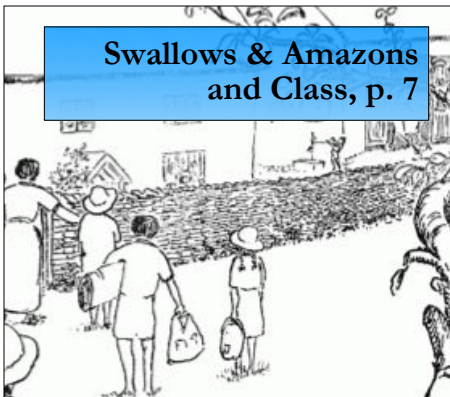




# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

May 2023

## Contents



*Ship's Papers:* ..... pg. 2-6

- [Is the Coordinator's Role Changing?  
and Are You Still a Member?](#) — Simon Horn
- [Greetings from the North](#) — Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator
- [A Note from the Editor](#) — Simon Horn
- [The 2023 North American Member Survey](#) — Simon Horn

### *Dipping our Hands:*

- [Swallows & Amazons and Class in 1930's England](#) — Eric Benke ..... pg. 7
- [Old Man Loves All of Swallows and Amazons](#) — Andrew Fisher ..... pg. 9
- [My Favourite Book](#) — Gordon McGilton ..... pg. 9

### *The Professor's Laboratory:*

- [Birds in the Ransome Books](#) — Maida Barton Follini ..... pg. 10
- [The Consequence of Keeping a Poor Anchor Watch](#) — Ian Sacré ..... pg. 13
- [Alarm Bells From Far Rockaway to Beckfoot](#) — Molly McGinnis ..... pg. 15

### *Ship's Library:*

- [Ransome Broadside](#) — Simon Horn ..... pg. 17

### *Beckfoot Kitchen:*

- [Squashed Flies, Anyone?](#) — Molly McGinnis ..... pg. 19



## Ship's Papers — Important information for the Crew



### Is the Coordinator's Role Changing?

American TARS still have no local coordinator, since no one has stepped forward to take over from Robin Marshall.

Of course, the precise role of a local coordinator today remains a bit vague. In the past the North American coordinators played a central role collecting annual dues from most members and forwarding them to the central organization in the UK.

Today the situation is changing. In Canada all members but one now renew their memberships using PayPal on the main TARS website. In the United States things are a bit different, however. Although about two-thirds of the U.S. members also renew using PayPal, the rest do not.

The UK membership team has said it will contact by email members who have not renewed. This is no doubt going on right now. I hope they can find a way to ensure that all U.S. members who want to renew can. I am a bit afraid we may lose some people in the confusion, however.

But what should the local coordinators be doing, if membership renewals can be centralized? In North America we are so spread out that organizing physical meetings is difficult, if not impossible. Nonetheless a majority of survey respondents said they might be interested in meeting (see the [Member Survey Report](#) on page 4).

Several areas have three or four or more members who live within 100 miles or so of each other. These include B.C. and Toronto in Canada, and San Francisco, Chicago, Washington, New York and Boston in the U.S. Perhaps some kind of occasional or annual meetup might be possible.

In several other places, two members are quite close.

But what about virtual meetings using Zoom or some similar method? Survey respondents also said they would be interested in this. TARS in Australia and New Zealand – also very spread out – appear to have been successfully holding online meetings. Perhaps we should talk to them about how they do it.

Finally, as around the world, our membership is aging. For TARS to continue, we all have to look for ways to encourage more people to join, especially families with children.

### Are You Still a Member?

All voluntary organizations like ours see member turnover. New members join, old members leave. Some people stay for years, others find the organization is not for them, and withdraw after a year or so, generally just not bothering to renew.

The fact that some people leave TARS without telling anyone poses a serious problem for our people in the UK who have to keep track of memberships. If someone does not send in their annual dues, have they left or simply forgot? Perhaps they wanted

### Take a Look at Where We Live

To help me, and hopefully you, visualize where North American TARS members live, I have created a Google map. Take a look:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?hl=en&client=safari&mid=1eBC9FaxeDiKuBeF9svmLncmh3T-Quqo&ll=37.56569567211686%2C-99.91583426131095&z=4>

Red markers show members who answered the Member Survey, blue markers show other members. (Note that locations are only by postal/zip code, so no one can find members' addresses.)

What do you think? Are any of you interested in becoming US coordinator if that job is more about organizing online meetings and discussions than collecting dues? Are you in an area where a local meeting might be possible? Send in your ideas and your comments and I will publish them here.

Simon Horn, Ed.

to renew, but something went wrong? So TARS tends to be very forgiving.

However, after a certain length of time, after all attempts to communicate with the missing member have failed, we don't have much choice: the member's name has to be removed from the lists, and they no longer receive Society publications.

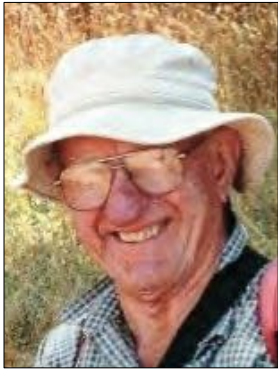
A certain number of members will soon be removed from the membership list: some have not paid for 2023, some even haven't paid for 2022.

This issue of the newsletter will go to everyone who is currently on the list, but I will have to update my list of North American members soon.

If you receive notice that you are no longer a member of TARS, but think that you should be, please contact us to clear this up. You can email the

membership secretary in the UK at [memsec@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:memsec@arthur-ransome.org), or me at [sjhorn@gmail.com](mailto:sjhorn@gmail.com) and I will try to clear things up.

---



## Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator  
3965 Marine Drive, Royston, BC V0R 2V0  
[gallivanterthree@shaw.ca](mailto:gallivanterthree@shaw.ca)

Greetings Canadian TARS Members!

We are well and truly into spring in most parts of the country. Let's hope we are in for plenty of pleasant outdoor weather without any nasty surprises.

Our Canadian TARS membership now stands at 21, since I have finally been able to communicate with one long-time member to learn of their membership intentions.

According to the HQ scribes the Society as a whole currently stands at 686 members world wide, but 47 have not yet paid their renewal fees for 2023. Sadly, our fellow members in the USA have not been able find a TARS coor-

dinator at this time of writing.

Simon Horn, our editor, has put a great deal of effort and work into conducting the North American Membership Survey, which has produced much interesting data. I know you all join me in extending our grateful thanks and indebtedness for his service to the Society. His findings will be found elsewhere in this publication, so enough said.

In order to make it easier for Canadian TARS members to communicate and perhaps arrange get togethers, etc., we'd like to send each of you a list of Canadian members' email addresses. Because of personal privacy concerns we shall hold off sending the list until we have received your permission to include your name.

Therefore, to move ahead with this proposal would you please email me at [gallivanterthree@shaw.ca](mailto:gallivanterthree@shaw.ca) and let me know if you would like your email address included and shared with other Canadian members?

Wishing everyone a splendid summer with fair winds and calm seas.

Warmest regards,  
Ian Sacré  
Canadian TARS Coordinator

---



## A Note from the Editor

By Simon Horn, [sjhorn@gmail.com](mailto:sjhorn@gmail.com)

Welcome to *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* for May 2023. Thanks to all the contributors.

### In this issue

First is my report on the North America Member Survey. 33 out of 69 members responded. Please take a look and let us know your thoughts.

*Dipping our Hands* again has several articles this issue:

**Eric Benke** answered my call for new contributors with "Swallows and Amazons and Class in 1930's England".

**Andrew Fisher** completes his list of favourite chapters with selections from *Coot Club* and *Pigeon Post*, while

**Gordon McGilton** tells us about "My Favourite Book".

The *The Professor's Laboratory* is full of ideas this issue, with **Maida Follini** talking about "Birds in the Ransome Books", **Ian Sacré** explaining "The Consequence of Keeping a Poor Anchor Watch", and **Molly McGinnis** telling us how Dick made the bell ring

in *Pigeon Post* in "Alarm Bells From Far Rockaway to Beckfoot".

In the *Ship's Library* your editor talks about the 2005 Amazon Publications book *Ransome Broadside*.

**Molly** is back again in *Beckfoot Kitchen* with "Squashed Flies, Anyone?" – the biscuits, of course.

\* \* \*

The next issue is set for September, so start thinking about a contribution, especially those of you who answered "Yes" to the survey question: "Would you be interested in contributing to the newsletter?" Expect a reminder about August 1.

All the best from me, to all of you.  
Simon

---

## The 2023 North American Member Survey (Jan.-Feb. 2023)

Designed by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec) with Ian Sacré (Royston, B.C.). Results compiled by Simon Horn.

