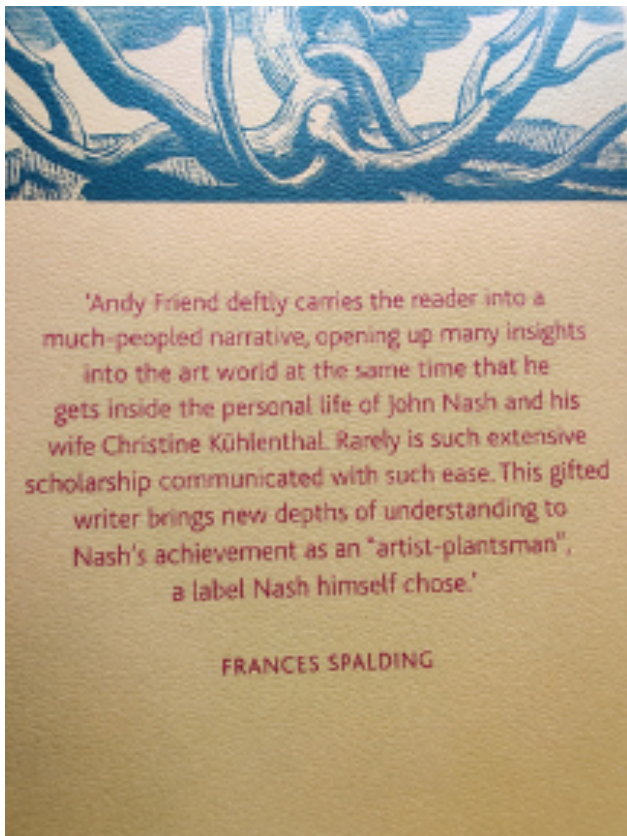
I would have loved to know what happened next, but really it doesn’t matter that we don’t have a sequel. It’s remarkable on its own.

Kirsty also recommended was *To War with Whitaker*, by Hermione Ranfurly (1994) Pan Books, ISBN 978-1-5098-5621-3:

This is the most marvellous, riveting, engaging, lively, often day-by-day diary account of the Countess of Ranfurly's first years of marriage during the war – she married Dan Ranfurly in January 1939, when they were both 25. They had met in Australia where she had been a PA to the Governor of NSW and he was an aide-de-camp. They are both well-connected, no-nonsense people, and she is determined not to be separated from him by war – enterprising almost beyond belief – but as you get to know her, of course you see how she wins over authority. So who was Whitaker, then? Her husband's butler – she took him along, and he is worth knowing! She is a Nancy, beyond doubt. You will love her. She writes fast and idiomatically, and you can hear her voice!

**Tony Hill** - My choice was *John Nash The Landscape of Love and Solace* by Andy Friend. Published Thames and Hudson ISBN 978-0-500-0229-0 price £30.

In this time of Covid Lockdown I found it a fascinating, compulsive and inspirational read. It is beautifully written and covers so much detail with a genuine empathy. The biographical events of John Nash's world are brought to life through meticulous research taking us through his struggles and triumphs in Art and Life. There are excellent reproductions of his art works and those of his contemporaries that show the skills of draftsmanship and of painting. Andy Friend also gives insight into his love and eye for Nature and the special places and qualities he sought so passionately to show throughout his long and productive life. Besides being an artist and illustrator he loved fishing and gardening. I am sure on reflection there are many connections with Ransome's world? I particularly liked the glimpse in to the Slade School of Fine Art and the ambitions and the talents of the young men and the young women of that generation.



**Liz Haworth** – *A Lakeland Boyhood* by David Clark (Lord Clark of Windermere) Hayloft Publishing Ltd  
The description of the way of life in the area around Bowness was very much what Arthur Ransome would have been familiar with when living at Low Ludderburn. The son of a head gardener living on the estate on the edge of the village, David Clark grew up roaming the landscape, knowing the birds and animals, guddling for fish in the becks and rowing to Swallows and Amazons locations on Windermere. He attended the local schools, the scouts and the boys club and had to travel around by bicycle, bus or on foot in the days when few had motor cars. He comments on the change from a self-contained village separate from Windermere to the current lack of amenities for any but the tourists.



# EBB & FLOW

## *The Eastern Pages*



### *The DICK CALLUM CUP*

Following the Eastern Region's zoom IAGM a separate zoom meeting featuring the Dick Callum Cup was held in the evening, ably managed by Sarah Samuel of the Midland Region. The quiz was compiled and hosted by Eastern Region's own Marc Grimston consisting of 30 questions scoring a possible 46 points.

Peter Willis won with a score of 31 points. My own score to my shame was a measly 11 points (actually more than I thought I would get). Seventeen Tars took part including David Stamp from Melbourne, Australia, making it a truly international affair.

### *LOOKING BACK — LOOKING FORWARD*

Not knowing how Covid will pan out it is still a time of looking back rather than looking forward. I would certainly like to get back on the water with perhaps a trip on one of the Norfolk Broads trading wherries that our region has hired in the past. There are still a couple of these wherries, the *Albion* and the *Maud* (which we hired for the 2015 IAGM) and the pleasure wherry *Hathor* to choose from. In May 2016 12 Tars (the maximum number allowed) boarded the wherry *Albion*. Looking back can be useful too as I remember the day was blustery and cold, so cold I was sent below as I was told I was turning blue. Next time I will take an extra sweater or topcoat even if the Sun is out; just in case.



The *Albion* has no engine so uses a tender with an outboard engine to manoeuvre in the narrower sections of the river. Wherries with their shallow draft, low freeboard and single black sail (*Hathor's* sail is white) tend to be thought of as being confined to rivers but in the past they did go to sea, trading between Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. It was not all work. There was fierce competition in racing and not just on the rivers and broads but also at sea. There is one known painting showing four wherries racing offshore with added foresails set. Long may they continue.

## ***EVEN ARTHUR GOT IT WRONG SOMETIMES***

One of my favourite books when young, even earlier than Arthur Ransome was Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*. First published without illustrations in 1908, illustrated editions soon following, drawn by various artists, the most famous being E H Shepherd in 1931. I believe the book is still in print and has been adapted for the theatre, television and film. Truly a classic it was at first turned down by every publisher it was sent to, even though Grahame had four previous books published. It was finally accepted by Methuen and not in America until Scribner reluctantly published the book only after President Theodore Roosevelt made a personal appeal.

Apart from the novelist Arnold Bennett, who saw its potential the book was panned by the critics even though they had praised Grahame's earlier work. The *Times* critic stated '*Grown-up readers will find it monstrous and elusive. Children will hope in vain for more fun.*' Even our own Arthur writing in *The Bookman*, thought it and out and out failure, — '*like a speech to Hottentots made in Chinese.*'

How wrong he was!

*RW.*



*'There is nothing, absolutely nothing, half as much worth doing as messing about in boats.'*

## **COMING EVENTS**

Subject to Covid 19 the Eastern Region are planning events for late 2021/2022

**OCTOBER 18th (Sat): Literary Half Day, URC Church Hall, Whiting Street, Bury St Edmunds IP33 1NR.** 2 pm to 5.30 pm. Parking on site. £10 per head to cover expenses. Optional meal afterwards at local restaurant (subject to Covid) **Ted Alexander on the Russian Revolution with selection of items from his substantial archive.** — phone **Brian Key 01245 263579** or **Nicholas Hinde 01371 820054** for details.