### Part 1: Summary and general thoughts

This first part gives my summary of the survey results. I provide more details in part 2. (Note that unless otherwise mentioned, the figures given are those of the 33 survey respondents, not the entire North American membership.)

This was a voluntary survey, so we can assume that the people who answered were the more interested and engaged members. 33 members answered out of a total of 69. That is 48% of North American members, and I think that is pretty good.

Significantly, 73% of respondents have been members for more than 10 years, and another 12% for between 5 and 10 years. Note too that 88% of respondents are adult members (which now includes seniors) and only a few have family or junior memberships. (By comparison, in the full membership 74% are adult members, 19% are families and 7% are juniors.) In general, North American members are aging, possibly faster than in the UK.

Overall, people's answers were very positive, but several expressed fears for the Society's future as the membership ages and society changes.

#### Location

As we all knew already, our members are located all over the U.S. and Canada, and there are very few areas where several members live close together. To give us all an idea I prepared a Google map that shows where all our North American members live. Take



a look: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1eBC9FaxeDiKuBeF9svmL-nmh3T-Quo&usp=sharing>

(Members are located on the map by postal code, not by name or address, so there is no danger to our privacy.)

#### Membership renewal

Increasingly people are using PayPal to renew their memberships online through the UK website. This was the case for 88% of survey respondents. (For our total membership this drops to only 73%. Also, while almost all Canadian members now use PayPal, only 63% of Americans do the same.)

Everyone who answered the survey knew about the local coordinators, and an amazing 27 (85%) had actually made contact. Ten of those contacts had concerned dues payments, while the rest had a range of reasons, including information about publications, or just to get in touch.

#### TARS publications

Our publications are universally appreciated and read, though few get *The Outlaw* for obvious reasons. One person subscribes as a group (of 1) just to get it, though!

#### TARS on the web

Most respondents visit the TARS website occasionally.

For Facebook, 23 of the 33 are members, but 6 of those never visit Ransome-related Facebook pages.

The Society's Twitter page is almost universally ignored.

#### TARS Activities

33% of respondents had attended a TARS activity in the UK, including the IAGM, the Literary Weekend, or a regional activity

As expected most respondents had never attended a TARS activity in

North America, but surprising 21% said they had. I found this amazingly high, given that we don't have activities, but it probably just reflects how long some of us have been members.

If we could find some way to organize face-to-face activities, more than half of respondents would be interested. The question is, how to do it!

Virtually everyone would be open to some kind of virtual activity by computer (via Zoom or the like). Here the question is, what should it be and how should it be organized? Perhaps we should talk to the people in Australia/

New Zealand, who seem to be doing this successfully.

**Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News**

One reason for the survey was to give your editor some feedback about the newsletter. Every four months I send an issue out into the ether, as it were, and I sometimes find myself wondering about the result.

Perhaps I should not have worried. Everyone gets the newsletter and reads some or all of it. Perhaps most interesting is what people want more of, with the top choices in order being

*Dipping Our Hands, The Ship's Library, Captain Flint's Trunk and Kanchenjunga's Cairn.* You can see the complete list in section 2.

I am afraid that there is little need for the Juniors pages, we don't have many Juniors! That is perhaps a bit unfair, and I will be asking our small number of group and junior members if they would like to contribute.

And talking of contributions, 18 of our 33 respondents said they would be open to contributing to the newsletter. You know who you are and I will be in touch.

**Part 2: Detailed Results**

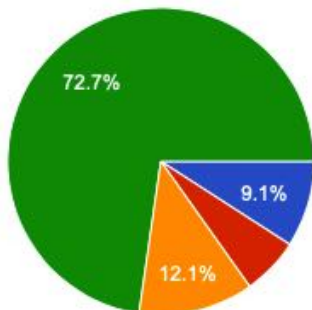
**Respondents:**

- Total: 33 of 69 members (48%)
- USA: 19 of 48 (40%)
- Canada: 14 of 21 (67%)

**Section 1: Membership and Location**

a) Survey Respondents (33): 29 adult (88%), 3 family/group (9%), 1 junior (3%)

Length of membership: 73% over 10 years, 12% 5-10 years. In other words: 85% long-time members.



- 1 year or less
- 2 to 5 years
- 5 to 10 years
- Over 10 years

By comparison:

b) Entire North American membership (71): 53 adult (74%), 13 family/group (19%), 5 junior (7%)

**Section 2: Membership Renewal**

a) Entire Membership (71): 52 PayPal (73%), 19 other (27%)

- US (of 51): 32 PayPal, 16 manual, 2 standing order, 1?

- Canada (of 22): 20 PayPal, 1 standing order, 1?

b) Survey Respondents (33): 29 PayPal (88%), 4 via coordinator (12%)

Several of the 4 said they would use PayPal if someone would explain it.

**Section 3: Local Coordinator**

All but 2 know about the coordinator, and 85% have contacted them.

Various reasons: about dues payments (9/28), about newsletter (4/28), to say hello (4/28), etc.

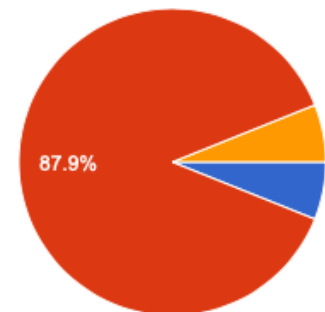
**Section 4: TARS Publications**

Essentially everyone reads UK *Signals* (32/33) (though one finds it too

“parochial”) and *Mixed Moss* (33/33). 5/33 read *The Outlaw*, but most have no juniors and so no access (though one member has a Family/Group membership specifically in order to get *The Outlaw*).

**Section 5: TARS on the web**

a) TARS website: 29 visit occasionally, 2 regularly, 2 never. (If not, no particular reason.)



- Regular visitor
- Occasionally
- Never

b) Facebook & Twitter: 23 Facebook members, 1 Twitter.

c) Ransome-related Facebook pages:

22% regular visitors, 41% occasional, 37% never.

- 13 are members of the official “The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook Group”

- 10 of the “Arthur Ransome Group”

- 10 of “Arthur Ransome’s Swallows and Amazons in North America”.

d) “Have you ever visited the TARS Twitter page?”

88% never, 12% occasionally.

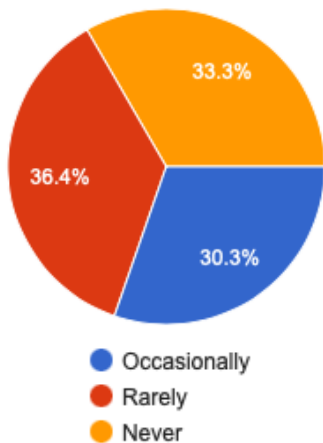
### Section 6: TARS North America

a) Attended TARS activity in North America

79% never had, 21% had.

b) Communication with other NA Members

30% do occasionally and 36% rarely (but 33% never).



c) Attended TARS activity in the UK  
33% have, 67% have not

IAGM: 8, Lit Weekend: 4, Regional: 4  
(One person actually attended the IAGM via Zoom!)

d) Would you be interested in activities:

Face-to-face: 55% yes, 39% maybe (2 no)

Virtual: 44% yes, 53% maybe (1 no)

### Section 7: Signals from TARSUS/ North Pole News

a) Everyone gets it, 70% read it cover to cover, 27% read some of it.

b) Most people like most things, with perhaps a preference for stories about individual experiences. Nothing is particularly disliked.

c) What people want more of (in order, out of 30 responses):

*Dipping Our Hands* - 22 (73.3%)

*The Ship's Library* - 19 (63.3%)

*Captain Flint's Trunk* - 17 (56.7%)

*Kanchenjunga's Cairn* - 17 (56.7%)

*Ships Papers* - 14 (46.7%)

*Dot's Latest Story* - 13 (43.3%)

*Professor's Laboratory* - 8 (26.7%)

*Mrs Barrable's Gallery* - 8 (26.7%)

*Beckfoot Kitchen* - 7 (23.3%)

*Pieces of Eight* - 4 (13.3%)

d) Do your children read it?

This question is “not applicable” for 88%. Enough said.

e) Have you contributed?

47% have several times, 16% have once, 37% have never.

f) Would you be interested in contributing?

58% said yes, 42% said no.

### Section 8: Other Comments

Of 20 comments, 8 were simply various expressions of appreciation for the work of the coordinators, the editor, TARS in general, etc., 5 comments expressed some level of worry about TARS future, given the changing world and the aging membership, and a couple showed interest in possible TARS events. (The remaining 3 were either providing or requesting particular information.)

The highlights:

“I think we should have a section on Saving the Environment, starting off with how in *Pigeon Post* Susan made sure they did not leave sandwich papers or orange skins around... And have a few suggested projects of what TARS can do to help: e.g., clean up beaches, save endangered species..., use of self-propelled vessels, by oars, and sails; establish a TARS Earth-protection Society like the Coots' Bird Protection Society. I think this would help provide activities for all, but especially for youth.”

“I'm 85, grew up with AR in my Penguin class sailboat along Long Island Sound. Hard for my grandkids and their friends to relate to the S&As when they have no such experiences, nor have any of their friends...”

“My late husband was an Arthur Ransome fan, having collected his books as a child. I am carrying on his interest as a way to carry on his love for these books, etc. with the family.”

“I suppose if there were an annual North American get-together, it would be sparsely attended due to the huge distances that separate us, but I'd certainly try to make it. Has this ever been tried?”

“I would be interested in events in the US for ourselves and our grandchildren who are members.”

and one unfortunate experience:

“I used to enjoy reading and contributing to an early TARS discussion group on line. Finally dropped out because one unpleasantly arrogant contributor kept responding with pompous insults to anything he disagreed with.”

## Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

### Swallows and Amazons and Class in 1930's England

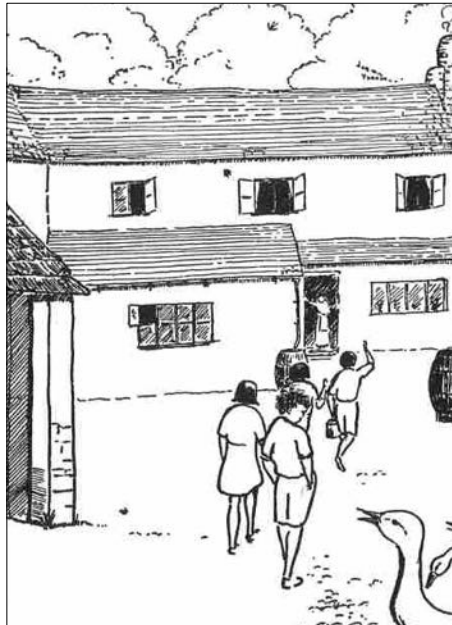
*He's our policeman. He isn't afraid of anybody except his mother... and us, of course.* — Nancy Blackett

By Eric Benke (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania)

The twelve books of The Swallows and Amazons series are an enduring escape from our world. As a regular re-reader of Arthur Ransome's work, I'm drawn back each time to the fully-formed, realistic world he creates. We are treated to adventures that are fully plausible: no aliens, magic, or time travel are involved in the plots of his S&A oeuvre.

As a grown up I've wondered if real parents would have been quite so permissive, but the plot lines – setting up camp on an island, exploring the Lake District in winter time, protecting bird life – are completely believable. Given their competence and energy, it makes perfect sense that the Blacketts and Walkers and all the rest are able to imagine and complete the tasks they set themselves. There is an element of fantasy or play-acting in the earlier novels, but only in the context of what children might really do to amuse themselves. Ransome's particular talent is to create a believable world in which these children can operate plausibly.

A crucial dynamic in these stories is the almost complete absence of parental supervision. (This is arguably a common characteristic of young adult fiction: what child wants to read about parents and other adults?) The Swallows, Amazons, D's, Coots, et al., have loving and helpful parents, but they are given strikingly wide latitude to govern their own activities. While it's hard to imagine a 21st-century par-

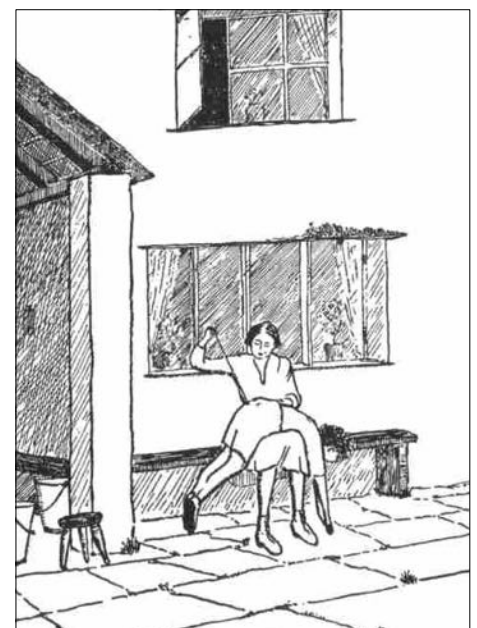


ent turning their school-age children loose for days on end, one recognizes that customs have changed radically. This writer remembers that in his childhood in the 1950's and 60's entire summer days were spent out of doors with no adult presence from breakfast until dusk. So it's plausible to believe that in England in the 1930's parents might have been ready to give their children the latitude Ransome describes. And, of course, it's a moot point – this is fiction, after all, not a documentary about adolescence in England.

Looking at this from our contemporary perspective also raises the issue of the society which these young characters inhabit. The class-ridden society surrounding the S, A and D's which the author sketches out is a very traditional one. It is a given that these chil-

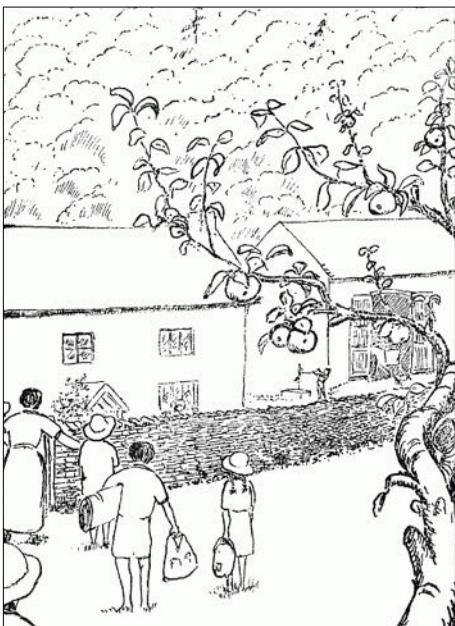
dren will be able to move freely across the physical and social arenas they are in. They find places to play out their adventures with no interference from adults. They arrange to buy milk and eggs; they camp on public land; they hike unfettered through the valleys and hills of the Lake District. This may be a fictional idealization on Ransome's part, but the affection with which he draws this peaceful society is evident.

Furthermore, the S, A and D's (and friends) are firmly placed in the upper echelons of society. Occasional shopping trips reveal that they always have enough money for supplies (though not too much). Parents and uncles indulge in extra goodies and gifts at helpful times. The Walkers and Callums are able to stay with local families, meals and laundry provided, and



rent boats, buy post cards, and eat the occasional ice cream. They attend boarding schools. The Walkers' father is a ranking naval officer, and their mother enjoyed childhood in Australia sailing. The Callums' father is a professor, and Molly Blackett is a landowner who appears to have no need to work. They represent a stratum of society that enables their children to enjoy holidays. While not nobility or even gentry, these parents provide an environment in which their children have the permission and the resources to play and explore unhindered.

A different layer of society supports and enables their activities. The working class – the Blackett's cook, the farm owner Dixons, the Jacksons of Holly Howe – are a distinct stratum as well, and with them the deliverymen, the boatyard workers, the charcoal burners, the deckhands. No doubt there are niceties to their respective social positions, but all these people treat the children with respect and attention. The children, in turn, are polite as they accept the help which it

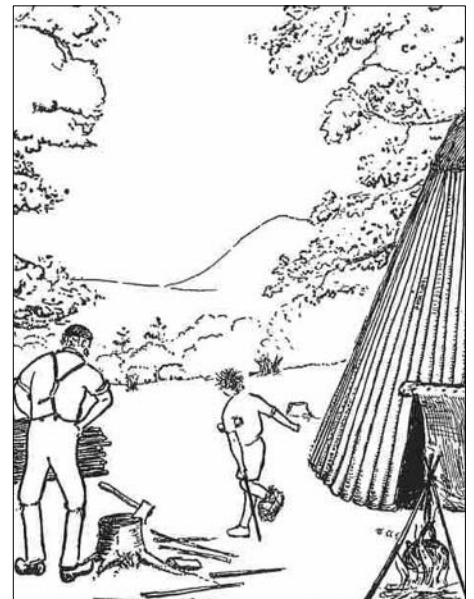


appears they expect to find.

One can see, looking at the entire Ransome S&A corpus, that the young protagonists live in a bubble just between their supportive and permissive parents and the respectful and cooperative local people. Above them are the moneyed adults who are responsible for them – from Mrs. Blackett to Mrs. Barrable to Solicitor Farland – and below them are the cadre of cooks, farmers, postmen, wherry captains, and others. In the upper layer reside adults who either are independently wealthy (e.g., Molly Blackett or the owner of the *Cachalot*) or are professionals (Commander Walker, Professor Callum, Dr. Dudgeon) so that financing the youths' activities is never a serious question. It's notable that the villains who appear are always from the privileged classes – e.g., the idle George Owdon, the greedy egg collector Jemmerling – not from the more economically challenged lower classes.