**JANUARY 22nd 2022: AR's Birthday Lunch and AGM (VTBA).** For further details phone — **Brian Key. 01245 263579.**



## **Sou'westers and Seaboats News from the SW Region**

### **Learning knots via zoom?**

Nora Fawcett showed us how to knot rope or string in many different ways in our zoom meeting. At first I thought it would be tricky this way but armed with the paperwork sent out beforehand, some rope and props we got on well. I can now collect tadpoles and bring them home in a jar with rope handle. Diane learnt some different ways to tie up her kayak. Thank you to Nora.

### **Zoom mapping event – 15th May 2021**

Technology is great when it works. Unfortunately, this was one of those occasions when the gremlins struck! We did eventually manage to see and hear each other and did various interesting exercises devised by Diana Wright, (to whom many thanks must go).

The first involved plotting points from grid references using two different conventions. One of the references was for the Wild Cat's berth in Lowestoft harbour in Peter Duck.

Exercise 2 was how to identify a walking route on screen using Google street view. I use this before driving if I am going some-where new – seeing what junctions and the destination look like helps a lot if you are on your own.

Exercises 3 and 4 were on using Google to decide a route and plotting a course, and number 5 would have been on capturing images on the web, but sadly the gremlins returned and cut us all off, so I still don't know how to do this.

Perhaps we will repeat this some time when we can meet up properly.

**Barbara Flower**

### **SW outing to East Somerset Railway Cranmore to Mendip Vale 12/6/21**

The first proper outing for the SW as restrictions lift.



Our engine approaching to be coupled at the front, so reverse there and forwards return





See, there was plenty of room after all.



Engine and carriage restoration shed

Barbara and I arrived at the same time, so we had no difficulty finding each other. We presented our tickets to be told that we had a compartment each! We insisted on sitting together, and so there was not only the rest of our compartment free, but a whole compartment available as well. Cranmore is just outside Shepton Mallett so I had decided to visit Nunney Castle on the way



and I had my coffee at this charming spot.

We did the normal sightseeing things and settled into our compartment for the 2.5 mile excursion, chased by a herd of young cows. The stately pace of heritage railways is the best bit, so from a high vantage point one can see the countryside passing slowly enough to spot wildlife, of which there was a lot to see.

Dick would have been please to watch the uncoupling of the engine and its move to the front to take us back the right way round.

On our return we found a nice spot to eat our lunch, and finished by visiting the restoration sheds. I went on to nearby Kilver Court garden, which is often on gardening programmes.



Barbara more prosaically collected a mattress.



## **Forthcoming events**

– although at the time of writing lockdown rules are hopefully going to be easing, there is the possibility that we may have to change dates. Also, it is still tricky trying to book venues, so please bear with us! In each case details will be sent to members nearer the time. If anyone from other regions would be interested in being sent information about any of our events please contact me (Barbara) on [souwesters@gmail.com](mailto:souwesters@gmail.com)

### **September**

– We are planning a couple of events for this month.

Firstly, a talk by Simon Dell via Zoom  
about Lundy Island on Saturday 11th September 2021 starting at 7 pm

and secondly, a visit to the Kennet & Avon Canal Trust Museum at Devizes  
in the morning and after lunch a canal boat trip on the  
Kenavon Venture on Wednesday 29th September 2021

. Anyone feeling energetic could also walk along the towpath to the famous Caen Hill Locks, which are around a mile and a half away, (or they could go by car!)

### **October**

– This is when we usually have a Bring and Scoff Literary day, so we hope to be able to book the village hall at Creech St Michael near Taunton for Saturday 16th October 2021

. We will base the day on the Broads books, Coot Club and Bix Six, and people can read a favourite piece or share memories of trips on the Broads. We will also have a go at re-enacting William's heroic moment as a pug-rocket, (without the mud), and Dick's pulley system.

### **November and February**

– we have it in mind to have Zoom events in these months to save travelling – see the TARS website for dates.

### **January**

– **Advance notice of the SW AGM and AR Birthday lunch to be held on Saturday 15th January 2022**

. We have a speaker for the afternoon and we hope to book the Teignmouth Corinthian Yacht Club, which has fabulous panoramic views of the South Devon coast.

## Bender on Ransome on Zoom

In a first for TARS, **Mike Bender**, author of *Sunlight and Shadows*, joined Northern Region Chair **Elizabeth Williams** for a live on-line discussion of his themes and ideas.

We invited **Julia Edwards** to review the debate



I wondered if someone like me – who does not immediately remember all the texts ‘cover to cover’ – was the best person to critique the interview. But after watching the exchanges between Mike Bender and Elizabeth Williams I realised it did not really matter if I did not remember the finer detail of the novels. His focus was to delve deep into those areas which strongly influenced Ransome’s life: his father’s early death, bullying at school, his life as a journalist in Russia and Eastern Europe and his marriage to Evgenia. There is endless material for a psychologist here, and I agree with Julia Jones in her review of the book that Bender speaks mainly with his “clinical psychologist hat on”.

However Mike Bender has a ‘literary hat’ too: he has doctorates in both psychology and literature. Yet during this interview he barely makes use of his literary expertise, constantly deferring to his interviewer, as she has ‘more knowledge of the children’s genre’. Indeed I felt during the interview that Mike Bender wanted to keep discussion on the historical and psychological rather than Ransome’s fictional narratives in his book. I like to think that this is because the book is subtitled ‘Hidden Narratives’ and that this interview gave him a chance to unwrap some of these.

A hugely important moment in the interview is Bender’s hailing of Victor Watson’s *Reading Series Fiction* as a ‘key text to understanding Ransome’. Watson’s chapters on Ransome are indeed exceptional. This only reconfirmed my belief that Mike Bender’s intention was to emphasise the trauma in Ransome’s life; however controversial that might be for those who wish to see a favourite author free of ‘issues’. He deferred to Watson and did not really want to concentrate on - or discuss - the poetic side of Ransome’s characters.

Contemporary authors have revisited stories by E Nesbit and Susan Coolidge and reinvented their characters for the 21st century. This has not happened with Ransome. Maybe writers now are aware that Ransome was so “*preoccupied with the goodness of children, his recognition of the*

*enduring possibilities for happiness*” (Watson p. 69). And possibly because the storylines in some of the texts are so extraordinary. Ransome’s children play out freedoms in exceptional ways. Bender mentions the lack of ‘tenderness’ in the books, and a focus on ‘confidence and hierarchy’. It seems that he wants to view the novels clinically and not as children playing-as-children-do.

In the final part of his interview Bender talks about the Ransome ‘legacy’ and the need to get the stories out to new readers. This section was, I felt, the most intriguing. While there have been films and dramatisations based on Ransome characters, Bender barely acknowledged this. He emphasised forcefully the need for the Ransome output to receive media attention; for reissues of the books with newer illustrations; for an updated biography; for making the Amazon publications “available”, for pushing for more academic writing (with jazzier titles) and collating transcripts.

### ‘Speaking largely to ourselves’

He celebrated the TARS initiative but cautioned that we may be speaking largely to ourselves. There are now a number of groups of adults celebrating the authors they loved in their distant childhoods. Bender is outspoken about the inevitable death of these organisations if members are not ambitious and brave in allowing reprints in all manner of formats, revisions and imaginative reinterpretations of their beloved texts.

In conclusion, I am still confused by this interview. Much planning obviously went into the chosen questions and time was tight. But mainly, I sensed a reticence in the author to expand on some answers. Sometimes he would suddenly stop mid-sentence. *Sunlight and Shadows* is a highly detailed text about Ransome which tries to bring the many strands of his life together. Maybe there was too much to condense into a 45-minute interview. I agree with Julia Jones yet again, when she says that ‘there is much to interest and provoke beyond the circle of the already-committed’.

The recording is still available to watch here (or email Peter Willis for a copy-and-paste link):  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89727463571?pwd=K1lIRFBPMjRQbkhYcVduaXd4U0s2QT09>  
 Pass code: 471871 Meeting ID: 897 2746 3571





# RELICS of a RANSOME FAMILY



*Helen Lupton, widow of Arthur and much-loved mother of William and Robert, died on April 26. Arthur Lupton was Arthur Ransome's nephew, son of AR's sister Joyce.*

*In clearing Helen's house in Settle, Robert contacted TARS to ask if the society would be interested in a donation of her books.*

*The books, which included great many Amazon Publications and other books relating to Ransome, will be inspected first by the TARS Library; those that it does not need will be offered for sale to members to raise funds for the Society.*

*There seemed to be far too many to post so Krysia Clack drove over from York to Settle to collect them, and found more than she had been expecting.*

Robert, who had been doing the house-clearing prior to its sale, had some interesting mementos of his mother and the family to show me.

Until her death, Helen had kept the notebook in which she and Arthur had recorded everyone's wedding gifts. It shows 'Arthur Ransome - £10' which was a considerable amount at that time. On the same page is recorded the gift from the related Middleton family (who had no idea that a future member would marry Prince William).

AR regularly reviewed books and I was handed one of particular interest. This was by Ernest Raymond called *The Nameless Places* (1954) which has a dedication 'For Arthur Ransome in gratitude for his indispensable pilotage through some very dangerous waters, from Ernest Raymond October 21st 1954.'

In the novel's final chapters, where there is a sailing incident, there are pencilled underlinings and question marks, possibly in AR's hand. Raymond was clearly a friend of AR's – as *The Twilight Years – London* reveals, they met up at the Garrick Club and notes in AR's diary indicate they discussed the Reprint Society and which are the best typewriters.



## Mrs Gaskell and the Good Aunt

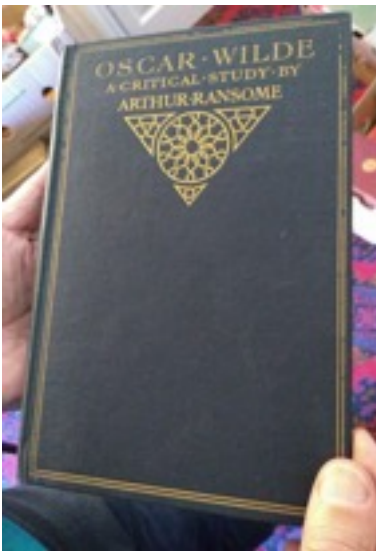
I also accepted enthusiastically a series of books written by Mrs Gaskell which had been owned by Helen Boulton. This Helen, I was reminded by Robert, was *the Aunt Helen* – the 'Good Aunt' to whom *The Picts and the Martyrs* was dedicated. He added that AR was very fond of Aunt Helen. Looking inside I could see that some were bought for her by Cyril and Edith as Christmas presents, eg 'from C & E Ransome Xmas 1889'.

## Edith's sideboard

Robert also kindly showed me some other 'treasures', the first being the sideboard that had belonged to AR's mother Edith. (The upper half was not hers, just the bottom part – *photo, left*).

He next produced a first edition of Arthur Ransome's *Oscar Wilde, A Critical Study* (published 1912), which Ransome had presented to his (Ransome's) mother.

Inside is his dedication (*see photos*). I couldn't help thinking about the ensuing court case and also about what happened to AR in his life in the years following that dedication.



Edith Ransome's copy of *Oscar Wilde*

Robert then pulled out some items they were keeping of Evgenia's, a little cat and a Russian spoon. Evgenia had bought the spoon when she had revisited her family in Russia in later life. Robert also showed me a monkey which had belonged to Geoffrey, AR's brother.

### Geoffrey

The family spoke quite a bit about Geoffrey. Apparently, he had been very keen on railway engines and he and AR used to go to wait for trains at the railway line to see them pass by. They also have a photo of Geoffrey with Rupert Brooke and other members of the cast at a school play, below. Unfortunately, they have no idea which two they are in the group.

Over coffee, I learnt that AR's great grandfather had been present at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway and had attended William Huskisson MP at his fatal accident.



Finally, Robert showed me some of Edith's water colours, including a view of Coniston Old Man (top) and one of High Nibthwaite, which I tried my best to photograph. As they are behind glass this was not easy.. I was impressed at how good they were. Sadly a family member had already collected the one of 'Low Ludderburn'.

### Memories of Hilltop

Robert and William have memories of visiting Arthur at Hilltop but they are vague as both were very young. Robert remembers going upstairs to visit Arthur and being given some coloured paper clips as a present. William remembers that one time Arthur had an accident when his chair tipped over backwards. Robert has no recollection of that.

I very much appreciated the warm welcome given by the Lupton family and their kindness to let me see some of the AR related items while I was only on a mission to collect a box of books and when they were obviously so busy. My thanks to them.





# The best fairy merchant going?

Peter Willis reviews *A Thoroughly Mischievous Person*  
by Alan Kennedy

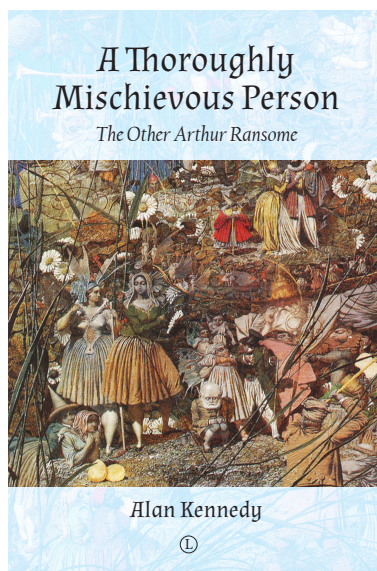
You know how it is – you wait ages for a retired psychologist to analyse Arthur Ransome and then two turn up almost at once. Last year, it was Mike Bender, with *Sunlight and Shadows*; now, from Alan Kennedy, comes *A Thoroughly Mischievous Person: The Other Arthur Ransome*. As well as being Emeritus Professor of Psychology at Dundee University, he writes novels and has contributed articles to recent issues of *Mixed Moss*.

*A Thoroughly Mischievous Person* (the phrase was found scrawled on the cover of Ransome’s file in the MI5 archives) manages to combine a psychological study of Ransome both as a novelist in the symbolist school and, based on his years in Russia, as ‘an accidental spy’. But what really intrigues Kennedy are the “powerful autobiographical themes” that can “be glimpsed throughout Ransome’s fiction, albeit always slightly out of reach.”