Below them are the helpful working-class villagers and farmers who comply with requests for help, supply food, and act as hosts. Ransome treats these groups with respect – they are not parodied or belittled at all – but it is implicit that the *Swallows and Amazons* will get what they ask for. To their credit, the children rarely press their advantage in rude or inappropriate ways, though Nancy's importuning of her doctor in *The Picts and the Martyrs* borders on it. Nancy is, in fact, the exception that proves the rule about the children's conduct: she sometimes makes her friends uncomfortable as she wheedles food from Cook or berates the local constable.

These class distinctions are clear to us,



though perhaps not so much to Ransome's original audience. The social structure that is so apparent is taken for granted, through Ransome must have been quite aware of the issues of class and privilege. Nor do we see the children express any awareness of or discomfort concerning their privileged place. While individual moments may make Susan unhappy (she is the bellwether of good behavior) there is no moment when the children acknowledge their differences from Jacky Warriner, the farmer's son, or from the *Death and Glories*, sons of boatbuilders. In that sense the books are democratic, but in the larger scope of the narrative, Ransome constructs a stratified society that reflects the real world. Or, at least, a realistic world that meets the requirements of credibility.

Judging exactly how accurate is Ransome's depiction is impossible from this observer's distance in time and culture; how can I know how likely the interactions are that Ransome describes? Perhaps it's sufficient to say that Ransome encapsulates a view of England in the interwar years that



confirms our nostalgic beliefs (and his as well?). Certainly in books aimed at a young audience one does not expect an attack on the privilege of the gentry or an exposé of abuse and neglect among the poor. It is a bit ironic, however, that a witness to revolutionary Russia should present so complete a picture of idyllic vacation life.

If Ransome meant in any way to be subversive, it wasn't about the social

order in England. Perhaps he was making an argument for the benefits of sailing, hiking, and generally being outdoors, and for allowing young people autonomy as they find ways to use their free time.

Ransome acknowledges in a brief forward his own remembrance of a childhood lake, and these books are a careful reconstruction of an idyllic memory, a childhood memory unaware of

class conflict or social inequality.

We know as adults that frustration, abuse, hunger, and illness must have lived amongst the people of the Lake District and the Broads, but they play no part in the construction of the world of Swallows and Amazons. And therein lies one of the great charms of Ransome's work: to enter a world of adventure unmarked by the failings of adults.

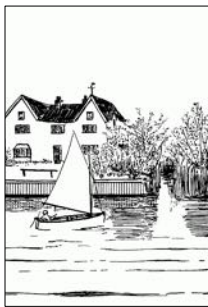
## Old Man Loves Swallows and Amazons... All of Them

By Andrew Fisher (Evanston, Illinois)

*After we published Andrew's favourite passages in the January issue, he realized that he had inadvertently left out Coot Club and Pigeon Post. So here they are:*

### In Coot Club:

"Under the Enemy's Nose": where Tom hides under Titmouse's sails as Port and Starboard slowly tow her along, while the Margolotta powers past with the hulabalalos searching for Tom.



"William's Heroic Moment": where William acts as a pug rocket and brings a string across the Brydon mud so that food and water from the stranded Titmouse can be brought over to the also-stranded Teasel.

### In Pigeon Post:

"Roger Alone": where Roger, sick of combing, Indians his way along the line, falls into the small gulch, then hammers, mimicking Slater Bob. A large rock falls out and he sees the yellow particles in the quartz – supposedly gold.

"What's Become of Him": where the others are all very concerned about Roger, but then he walks into camp with the "gold".



"Smoke Over High Tops": where Titty, Roger and Dorothea wake up to find the fell on fire, let loose Sappho with a desperate call for help, and start fighting the fire.

## My Favourite Book

By Gordon McGilton (Montreal, Quebec)

My favourite book is *The Picts and the Martyrs*. In fact, the five Lakeland books give me the greatest pleasure. I enjoy another five of the 12, but I have almost never re-read *Missee Lee* and *Great Northern?* *Missee Lee* is just too different and *Great Northern?* does not do justice to Scotland.

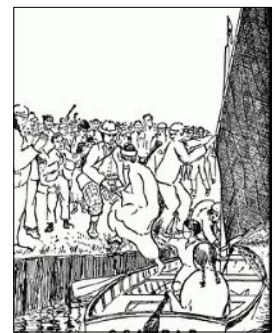
I am married to a Scottish lassie so I have visited Scotland several times, but I have never met any Scots that are like the cardboard characters we get in

*Great Northern?*

I think that perhaps I love the Lakes books best because as a child I grew up in an area in southern Quebec with lakes and mountains. In the area surrounding my home town we had four lakes and three mountains, which were not too difficult to climb. But the main reason that P&M is my favourite is the suspense: will the Great Aunt discover Dick and Dorothea? And for me the final scenes on the lawn at

Beckfoot are superb.

I am disappointed that Ransome never wrote a sequel to P&M: imagine what a book that could have been, with the Swallows returning. What potential for a first-class story!



## The Professor's Laboratory — Ideas, instructions & fixes

### Birds in the Ransome Books

By Maida Barton Follini (Halifax, Nova Scotia)

One of the attractions of the Swallows and Amazons series for me is that the Walkers, Blacketts and Callums are all interested in the bird life around them. The sailboat that carries John, Susan, Titty and Roger out to Wildcat Island is named after a bird. Dick Calum, of course, is a practiced bird-watcher. And Dorothea and Dick's friends in the Norfolk Broads have formed a bird protection society. This resonates with me, as my brother David and I spent many hours on bird-walks, our binoculars at the ready, trying to add to our list of birds discovered and identified.

Our interest was spurred by the works of naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton, whose *Book of Woodcraft and Indian Lore* states that knowing and naming correctly 50 wild birds in the field counts as a coup (an exploit) recognized in his youth organization, The Woodcraft League. Dave and I spent many hours walking the woods and fields, riverbanks and seashores to locate new birds for our lists.

So when cormorants, ducks, owls and a great northern diver pop up in Ransome's books I sit up and pay attention: Do I recognize that bird? Have I seen one? And do they live in my habitat (northeastern North America?)

#### Swallows

These birds must be discussed first, because the Walkers' vessel is their namesake. Swallows are strong and swift flyers, banking quickly against the wind, as they hunt their insect

prey. Swallows are air-dependent, just as the vessel Swallow is wind-dependent. The flying swallows set a model of speed for the water craft. Titty's flag of the blue swallow on a light canvas field expresses the natural beauty of the bird. The barn swallow is a familiar bird along shores and marshes, where mosquitoes and other insect food is available. Identifying marks are its slate-blue wings and back, with a reddish-brown throat, and a deeply-forked tail.



Barn swallow (Image: Biorender.com)

#### Cormorants

The next noticeable bird in *Swallows and Amazons* is the cormorant. After their first night on Wildcat Island, the crew of the Swallow are sailing back from a voyage of exploration when they see a smaller island across the water. On the dead trees of this island were perched several dark birds with long necks. As the children watch, the birds dive in the water and come up with fish in their beaks, which they swallow.

"Cormorants," said John. "We'll call this island Cormorant Island."

Cormorants are common along the Atlantic coasts of North America and



Double-crested cormorant spreading its wings to dry

(Photo: U.S. National Park Service)

the United Kingdom. In New England and the Atlantic Provinces, cormorants are often called shags because of the irregular shaggy feathers which in some birds make crests on their heads. And we have places named for these birds: Shag Harbour in Nova Scotia, and Shag Island near Fogo in Newfoundland, where shags (cormorants) were common.

Ransome describes the dead trees on Cormorant Island, where the birds perch. It is interesting to learn that cormorants actually kill the trees in the areas they frequent. Their droppings are acidic, and damage the trees. So it wasn't just chance that Cormorant Island in the Swallows' lake had dead trees but no live ones!

#### Titty and the Dipper

Titty is left alone to be "Robinson Crusoe" on Wildcat Island, in charge of the leading lights, while John, Susan and Roger go on a cutting out expedition to capture the *Amazon*. On her own, she sees something she wouldn't have seen if she had been with companions. As she watches

from a large rock in the Island's Secret Harbour, she sees "a round stumpy little bird, with a short tail... a brown back and a broad white waistcoat". The bird bobbed up and down as if bowing.



White-throated dipper (Photo: Wikipedia)

Suddenly the bird jumped feet first into the water, then flew up again to perch on a stone. It dropped into the water again and this time Titty could see it swimming under water with its wings, as if it were flying. It came up again, simply flying with its wings with no difference between moving in the water and in the air.

The bird was a white-throated dipper, which lives upon insect larva or tiny fish it finds in the clear waters of lakes and streams. White-throated dippers are found in the United Kingdom and in parts of Europe and Asia. Other species of dippers are found in western North America, in South America, and in Asia.

Titty bowed back to the dipper, but the dipper did not know she was just trying to be friendly, and flew away. He came back later, when she was patrolling the island, and she watched as he jumped into the water again in his search for food.

## The Coot Club and the Bird Protection Society

Number 7 was not just any old nest; it was the nest the Coot Club had been watching since early spring. The parent coots had build it high to raise it above the spring floods, the mother bird laying her eggs in it. Now they were almost ready to hatch.

And these coots became the Club's special mascots. Tom Dudgeon, the doctor's son, took drastic action to save the offspring of these special coots and thus begins the exciting plot as Dick and Dorothea go off on a cruise of the Norfolk Broads, taking Tom with them to keep the Hullabalooos from finding him and pressing charges.



Eurasian coot (Photo: Wikipedia)

That six children should start a Bird Protection Society is not unusual, as most children have a particular affinity for dogs, cats, birds, and animals, whether wild or pets, and will do their best to protect them. Books about animals continue to be children's favorites. When I was young, one of my favorite books was *Beautiful Joe*, published in 1894 by Canadian author Marshall Saunders\*. In it, Joe, a puppy, is rescued from an abusive owner and becomes a beloved family companion. The book also introduces the reader to an animal protection society, The Band of Mercy, whose members

take the pledge: "I will try to be kind to all harmless living creatures, and try to protect them from cruel usage."

Persons born and brought up in Norfolk, England, may be called Norfolk Coots – coots being so characteristic of Norfolk bird-life, it is an appropriate symbol for the Norfolk human population. The coot common in the British Isles is the Eurasian Coot, which is found all over the U.K. and Europe as well as Asia and Australia. It is a mostly black bird, with a white bill and white frontal shield. It has webbed feet to help it swim and dive. Both the male and female participate in building the nests usually in reeds near or over the water, and both parents feed the young. Built to swim and dive, it has some difficulty taking to the air, running across the water with much splashing before becoming airborne. But once in the air it can fly long distances.

## The Loon

A cruise with Captain Flint to the Hebrides of Scotland allows the Swallows, Amazons and Ds to explore new areas of the United Kingdom, and to see first hand some of the sea mammals and coastal birds of these waters. One of these, the Common Loon, or Great Northern Diver as it is known in Britain, rarely breeds in the

---

\*Margaret Marshall Saunders (1861-1947), born in Milton, Nova Scotia, grew up in Berwick, an author and animal rights advocate. Like the Brontë sisters, who took male pen-names, Saunders published under her middle name, as publishers at the time routinely accepted manuscripts from men over those written by women.

U.K. or makes nests to raise young. That is why it was so exciting for Dick Callum to find a nest occupied by a pair of large divers that he suspects might be Great Northern. Hearing of an expert on birds, he eagerly goes to visit this man and describes to him the bird he has seen. And indeed the expert, Mr. Jemmerling, does confirm that this must be a Great Northern Diver, rarely breeding in Scotland. But O, Woe! it turns out Mr Jemmerling is an egg collector with racks of blown eggs on view in his quarters! Dick hastens away, desperate not to give away the location of the nest to this enemy of the birds. You may read for yourself in *Great Northern?* the story of how the birds and eggs were nearly lost, and how Captain Flint's crew of eight bird-lovers foiled the egg-collector and saved the Loons.



Loon with babies (Photo: Massachusetts Audubon Society)

The loon, rare in the United Kingdom, although common in North America, is a large bird with striking black and white plumage, and a wingspread of over four feet. Both parents help build the nest, setting on the eggs to keep them warm, and once hatching takes place, feed the young. The chicks soon learn to swim, but if tired, can climb up on their parent's back to hitch a ride.

In country folk tales of North America as well as among the indigenous tribes, supernatural powers are attributed to these birds, perhaps because of their beautiful and eerie cries. The name Loon is said to derive from the haunting call of the bird, which can sound like the call of a supernatural being. In a Tsimshian traditional tale, *The Loon's Necklace*, a blind medicine man saves the Loon from wolves by chanting songs which brought magic arrows to fly and kill the predators. The medicine man then asked the Loon to restore his sight. The Loon took the medicine man on his back, and dove under the water with him four times, until the water washed his blindness away. Gratefully the medicine man threw his necklace of sacred shells to the Loon. And that is why, today, the Loon's plumage includes a white necklace circling his neck.

In *Great Northern?* and *Coot Club* the plots hinge on the preservation of bird life, but in all of the *Swallows and Amazons* series there are examples of Ransome's interest in the preservation of the natural world and its wild inhabitants.

In *Pigeon Post*, after the *Swallows, Amazons* and *Ds* had dug a well to provide their camp with water, Titty sees the hedgehog (and a weasel, also) find the well, to slake their thirst. Dorothea says, "The animals and the birds will drink there for ever and ever, and if it wasn't for Titty, there wouldn't be a well at all."

Writers like Arthur Ransome (the *Swallows & Amazons* series), Marshall Saunders (*Beautiful Joe*), Anna Sewell (*Black Beauty*) and Ernest



Common Loon, showing its white "necklace" (Photo: maine.gov.photo)

Thompson Seton (*Wild Animals I Have Known*) help their readers to empathize with birds and animals. The authors are concerned with the lives of the living species around us. The human characters in the books set an example of how animals and birds should be treated, as respected fellow beings on this earth.

### Letter to the Editor

*I don't usually get letters to the editor, but I thought this was an interesting comment on "Did the Swallows and Amazons Visit Vancouver?" from Doug (a real mariner) – Ed.:*

From: "Doug Faunt"

Subject: Re: Did the S&A visit Vancouver.

Date: January 31, 2023.

To: sjhorn@gmail.com

Really unlikely – going north up the west coast of North America is best avoided by sailors.

The wind and current is against you. And it's often very rough because of that.

Most boats go by Hawaii since that makes for a better trip.

Best, Doug

## ***We Didn't Mean to Go To Sea, or The Consequence of Keeping a Poor Anchor Watch***

By Ian Sacré (Royston, B.C.)

*...the lookouts, in the cockpit, had heard something too, and were looking down the companion-way to make sure John and Susan thought it was all right. Susan signalled to them to be quiet. The next moment the jerk came again, followed by a scraping that they seemed to feel rather than hear, and then another jerk.*

*She's dragging her anchor!" cried John. "Look out of the way." With one jump he was half-way up the companion-way steps...*

And so began the harrowing adventure for the Walker family children, the Captain and crew of the *Swallow*, which led them across the North Sea to Holland and back again to Harwich in the cutter *Goblin*.

As we read the tale it becomes obvious that Jim Brading, the young owner of *Goblin*, did not even dream that he would not be back onboard his vessel after an absence of only an hour or so. If he had, I am sure he would have briefed the Walkers on how to safely veer more anchor chain as the tide rose. Therein lies a lesson for all of us when it comes to boats or vessels and seafaring. Never assume... If something, anything, does go wrong what are we going to do? Have we considered a plan of action for when the unanticipated happens?

The time at which the tide changes has always been a critical time for any vessel lying at anchor. Wise captains would often leave instructions in their night order book: "Call me when she swings!" The experienced master would have learnt that when the tide changed and his vessel started to swing with the tide it was possible his anchor could become un-bedded or even fouled by the anchor rode or chain dragging over the bottom.

### **Anchor technology**

Anchor design technology changed little from the time of the Romans to perhaps the early 1900's.

Prior to the Romans, the Phoenicians (1500 to 300 BC) were known for their incredible reputation for maritime prowess. But a Phoenician anchor consisted simply of an oblong piece of flat limestone with a hole drilled in one end through which could be passed an anchor line or rode. The slab of rock weighed about 75 kilos in air though larger anchor stones of up to 210 kilos have been found. Later, the Phoenicians went high tech and drilled more holes through the slabs into which they fitted hardwood pegs to increase the drag resistance when the slab lay on the sea bed.



The Romans upgraded anchor design significantly and developed the crude forerunner of what was to become the 'stocked anchor'. The flukes of the

Roman anchor were made of wood, often tipped with bronze or lead, and fastened to the shank of the anchor, which was also of wood. The stock was frequently made of lead and fitted



to the shank of the anchor at right angles to the flukes. This anchor resembled the Admiralty or Fisherman's Anchor still in use today.