Ransome, “This complicated, secretive man”, argues Kennedy, “deliberately set out to baffle those who sought to make sense of his life. He very largely succeeded.” Even his autobiography, “a small masterpiece of the genre, modest, entertaining, wonderfully vivid”, is “psychologically opaque” and the work of “an author hell-bent on giving nothing away.”

Instead, says Kennedy, “Over a number of interrelated novels, he fashioned an extended autobiographical allegory with the children’s holiday story as its unlikely medium. His work confronted three major sources of conflict in his life, each in different ways concerning loss: his father; his wife; and, above all, his daughter.”

Easily the most powerful of these three is the breakdown of relations with his daughter Tabitha, represented in the books by Titty Walker, the most alive and endearing character. Ransome does this, Kennedy argues, through a carefully-crafted combination of symbolism and the incorporation of folk-tale and classical references. Examples of these include the dowsing scene in *Pigeon Post*, with its emphasis on the hazel wand, and practically anywhere in *Swallowdale*, “a novel



drenched in sexual allusion” with its cave, its broken mast (emasculatation) etc. Classical literature is repeatedly referenced in several perilous night voyages, and in the “ball of string” visit to the mine in *Pigeon Post* (which has its folk-tale parallel in the patterans of pine-cones in *Swallowdale*).

A further significant loss, to which the loss of his father may have contributed, was his failure to go to university. It was an omission he was to come to regret. “The only excuse for those early books is that they were written (and unfortunately published) at a time when I should have been a university student,” he wrote. In 1906 he set out to specialise in English Folk

Lore. “I shall be better equipped than any other fairy merchant going,” he declared, adding (wistfully, observes Kennedy) “it is the one subject it is possible to excel in without a degree.”

Professor Kennedy presses the point home repeatedly. “He was not a ‘university man’ and it took his Russian years to discover how many doors this fact would lock against him in a wicked world... there was no place for him in the literary and cultural establishment he had for so long aspired to join.” It accounts for Ransome’s “chronic insecurity,” often expressed as ‘coming second’ (or simply too late) – a theme which recurs frequently in the books, starting with the Swallows’ arrival at Wild Cat Island.

The lack of this education may well have limited his judgement with fatal effects on his career. His frank but seemingly pro-Bolshevist reports from Russia led him to be regarded with suspicion by the British establishment for the rest of his life – “damaged goods” as Kennedy puts it.

In fact, for all his success as an author, was Ransome a bit of a duffer? He may have had to swim against the tide. But he never drowned. And as Kennedy’s last chapter, “*Lottie Blossom*” aims to show, he could reach out to a fellow-victim of the British establishment’s disdain - P G Wodehouse.

Published September 2021 by The Lutterworth Press  
lutterworth.com £20.00 ISBN 978 0 7188 9582 2



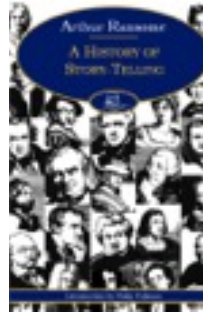
## BOOK REVIEWS

## Storytellers

The latest in the Arthur Ransome Trust's series of elegant uniform-edition reprints of some of Ransome's earlier works (as well as his autobiography of course) brings us AR's 1909 ambitiously-titled *A History of Storytelling*. And it comes with something of a coup: an introduction from one of the present age's great storytellers, Philip Pullman.

How this came to pass is a charming story in itself. Pullman borrowed fellow-Oxonian Christina Hardyment's copy, and enjoyed it so much that when he returned it, he said he'd happily write an introduction, if she, as an AR literary executor, should ever manage to place it with a publisher.

And a good introduction it is, tight and perceptive, while slipping into the companionable, conversational style of his subject. The book has its imperfections, and he pinpoints some of them, – “it is a young man's book” – but adds, firmly, “anyone who actually makes a practice of telling stories will recognise at once that Ransome knows



what he's talking about, and that his perceptions are the result of real experience and talent and not empty speculation.”

Ransome's own preface is modestly self-effacing: “Do not expect it to be too consistent. There is, I fear, no need for me to ask you to read it all at once.” It is indeed a book for dipping into – I was particularly charmed by his views on Jane Austen. “To read her is like being in a room with an unscrupulously witty woman; it is delightful, but more than a trifle dangerous.”

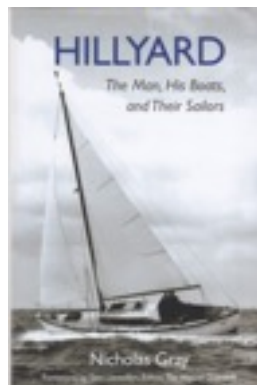
And his chapter on Poe's “new technique”, which is “to choose an effect and then plan a story to produce it,” chimes interestingly with some of Alan Kennedy's thoughts on Ransome's own “modernist” approach in *A Thoroughly Mischievous Person*. **PW**

**A History of Storytelling** by Arthur Ransome, Arthur Ransome Trust [arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk](http://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk) £9.50 ISBN: 9780995568136

## Boatbuilder to the Ransomes

Of Arthur Ransome's five ‘British’ yachts, three were Hillyards – built by the slightly idiosyncratic but progressive David Hillyard at his yard in Littlehampton. For *Nancy Blackett* – third-hand, twice renamed – this provenance was incidental, but when the Ransomes decided to return to yachting in the 1950s, it was to David Hillyard they turned, ordering one of his characteristic canoe-sterned, centre-cockpit 6-tonners. This was *Lottie Blossom*. And when, after one season, they decided they didn't like it, it was to Hillyard they returned, commissioning a more conventional aft-cockpit, transom-sterned 6-tonner, rather like a smaller *Nancy Blackett*. They transferred the *Lottie Blossom* name to her, and the previous boat, when sold, became *Ragged Robin III*.

This new book by Nicholas Grey introduces us to David Hillyard himself, Rowhedge-born, deeply Christian, a caring employer, appalling record-keeper and visionary boatbuilder, and the yard where he production-lined the construction of



his own standard designs – some 800 craft from the tiny 2½-tonner up to 70ft live-aboards – while adapting and modifying each build to the customer's demands.

It also introduces us to some of his owners – Arthur Ransome of course – and the until-recently owners of *Ragged Robin III*, our own Ted and Diana Evans. Alas, there are a few errors here – Pin Mill moved to the River Deben, ownership of the *Goblin* ascribed to Cdr Walker, and he describes Ted Evans as treasurer and vice-president of the Arthur Ransome Trust.

However, he does clear up the abiding mystery of the fate of the second *Lottie Blossom*, last seen in the early 1990s by Roger Wardale who reported her under restoration by her then owner Chris Barlow, but “vanished without trace” in his 2010 *Arthur Ransome Under Sail*. Gray's wife worked with Barlow and was able to confirm the worst: ‘*Lottie II*’ was broken up in the mid-1990s.

**Hillyard, The Man, His Boats and their Sailors** by Nicholas Grey, Lodestar £20 ISBN 9781907206542

## HISTORY

# ‘Probably not discussing fishing’

## Cheryl Paget speculates on that famous 1919 meeting between Basil Thomson and Arthur Ransome

Ransome, in his autobiography, says that in March 1919, on his return from Russia, he was taken from King’s Cross station by a man in dark clothes and a bowler hat to Scotland Yard, where he was interviewed by Basil Thomson. (He wasn’t made a Sir until June 1919.)