The Admiralty or Fisherman's Anchor is made of five main components each with a number of individually named parts, some seemingly named after human body parts! The *Crown* was fitted to the *Throat* of the *Shank*, the *Flukes* were fitted to the *Arms* of the crown and the flukes had *Palms* and the pointy end of each was called a *Bill* or *Pee*. At the balance point of the anchor along the shank, there was often fitted a *Gravity Band* or the point on the anchor from which it could be lifted in the horizontal position. The movable *Stock* was held in place by a pin called a *Forelock*. At the top of the shank was the *Head*, which

had a hole in it to which was attached a *Ring* or *Shackle* to for securing the anchor *Rode* or rope or chain.

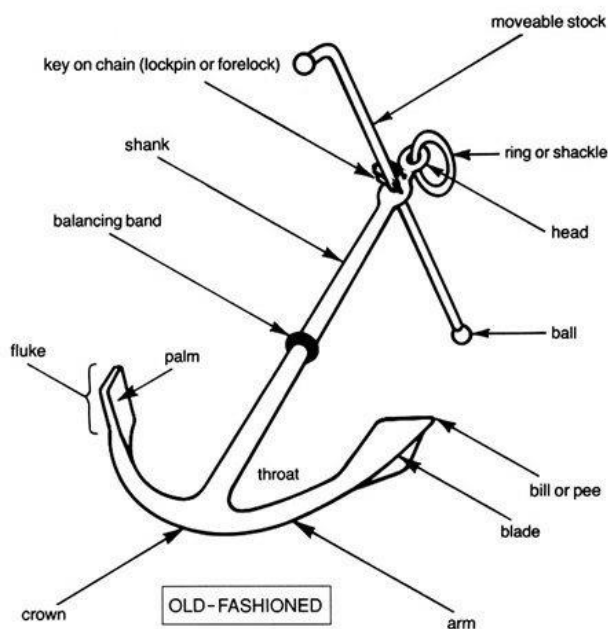
(This type of Fisherman’s kedge anchor was the one that gave poor John so much trouble with the forelock pin; this eventually came loose and allowed the stock to shift, with the consequence that the anchor dragged.)

Then next development was the Stockless Anchor where the crown and flukes were cast of steel in one part and the shank made in a separate casting. When both parts were fitted together the crown and flukes were free to pivot roughly 45 degrees on either side of the shank. Such anchors are used today on nearly all larger ships.



In the 1930’s anchor design started to change again. Sir Geoffrey Taylor developed the famous Coastal or Clyde Quick Release anchor better known as the CQR. It’s design was based on the double bladed agriculture plough shear.

Early in the 1940’s along came Mr. Richard Danforth, with what would obviously be called the Danforth Anchor, designed with high holding



Admiralty or Fisherman’s Anchor

power for use on seaplanes and wartime landing craft. It could be stowed flat when not in use. This anchor is found everywhere today, Relatively inexpensive to make, it has been taken up enthusiastically by the pleasure boating fraternity ever since World War 2.



Danforth Anchor

Later, the ever developing oil industry started off-shore drilling using enormous floating drilling platforms weighing thousands of tons. These have to be moored securely in place while drilling operations are carried out.

In early 1970 Peter Bruce designed an

embedment anchor of huge proportions to fulfill the task. Thus was born the Bruce Anchor. The design was then quickly scaled down and the popular small vessel Bruce Anchor was manufactured.

Since then a number of different plough or embedment type anchors have been developed, including the Brittany Anchor, the Delta Anchor and the French Spade Anchor. Recently, a New Zealander named Peter Smith designed the Rocna anchor, which has become very

popular. This anchor incorporates some of the better features of many other anchors and is said to have the highest holding power of many contemporary designs.

Other anchor designs exist, of course, some of which can still be found in use. But what it really comes down is, you need to use an anchor that is perfectly suited to the sea bottom in which it may be used. However, like nearly everything else connected to vessels and seafaring the choice of an anchor will be a compromise, so still “Call me when she swings!”



## Alarm Bells From Far Rockaway to Beckfoot

By Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

*“I mean what I say about those pigeons,” said Mrs Blackett, almost hopefully. “They’ll have to ring bells if I’m to agree to your going.” “They shall,” said Nancy.*

Nancy is sure Dick can make those pigeons ring bells... but first...

### ***Another Time, Another Place***

1927, Far Rockaway, New York City, USA: a little boy named Richard Feynman sets up a lab for himself. He makes a big light board and plays with vacuum tubes and lights and all kinds of electrical circuits. He is just eleven years old.

*About that time I invented a burglar alarm, which was a very simple-minded thing: it was just a big battery and a bell connected with some wire. When the door to my room opened, it pushed the wire against the battery and closed the circuit, and the bell would go off. One night my mother and father came home from a night out... All of a sudden this tremendous bell went off... BONG BONG BONG BONG BONG!!! I jumped out of bed yelling, “It worked! It worked!”*

Maybe Feynman’s “tremendous” bell was a fire alarm bell like the one we had for a telephone bell in the riding stable where I worked. It was high up on the barn wall, and it was LOUD!! It made us jump no matter where we were.

Feynman’s battery and bell must have been mounted on the doorframe, if the wire set it off as the door opened. (His parents had come in to take his earphones off – as usual, Dick had



An old fire alarm bell, with new wiring but without its weatherproof cover.

gone to sleep listening to his “little creaky crystal radio” with his earphones on.)

Richard Feynman would have been wiring up his burglar alarm about ten years before Ransome was writing *Pigeon Post*, in 1936. He went on to become a famous theoretical physicist who worked on the atom bomb when only a grad student and went on to win a Nobel prize. (See the epilogue for more about Feynman.)

How might Dick Callum’s life in science have developed after he made the pigeons ring a bell? Was he the youngest code-breaker at Bletchley Park, deciphering Nazi codes while Richard Feynman was at Los Alamos? Was he a physicist, an ornithologist, or something else entirely? Was he as famous a physicist as Feynman, or did identifying bird species lead him into genetics and deciphering the double helix with Crick and Watson? We’ll never know what Dick’s career was... but we do know...

### ***How Dick Callum Made the Pigeons Ring a Bell***

Step by step, testing each step as he goes along, Dick D. works out a scientific way to make the pigeons ring a bell in Blackett house from yards and yards away in the stable yard, just as he worked out the ways to do so many things, before and after the time of *Pigeon Post*.

*“Can I use the electric bell there is in the stable under the pigeon-loft,” said Dick, “and the wires that go across the yard?”*

*As far as he could see, nothing was wrong with that old bell but dirt and rust. But it took a long time to clean...*

Dick replaces the old wiring and tests the bell: “he screwed the trembler into place and adjusted it until the little hammer on the trembler did not quite touch the bell” and – methodical as always – tests the bell, using a battery out of his flashlight.

Then, he makes a swinging curtain of

wires for the nest box and waits to see if the pigeons would push through the set of wires. They do.

Then, “What he had to do was to make a little swinging trigger... that would grip and hold” – stiff wire, a cork, a scrap of lead, and a bit of copper sheet (bought in Rio by Dot and Roger) made the trigger. Then, he wires the trigger, first to “the old wires across the stableyard,” then with electrical cord (“flex”) all the way to the house, where he hooks up the whole system: “Lucky the batteries for the house bells were close to the kitchen door. He had not any too much flex to spare.” First test of the system: the crew brings him dinner while he waits...

*The thing had worked. Sophocles had rung the bell... “but are you sure it’s loud enough” ... would that faint tinkling purr catch the ears of busy natives?*

But Dick had another piece of salvage ready: “a huge old tea-tray, and noisy if you only touched it.” He mounted the bell close to the kitchen door with the tea-tray loosely screwed in “so that it was free to rattle.” And rattle it did. The bell must have been an old doorbell, not a fire bell, to be so faint.