Told to sit down “in the famous chair” he was asked “Now I want to know just what your politics are.” Ransome replied “Fishing... We are very near the beginning of the season.”

He reports “We talked for some time, in a manner more and more friendly” and that during the interview Thomson received a call from the Foreign Office apparently warning him that Ransome was arriving the following day.

Ransome says he talked for some time about why intervention would be bad for future British relations with Russia, and that Thomson said “You certainly make out a pretty good case... and I agree with you that the more it’s known the better.”

### ‘Something of a sportsman’?

Later that year Thomson helped Ransome return to Russia for the final time to extract Evgenia by ensuring he had his transit visas for Norway and Sweden – “He was as disgusted as I was at what he evidently thought was a deliberate tactical trick... Sir Basil was something of a sportsman.”

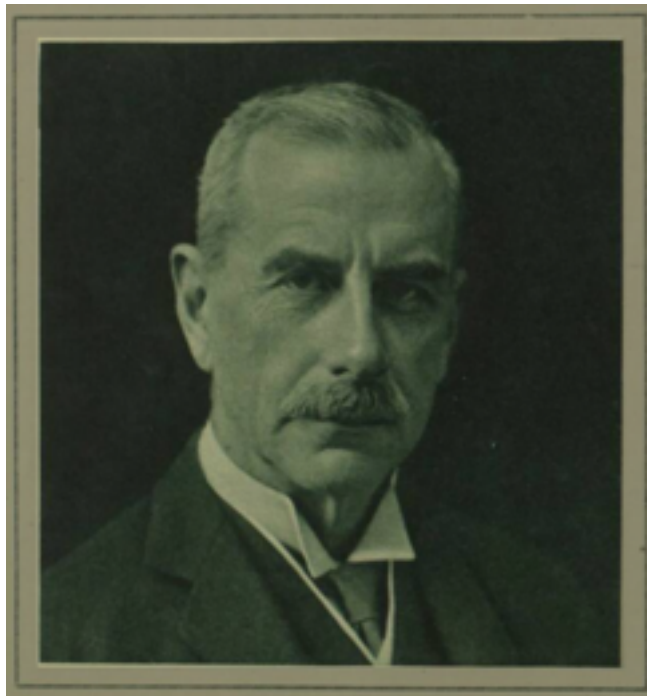
There are a few reasons why I think the conversation did not go exactly as Ransome described. Thomson’s autobiography *The Scene Changes* and his book about his time at Scotland

Yard, *Queer People* (which was republished as *Odd People*, for obvious reasons) paint a person who wouldn’t have been quite as “friendly” towards a person newly returned from Russia with a reputation like Ransome’s.

Thomson spent the First World War

interrogating spies – in fact he received his knighthood in 1919 for services to counter espionage for the country. We know that the Foreign Office were liaising with MI5 and Scotland Yard before Ransome’s arrival in Britain, and that Thomson reported to the Foreign Office after his interview with Ransome.

Ransome was definitely unpopular at the Foreign Office, variously described there as an “Out and out Bolshevik,” “Openly recognised Bolshevik agent,” and “Undoubtedly capable dangerous agent.” A foreign office memo of January 1919 stated “I understand that Ransome is working for



Sir Basil Thomson: ‘A special way of dealing with those he interrogated’

us but that he is not to be trusted.” By 1918 Ransome had been recruited by Bruce Lockhart to MI6 and given the codename S76. He provided information to MI6 and the Foreign Office.

*Queer People* gives a very clear insight into the mind of Thomson. He very clearly disliked Bolsheviks. “Bolshevism has been described as an infectious disease rather than a political cause – a disease which spreads like cancer... The Russians, the most amiable and the most docile of people, took this malady in its severest form.”

Thomson’s radar would have been up. Was Ransome a Bolshevik? If he had been told by the

Foreign Office that Ransome was working for the British, he would have been wondering if Ransome was also a double agent. I'm pretty sure he would have given Ransome a pretty hard grilling.

Thomson also hated the Labour Party movement, militant suffragettes, pacifists, anti-conscriptionists and trade unions. And here was Ransome sitting in his office spouting non-intervention! There was no way I can see Thomson personally agreeing with him. If he said anything as Ransome describes it could have been an interrogation tactic to get Ransome to spout incriminating evidence.

Although Thomson interrogated several spies including Matahari, he believed "Whether an individual degrades himself by engaging in espionage depends on how and why he does it. If his motives are purely patriotic and he performs this dangerous duty at the risk of his life without thought of personal gain; if in carrying out the duty he does not stop to form friendships in order to betray them, but comes out with clean hands, what is there degrading in his service?"

If Ransome came out of Thomson's office not under arrest it must have been because Thomson knew he was a spy but was confident that he was not a double agent, or if he was unaware that Ransome was a spy, Ransome told him during the interview and was let go, presumably after a confirmation call to the Foreign Office which would account for Thomson's help in getting him back to Russia later in 1919.

### The 'famous chair'

The "famous chair" was an armchair, slightly lower than Thomson's own, in which "...Every spy, real or fancied, sat while he was accounting for his movements." This difference in height gave him an advantage, and he noticed that when he asked "a particular question" the interviewees would always raise themselves up on their arms to try and see him eye to eye.

It was a joke amongst his staff that no one, however angry they were when they came in, left without offering their profuse thanks. Thomson obviously had a special way of dealing with those he interrogated. Just like Ransome, they came out thinking they had received special treatment.

Thomson estimated four people a day sat in the chair, and that nine out of ten were cleared by the examination they received. Wouldn't it have made a humorous story for his autobiography to relate the time he erroneously interrogated the celebrated war correspondent and now children's author? Yet there is no mention of Ransome at all – which there

wouldn't be if Ransome was indeed a British spy. Although of course we know how selective people can be when it comes to one's own memoirs.

### Diamonds and pearls

However, given that "The routine of the "Home" section of [his] staff was to attend subversive meetings all over the country and to obtain evidence of money passing from Russia to the extremist section of Labour", Thomson would have been incensed had he known that he was assisting Ransome to get back to Russia to bring Evgenia – and 35 diamonds and three strings of pearls – to safety in October 1919. The gems, handed to Soviet agents in Estonia, would have found their way to England, where similar packages were being distributed to trade unions and pro-Bolshevik newspapers, including the *Daily Herald* whose editor Ransome had met with the previous March.

SIR BASIL THOMSON

Thomson was a man of ultra-conservative

views, who developed a strong fear of revolution. He wrote "February 1919 was the high-water mark of revolutionary danger in Great Britain. Many of the soldiers were impatient at the delay in demobilisation – Russia had shown how apparently easy it was for a determined minority to seize the reins of power." And Ransome walked into his office in March 1919 – straight off the boat from revolutionary Russia, with a long history of publishing what could be perceived as apologist news articles.

The evidence suggests that Ransome got a pretty strong grilling in that interview, where ultimately Thomson, an accomplished interrogator of spies, anxious of a Bolshevik revolution in Britain, who hated all that Bolshevism and all shades of socialism stood for, became confident that Ransome had patriotic and non-political aims. It wouldn't have been a friendly interview at all – potentially until after that phone call with the Foreign Office which may actually have been to confirm S76's credentials.

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Photo of Sir Basil Thomson:

Illustrated London News 12 November 1921  
[britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)



## MEET THE OVERSEAS CO-ORDINATORS 3

# Ian Sacré

## TARS Canada Co-ordinator



My first exposure to Arthur Ransome's stories took place when I was about nine years old. It came about because my parents were very worried about my inability to read properly even at that late age, which turned out to be a hereditary defect inherited from my father's side of the family.

My parents thought that my keen interest in everything to do with boats and ships might well help solve my reading problems if they provided me with suitable exciting stories about boats, ships and their crews. I was thus given AR's *Swallows and Amazons* for Christmas. I remember struggling through the book but living every minute of it. That book and the other AR books which followed did the trick and also turned out to have a profound effect on my life.

### Built first boat at 14

Holidays and Birthdays came and went and with them the rest of AR's books until I owned all of the twelve, which I still have. My interest in boats and ships grew and when I was fourteen, home from boarding school for the holidays and with my Father's occasional help, I built my first boat, a 14ft Catboat, the plans for which I found in a boy's magazine. Mother taught me to use her sewing machine and I made the sail which we pinned out on the floor of the sitting room to mark and cut to its final shape. The mast was made of a small fir tree family friends allowed me to cut down in their forest grove.

On finishing school, our whole family immigrated to Canada from the UK and I decided on a career at sea. After serving my time in general cargo ships I finally ended up with a Master Foreign Going Certificate of Competency and eventually became a Captain of foreign going cargo ships sailing to far distance places with the proverbial strange sounding names.

### To sea with Morse and Aldis Lamp

In a time before containers, GPS, internet, emails, and other modern electronic systems, signals were sent in Morse Code by radio operators, or from the bridge by the officer of the watch using an Aldis Lamp. Ship's positions were found by celestial navigation using a sextant or by bearings of shore objects using a compass and azimuth circle. Happy days indeed! When owners trusted their captains and officers to do the right thing without inundating

*Ship's positions were found by celestial navigation using a sextant or by bearings of shore objects using a compass and azimuth circle. Happy days indeed!*

them with emails as is the case today!

After a wonderful sea-going career of many years I was invited to come ashore and join the Canadian Ministry of Transport, Canadian Coast Guard Branch, first as a senior marine surveyor dealing with visiting foreign ships and later as the Regional Manager of the Pacific Region, Coast Guard Fleet, a position from which I finally retired. Sadly, my wife of 36 years died suddenly a year after I retired. But boats and outdoor adventures continue to occupy much of my time.

The years since retirement have been exciting and full, lots of travel, sailing my dear old ketch and now my Folkboat or Drascombe Lugger, canoeing and camping at other times and during the stormy winter days undertaking various indoor projects too numerous to mention.

### Tracking down the places in S&A

Arthur Ransome's stories often stir my thoughts and on a holiday years ago in Cumbria I came across a reference to the Arthur Ransome Society while in the Tourist Information Office in Windermere. I then spent the rest of that holiday in the Lake District tracking down the places described in *Swallows and Amazons*. On returning to Canada I promptly joined the Society.

Harry Miller was the Canadian TARS Coordinator at that time and a few years later I was made aware of his wish to hand the job over to someone else. The silence from possible volunteers was deafening apparently, so I contacted Harry some months later and suggested that if he could not find anyone else perhaps I could do the job. In a flash Harry replied, "the job is yours!" As they say, the rest is history!

## To steer a Tall Ship

When Tall Ships (Wales) Trust offered Tars a chance of a sail on the *Johanna Lucretia*, **Lindy Castell** (at the helm, right) jumped at it



Since I'd wanted to do this all my life, I rapidly applied to Paula Holt, co-ordinator of the Trust. . *Johanna Lucretia* is a 96ft Topsail Schooner with two masts and gaff-rigged fore and aft sails. In June this year I boarded her at Pembroke Dock.

Our skipper was Capt. Craig Young. We also had 1st Mate Dan, 2nd Mate Aerial; Paula doubled as 4th Hand. Able Seamen Esme and Tatsuki completed the crew. We were joined by the Bluetits Chill Swimmers, dressed as pirates with appropriate hats and moustache and frequently given to shouting "Aaargh!"

Housekeeping and safety instructions over, then Aerial bailed out water from the ship's dinghy, to use it as a tug and push us away from the pontoon. Suddenly and excitingly, we were under way!

Being in Pembroke Dock, we were constantly on the watch for large tankers, bringing in oil to the refinery there. I was thrilled when the skipper asked if I'd like to try my hand at being helmsman, which lasted for about 45 minutes. We had to follow instructions from the Port Authority, to keep well out of the way of these massive vessels. We had to stand off for about 20 minutes while a very large tanker turned through 360° to go out to sea. *Johanna Lucretia* also turned, through 180° to avoid obstructing the tanker's passage.

### Sweating the sails

We were then able to move forward into a larger area of water, where our skipper directed raising the sails. Enthusiastic volunteers leaped at the chance. "Can we sing?" asked a pirate. "Of course you can, but you might find it easier to count" was the response. Rather than pulling straight down on the heavy ropes, we learned that grabbing them firmly at head height and then leaning back was the best technique for



'sweating'. This was accompanied by shouts of "2, 6, heave!" by two teams of 3 (each one of which had a crew member) on either side of the ship. The teams' shouts were only slightly out of synch! To our delight, the huge foresail began to rise above our heads. The topsails were added later.

My accomplishments before and after these manoeuvres were to gybe, twice – first to port to avoid the big, turning tanker, then to starboard to take us back on course and out to the bay. With the sails up and doing about 5 knots it was exciting for me to see the foresail fill and the boom go over!

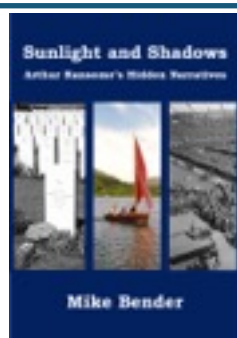
### Anchored for a swim

We anchored in Sandy Haven Bay to give the pirates (i.e. chill swimmers) the chance of a swim. Minus pirate hats and moustaches, and undaunted by the rain, a bevy of brave (or foolish?) women leaped into the cold sea with cries of delight (or shock?). They were rapidly joined by three of the crew, who then took a second dive but this time from the bowsprit!

After some quick changes in the saloon, the chill swimmers (now warm) created a wonderful lunch around the large galley table. Then we weighed anchor and turned around to make our way pleasantly and slowly back to our home port. The skipper kindly thanked us for sailing with them, and we then thanked him and the crew for putting up with us. A thoroughly enjoyable voyage: we were all sad that it was over.

[www.tallshipswales](http://www.tallshipswales)

For more on *Johanna Lucretia*, visit her owners [theislandtrusy.org.uk/boats/johanna-lucretia](http://theislandtrusy.org.uk/boats/johanna-lucretia)



## AMAZON PUBLICATIONS

available titles

**NEW Sunlight  
and Shadows**  
(2020) Mike Bender  
£14 (+£3.50)

**The Twilight Years, Vol II - London**  
ed. Margaret Ratcliffe £20 (+ £3.50) Ransome's  
diary 1950-1963, introduction by Griff Rhys-Jones.

**The Twilight Years, Vol I - Hill Top,**  
ed. Margaret Ratcliffe £15 (+ £3.50)  
Ransome's diary entries at Hill Top, 1956 to 1964.