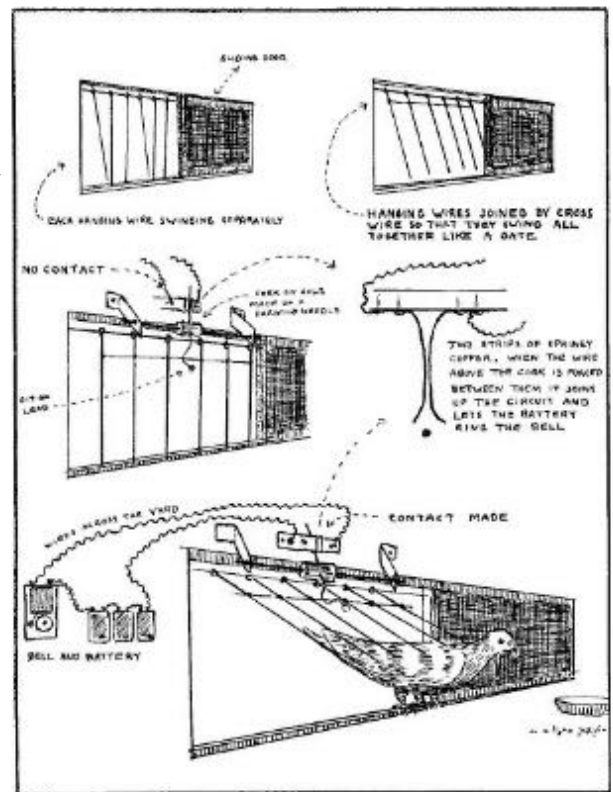
*Cook was standing at the kitchen door with her hands to her ears... In the passage was a pile of broken plates. “Lucky it wasn’t the best service,” said cook.*

And the prospectors are able to camp on High Topps and look for gold after all.

### Epilogue

The story of the burglar alarm is in the book *Surely You’re Joking, Mr. Feynman*, which is full of stories Feynman told. It’s now an audiobook, a print book, and an e-book. The second book, *What Do You Care What Other People Think*, is more serious but just as interesting.

Arthur Ransome showed the way to sailing to many of his readers; Richard Feynman’s books led many of its readers into physics or mathematics. You can see Feynman on YouTube doing everything from telling stories and drumming to lecturing on physics. Like Dick Callum, Dick



**HOW DICK MADE THE PIGEON RING A BELL**

Feynman was interested in almost everything, and his storytelling hints that he had a bit of Dot in him. He had a touch of Roger’s naughty side, too. Feynman loved pranks and got off a good many, from the special birthday radio broadcast he tells about in the book, to picking locks and opening safes in Los Alamos.

### Are You on Facebook?

Despite the many problems with Facebook, it does enable groups of like-minded people to share and exchange. (These are the groups I can find. Let me know if you find any others — Ed.)

**The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook Group:** [www.facebook.com/groups/762560473886537/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/762560473886537/)  
(This is a closed group, so you will have to ask to join.)

**Arthur Ransome’s Swallows and Amazons in North America:** [www.facebook.com/groups/tarsfriends/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/tarsfriends/)

**The Arthur Ransome Society in New Zealand & Australia:** [www.facebook.com/tarsnz/](http://www.facebook.com/tarsnz/)

**The Arthur Ransome Group:** [www.facebook.com/groups/2612950856/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/2612950856/)



## Ship's Library — Books (and movies) we've read and want to share

### *Ransome Broadside* (the 2005 Amazon publication)

By Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

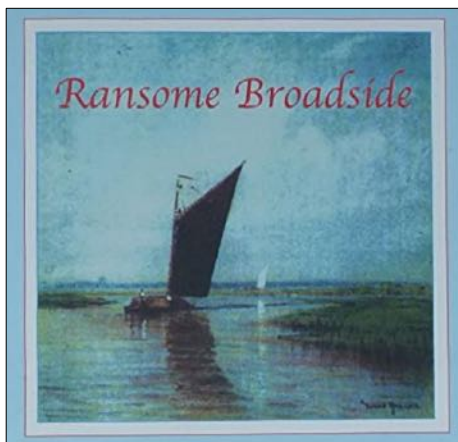
Recently, fellow Montreal TAR Gordon McGilton offered to give me his substantial Ransome book and magazine collection. He is at that stage of life where downsizing seems to be a good idea, and he thought that I would give the books a good home. I gratefully accepted and have added them to my own somewhat smaller collection of Ransome items.

Gordon has been a member of TARS for quite a while, and had many Ransome-related books I have never seen. Since

our member survey showed that people like the Ship's Library feature, I thought that I might review a number of Ransome books that many of us may not had the opportunity to read. I begin this month with *Ransome Broadside*, the Amazon publication for 2005.

(Please do not take this as a “get-out-of writing-a-review” free card. I am sure that lots of you have read books – by Ransome or not – that the rest of us would like to hear about. So send in those reviews!) — Ed.

*Ransome Broadside* was published in 2005, and was the 14th book from Amazon Publications. Getting a copy now would be a bit difficult, although several copies are available used on [AbeBooks](#), [Biblio](#) or other used book sites. Copies can be quite expensive, though.



*Ransome Broadside* is essentially a miscellany of stories and articles set in or about the Norfolk Broads. It includes articles, sections of stories, travel narratives, history and poetry. It also includes a whole range of illustrations.

Much of this work is long out of print, but some can still be found on archive

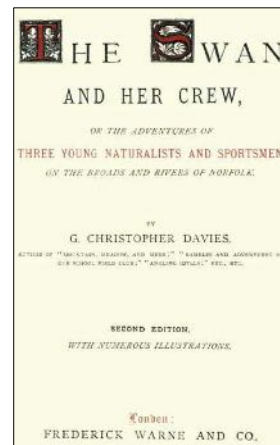
sites on the web like [Project Gutenberg](#) and [Archive.org](#). Where possible I have tracked down the originals so that you can read them and at least get a flavour of the 2005 publication. (These links are listed at the end.)

The book sets off, after a short introduction, with an excerpt written by Ransome about his various trips with Evgenia to the Norfolk Broads in the 1930s, talking about their itineraries and their boats and their adventures. This was the highlight for me, since I had never seen any of it before. The section was apparently intended for his *Autobiography* but did not appear in the published book, whose narrative ends in 1932.

Next comes “Arthur Ransome’s Advice to a Novice”, apparently a letter Ransome wrote to someone who was considering a trip to the Broads but did not know where to start. Ransome basically say, “just do it”: like everyone else you will start off badly but will quickly learn what you are doing. “If you prove to be incompetent (which I

do not expect),” says Ransome, “your son, aged twelve, will see that you come to no harm.”

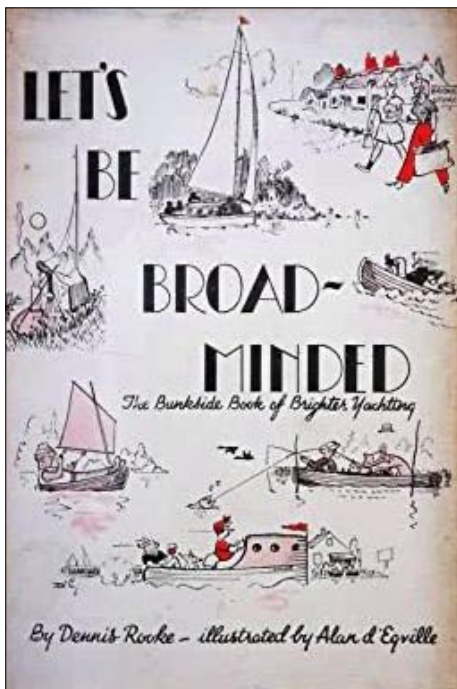
An excerpt from 1876 novel, *The Swan and Her Crew*, follows, giving the story of how three boys build a boat and sail it on the Broads, the book acting also as a guide to the natural history and folklore of the region.



Then follow articles about the natural history of “Broadland”, excerpts from a comic log of inexperienced sailors (“both Ransomes were much amused...”), poems, adventures, a company history from Roy’s of Wroxham (“The World’s Largest Village Store”), of the Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club... This compilation continues, providing a compre-

hensive look at the Broads as Ransome knew them and when they provided him the inspiration for *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*.

Although *Ransome Broadside* may be hard to get, some of its content is still available. So if you are interested, see what you can track down using the clues I give below.



## Sources

In *Ransome Broadside* specific sources are not always clearly provided. This made tracking things down difficult, so the following information does not cover everything in the book. Here is what I found.

Before I start, however, I should explain the following two sources;

[Project Gutenberg](#) provides a very large section of out-of-copyright books. If it is on Gutenberg you can download it and read it on your computer or tablet.

The [Internet Archive](#) also has a lot of material that is out of copyright but, like any library, it also allows you to borrow some ebooks that are still protected by copyright.

### **Autobiography:**

If you want to read Ransome's *Autobiography* as it was published, you can borrow a copy from the Internet Archive [here](#).

### **The Swan and her Crew:**

This is available for download from [Gutenberg](#).

### **Fens and Levels**

Presents the geography of the Broads, from Adrian Bell's 1939 book *The English Countryside*. This may be available on Abebooks.

### **Horsey Gap (a poem):**

I do not know where the poem comes from, but Horsey Village has an interesting website [here](#).

### **The Log of the Beautiful Lady:**

This excerpt comes from *Let's Be Broad-Minded!*, a sailor's comic log that can be found on [AbeBooks](#).