**Robert Louis Stevenson,** Arthur Ransome's  
study, ed Kirsty Nichol Findlay. £8.50 (+ £3.50)

**Ransome the Artist,** by Roger Wardale, Sketches  
paintings etc by Arthur Ransome. £5 (+ £3.50)

**Ransome on Blue Water Sailing,** ed Christina  
Hardyment. Writings about sailing. £5 (+ £3.50)

**A Ransome Book-case,** by John Cowen  
Illustrated guide to Ransome's books. £10 (+ £3)

**Bohemia in London,** Ransome's 'first real book'  
with the original 1907 illustrations. £7.50 (+ £3.50)

**From our Special Correspondent - the**  
Journalism of Arthur Ransome in Egypt, by Nancy  
M Endersby-Harshman. £25 (+ £3.50)

**Ransome in China, 1927,** special correspondent  
to the Manchester Guardian and the Baltimore Sun,  
by David Jones. £7.50 (+ £3.50)

**Arthur Ransome,** a Bodley Head Monograph,  
Hugh Shelley. £2 (+ £2.50)

**Before a Peak in Darien,** ed Paul Crisp. From  
Arthur Ransome's early writings. £7.50 (+ £3.50)

**Fair Cops and Glowworms,** ed Paul Crisp An  
anthology AR's fishing articles. £10 (+ £3)

**Genetic Building Blocks,** Arthur Ransome's  
forebears, by Margaret Ratcliffe. £10 (+ £3)

**Collecting our Thoughts,** ed. Margaret Ratcliffe  
Essays from TARS Library catalogues, 2000-2009,  
and new writing on related themes. £15 (+ £3.50)

# The TARS Stall

For full postage details, please see back cover

## PUBLICATIONS FROM TARS

### Literary Weekend Transcripts

Report and talks from **Edinburgh, 2017**  
£6 (+ 2.50) Previous events, 1995, 1999, 2001,  
2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2015, also available.

### Encountering the Ransomes: DVD set

**Personal memories of Arthur & Evgenia**  
Presented by Sophie Neville, recorded interviews  
filmed 1996-2010. **2-DVD set £20 (+ £1.50)**

### Mixed Moss

Most previous issues available. £4 (+£1.50)

## BOOKS ABOUT ARTHUR RANSOME

**The Life of Arthur Ransome,** by Hugh  
Brogan **£12 (+ £3)** The definitive biography.

**Good Little Ship: Arthur Ransome,**  
*Nancy Blackett and the Goblin,* by Peter Willis  
The story of *Nancy Blackett*, inspiration for *Goblin*  
in *WDMTGTS*, her restoration by Mike Rines and  
the Nancy Blackett Trust. £14 (+ £3.50)

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**a reading of Arthur Ransome by Julian**  
**Lovelock** A literary overview of all 'the 12' by the  
former editor of *Mixed Moss*. £17 (+ £1.80)

### Arthur Ransome on the Broads

by **Roger Wardale** Beautifully illustrated and  
draws on diary entries from the Ransomes' Broads  
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**Ransome in Russia,** by **Ted Alexander &**  
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# The TARS Stall

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**Racundra's First Cruise**  
Arthur Ransome's first 'proper' boat, built and sail in Baltic in the 1920s re-edited by **Brian Hammett**, with additional material. Hardback £7 (+ £3.50)



**Racundra's Third Cruise**  
Previously unpublished account of Ransome's honeymoon cruise in Latvia in 1924, (includes his draft of *Racundra's* Second Cruise) edited by **Brian Hammett**. Hardback £5 (+£3.00)

## **The 12 Swallows and Amazons books**

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The script and songs for the Bristol Old Vic stage musical production, £9 (+ £2)

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LATEST: Vol. 6: **Pebble** £9 (£1.80)

### **Those Kids series by Jon Tucker**

A new series of Tasmanian adventure stories for children by TARS member and live-aboard sailor Jon Tucker. Ask about available titles £10 (+ £1.80)

### **The Boat in the Bay by Alan Kennedy**

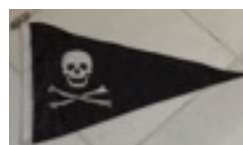
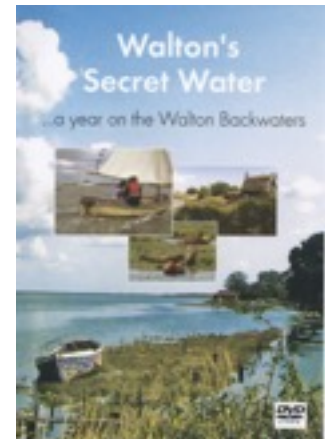
Ransome-referenced adventure story £10 (+ £2)



**TARS Teddy** Need a mascot? Or a stocking-filler? Here he/she is! companionable soft toy, 24cm high (plague flag not included) **£10 (+£3.50)**

## **Walton's Secret Water**

Film by David Webb of the Walton Backwaters, the setting of *Secret Water* country, and including the River Orwell and *Nancy Blackett*  
Run time 75 Minutes  
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## **Burgees**

For your boat, or for a 'homely' decoration for your bedroom

Polyester burgees, 50x30cm, including halyard and toggle.

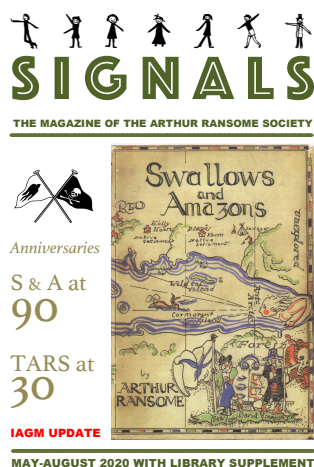
Three designs:

Swallow,  
Skull and crossbones,  
TARS (Swallow+ Skull and Crossbones), £18 (+ £2.50)

### **TARS Enamel pin badge**

(Swallow + Skull and Crossbones) approx 2x3cm  
£3 (+£1.50)

## TARS PUBLICATIONS etc



**SIGNALS** is the Society's Magazine, published three times a year with news of events, activities and Ransome related happenings in the UK and overseas, as well as letters, features, reviews and contributions from members.

The January-April issue includes Despatches, with news and booking forms for the International AGM.

The May-August issue has the Library Supplement, while the September-December issue includes Ship's Log, which carries reports from the IAGM.

Each of the six UK Regions has up to three pages for its own events and news.

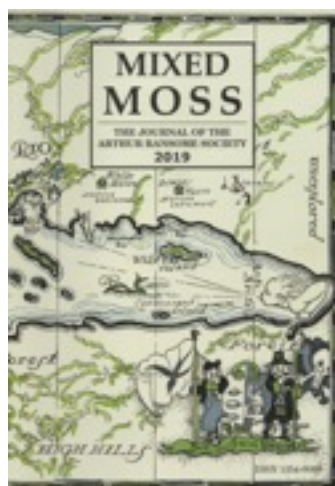
Some overseas material is included; overseas TARS groups also have their own newsletters – see below.

**Signals Editor is Peter Willis**  
[signals@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:signals@arthur-ransome.org)  
01394 387907

**Copy deadlines 1 March,  
1 July, 1 November**

**USA/Canada: Signals from  
Tarsus/North Pole News,**  
Editor: Simon Horn  
[shorn@colba.net](mailto:shorn@colba.net)

**Australia/New Zealand:  
Furthest South** Ed: Jan Allen  
[jp8fillyjonk@bigpond.com](mailto:jp8fillyjonk@bigpond.com)



**MIXED MOSS**, the Society's Journal, is published annually and contains generally longer articles on literary, historical and research matters. Potential contributors are invited to contact the Editor with articles or outlines/suggestions.

Copy deadline is 30 April, with distribution to members (not Youth class) in the autumn.

**Mixed Moss 2021 issue**  
Editor is Catherine Lamont,  
[mixedmoss@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:mixedmoss@arthur-ransome.org)

**Back issues: most in stock at  
the TARS Stall, £4 + p+p**

### LITERARY WEEKENDS

Transcripts of Talks from the Edinburgh 2017 event and 13 previous biennial events are available from the TARS Stall, £6.50 +pp



**Amazon Publications** produces a book with a Ransome connection roughly every year on a subscription basis. Next title (2021) *Ransome Centre Stage*. Some back issues on TARS Stall. Enquires to Alan Hakim: [awhakim@btinternet.com](mailto:awhakim@btinternet.com)



**THE OUTLAW** is the TARS magazine specially for Juniors, sent to all Youth members, and to everyone with Group Membership, three times a year, along with Signals.

**Contact the Editors on**  
[outlaw@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:outlaw@arthur-ransome.org)  
or **Outlaw Editors c/o TARS,**  
17 Chesterwood Road, Kings  
Heath Birmingham B13 0QG

## RANSOME ONLINE

**TARS WEBSITE:**  
[arthur-ransome.org](http://arthur-ransome.org)  
with log-in access for  
Members Pages

## OTHER WEBSITES

**The Arthur Ransome Trust:**  
[arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk](http://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk)

**The Nancy Blackett Trust:**  
[nancyblackett.org](http://nancyblackett.org)

[allthingsransome.net](http://allthingsransome.net)  
a useful resource site

[tarboard.net](http://tarboard.net) discussion forum

## FACEBOOK GROUPS

**The Arthur Ransome Group**  
(monitored public group)

**The Arthur Ransome Society  
(TARS) Facebook Group**  
(private group)



## The TARS Library

contains around 1,000 books written by Ransome, read by him, written about him or in some other way connected with him.

Browse the complete list on the TARS website, or request a paper copy for a small charge.

To borrow a book, contact our Librarian, Winifred Wilson, who will send it post-free in the UK (you pay only the return postage).

**Contact Winifred Wilson on 01387 252696**  
[tarslib@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:tarslib@arthur-ransome.org)

**TARS Library, Moat Brae**  
**101 George Street, Dumfries DG1 1EA**

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## TARS Committees

### Literary & Resources:

Krysia Clack (Chair), Paul Wilson (Secretary), Chris Birt, Paul Crisp, Ann Farr, Julian Lovelock, John Pearson, Christine Rae, Winifred Wilson, Diana Wright, Peter Wright

### Publications:

Barry Gouldbourne (Chair), Mike Glover (Secretary), The Blue Family, Paul Crisp (guest), David Middleton, Peter Willis

### Contribute!

Letters, articles, reviews, news, photos always welcome. Send them to the Editor at [peterwillis1144@gmail.com](mailto:peterwillis1144@gmail.com) or Creek View, School Lane, Martlesham, Woodbridge IP12 4RR tel 01394 387907

### Advertise!

We accept advertisements in Signals, included in the magazine or as loose inserts. Half-page £100, quarter page £50, eighth page £25. Insert flyer £100. Contact David Middleton, [memsec@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:memsec@arthur-ransome.org)

## TARS Subscriptions

### 2021 rates

(renewals due 1st January)

**Adult** (now including Seniors) £25

**Family/Group** £35

**Junior or Student** £15

**Overseas** as UK, with Signals/Outlaw online (otherwise + £5 postage surcharge)

**Corporate rate** £60

## RED SLIPPER FUND

**Research and publishing grants available with new grant criteria**

The **Red Slipper Fund** exists to encourage research into all aspects of Arthur Ransome's life and writings. This is one of the five objectives of the Society and we believe there is still much to discover!

To encourage more of you to undertake research, whether for a small article, pamphlet or book, for pleasure or academic study, grants may now be used towards travel costs, incidental expenditure or the costs of publication.

All we ask is that the TARS contribution is acknowledged in your work and that a copy is forwarded to the TARS Library.

For an application form and more details please contact: **Peter Wright**, [peterwright180@btinternet.com](mailto:peterwright180@btinternet.com)  
**17 Chesterwood Road, King's Heath**  
**Birmingham B13 0QG Tel: 0121 443 2910**

## *Junior Adventure Fund*

### Calling all young TARS aged 13 to 19

If you are planning to take part in a Ransome inspired outdoor activity, the TARS Junior Adventure Fund (formerly the Ship's Baby Fund) may be able to help with the costs.

The range is enormous – sailing, climbing, archaeological events, walking and camping, Scouting etc to name just a few. There are a few rules: School trips and GCSE field studies, or trips with parents are not eligible; Only one award per person.

**Please see the TARS website for further details or contact Paul Crisp,**  
[p.crisp048@btinternet.com](mailto:p.crisp048@btinternet.com)



## Summer wear from **The TARS Stall**



### **Adult T-Shirts**

**£12+ £3.50 p+p**

#### **Unisex,**

mid blue or white

Medium W 21in L 28in

Large W 22in L 30in

X Large W 23in L 31in

XX Large W 24in L 32in

#### **Ladies,**

mint green or white

Small W 16.5in L 24in

Medium W 19in L 25in

Large W 20.5in L 27in



### **Polo Shirts**

**£20+ £3.50 p+p**

**Unisex,** light blue or maroon

Medium Width 21in Length 28in

Large Width 22in Length 30in

X Large Width 23in Length 32in

XX Large Width 26in Length 33in

**Ladies,** light blue or pink

Small Width 16.5in Length 22in

Medium Width 18in Length 26.5in

Large Width 19.5in Length 28in



### **Sweatshirts**

**£22+ £3.50 p+p**

**Unisex,** maroon

Medium W 23in L 27in

Large W 24.5in L 28.5in

X Large W 26in L 29.5in



### **Children's T-Shirt**

'TARS AHOY!' logo

**£10+ £3.50 p+p**

Mid blue or lime green

W 17.5in L 23in 7-8 yrs

W 18.5in L 24in 9-11 yrs

W 19.5in L 26in 11-13 yrs

**UK postage and packing shown for individual items.** To Order, or for multiple-item or overseas costs, or any queries please contact:

**Christine Rae,** e-mail: [tarsstall@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:tarsstall@arthur-ransome.org)

By telephone +44 (0)1794 388897, preferably 6-8pm

(but *not* to make card payments, can't be done);

or SAE: The Manor House, Church Lane, Houghton,  
STOCKBRIDGE, Hampshire SO20 6LJ;

**Payment** may be made by PayPal to: [tarsstall@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:tarsstall@arthur-ransome.org)

or by cheque payable to: **TARS Stall**. BACS payment details on request.

**More Stall selections on Pages 44-45 or [www.arthur-ransome.org](http://www.arthur-ransome.org)**