### **Roy's of Wroxham**

Roy's is still around, and a current version of the company's history can be found on their website at <https://www.roys.co.uk/history>.

### **The Royal Norfolk and Suffolk Yacht Club (by Peter Heaton):**

Heaton's *Yachting, A History* is a classic and can be borrowed from the Internet Archive [here](#) or bought second-

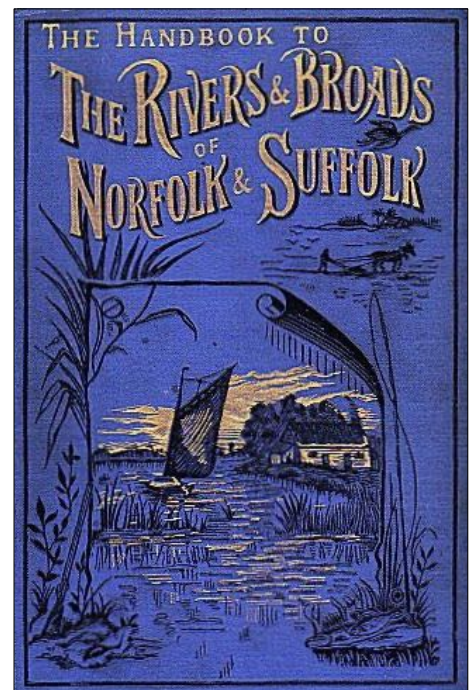
hand on Abebooks or new on Amazon.

### **The White Boats**

The Farland's racing sloop Flash was one of the "White Boats", officially know as the "Yare and Bure One Design". I couldn't find the sources that are excerpted in *Ransome Broadside*, but the class is still going strong after 100 years, and you can [find out more here](#).

### **Brydons on the Broads**

This is one of a large series of children's stories by Kathleen Fidler, but all are almost unobtainable. When I looked for this one in particular, I found several copies on AbeBooks, but two were in New Zealand, so shipping was prohibitive, while several from the U.K. were both even more expensive and costly to ship!



While searching, I ran across many other interesting old books about the Norfolk Broads. This 1911 handbook can be downloaded from [Project Gutenberg](#)

### The Way of Peace

Alker Tripp's narrative of a visit to the broads comes from his 1950 book *Under the Cabin Lamp*, reprinted by [Lodestar Books](#). Get it on Abebooks.

### Death Under Sail

Is a classic mystery by C. P. Snow (from 1932, his first novel and only mystery). It can be borrowed from Archive.org [here](#) or purchased used just about anywhere.

### Glimpses of Old Horning

Comes from *Life in a Norfolk Village*

and *A Norfolk Village in Wartime*. Possibly available used, be careful where you look, since prices vary.

### A Mystery of the Broads

By Percy Westerman, this 1930 novel is one of innumerable boy's adventure stories written in a very long career. Dozens of his novels are available at Gutenberg, but not this one.

### George Russell's 1938 Holiday Diary

I wish I had been able to find this. George and Josephine Russell were

siblings who crewed for Ransome when he lived on the Orwell and who sailed in Ransome's fleet on the Broads in 1938 and 1939.

### A Visit to Hickling Broad

Comes from *Springtime in Britain*, published in 1970 by American naturalist Edwin Way Teale. Many used copies are available from AbeBooks or [Thriftbooks](#).

\* \* \*

So that is what I could find. Not bad, but perhaps you will have better luck.

## Beckfoot Kitchen — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

### Squashed Flies, Anyone?

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

*Squashed-fly biscuits are those flat biscuits with currants in them, just the thing for explorers.*

Mrs. Walker's birthday feast, Chapter XVI, *Swallows and Amazons* ...tins of sardines, a large tin of squashed fly biscuits... Roger had had no criticisms to make.

Mrs. Blackett's supplies list, Chapter V, *Pigeon Post*

### First Catch Your Fly

You'll need enough currants to cover half the dough very thickly, 3/4 cup for this recipe. Currants. There's the catch. Though online sites of large supermarkets' claim to have 8-ounce boxes of Sun-Maid currants, I've seldom found them in stores. (Canadians may be luckier, with Canada's better supplies for British baking.) The usual price is \$3.50 (US) for 8 ounces in supermarkets, and about half again

as much from Amazon and other online sites.

### But what if I can't find currants?

Use raisins, plain black ones. Raisins from a bulk bin may be smaller, which is good.

(Note: *squashed fly currants* are a small dried black grape, no relation to the red kind.)

You don't need to make **this** dough. I found dozens of mixtures and procedures for making the dough for Garibaldi biscuits and concluded that you can make a reasonable facsimile with any cookie dough you can roll out. You could knock off a small trial batch of squashed fly biscuits any time you make cookies. Remember, though, that American cookies have about twice the sugar and butter (in



proportion to the flour) of British biscuits, especially Garibaldis. You can even buy refrigerated or frozen sugar cookie dough! The packages make only a few cookies but that might be good for a first try. Add 1/4 c flour and roll out as below with enough flour to keep the dough from sticking.

### Garibaldi Biscuits

(Note: *half whole-wheat pastry flour* in the dough will give it more flavor.)

You could make about any kind of British style biscuit with this dough

(it's much like a digestive biscuit dough made with white flour) and nothing could be easier than mixing it. Rolling the dough out and rolling the currants in takes more time and a little skill and care.

A good heavy rolling pin and a cloth or plastic pastry sheet will make rolling easy; a long spatula will help get the bars onto the baking sheets in perfect shape. A 12" ruler is just right for using as a straightedge to make the cuts and check the size.

It's a good idea to line the cookie pans with baking parchment or buttered aluminum foil, because some fruit will poke through and stick. I just buttered my non-stick pan well and got by.

Make the dough in a food processor if you have one, using the regular cutting knife (directions for hand-mixing follow below).

It's a good idea to get the butter ready first and chill the cubes while you set up the ingredients, prepare cookie sheets, and so on.

**1/4 c (1/2 stick) cold butter**

Cut the butter into cubes (quarter the half stick lengthwise, separate pieces, cut across every 3/4" or so). Then chill the cubes to keep them cold.

**1 c all purpose flour 1 tsp baking powder**

**3 T sugar, white or finely granulated raw**

Measure the other ingredients into the food processor bowl and whirl a couple times to mix.

Add the cold butter cubes into the

processor chute.

Whirl a few more times, until the mixture looks like coarse breadcrumbs.

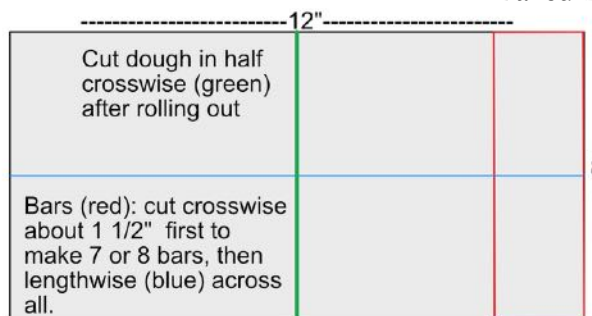
Add **3 T milk**, a tablespoon at a time, whirling very briefly to mix each time.

Whirl a few more times to make a dough that just comes together. It may take a little more milk to get the dough to consolidate but don't over-mix. Squeeze the dough together into a ball and knead once or twice, then smack the ball into a flattish oblong.

Have ready:

**About 3/4 c currants (half of an 8 oz package)**

Rolling out is a little confusing, so see the diagram below. You'll roll out to about 12 x 8" twice, once with currants between the layers.



Roll the thick oblong into a 1/8" thick rectangle —about 8 by 12 inches (*stack up two quarters for a measuring gauge; use a sheet of 8 1/2 x 11" letter paper for a shape guide*). Cut the dough sheet in half crosswise and sprinkle one half thickly with currants, all the way to the edges.

Cover with the second half of the dough and roll out again to 1/8" thick, keeping the same shape. Prick lightly all over with a fork to prevent big bub-

bles. Trim crooked edges (or not but trimmings are tasty raw or baked) and make crosswise cuts about 1 1/2" apart, then a lengthwise cut across all the bars to make the traditional Garibaldi shape. Brush sparingly with milk or cream just before baking to shine up the top a bit if you wish. Some recipes suggest sprinkling sugar on top – not the Garibaldis I remember!

**Make other biscuits with the same dough**

Roll out the dough about 1/4 to 1/8" and cut with a round cutter or into squares or triangles for the variations; bake 350°F as above. Toss a little of practically anything into the flour/butter mixture: finely chopped or flaked nuts; shredded coconut, can-

died peel of any kind, or mixed peel; ginger powder with ginger root. Spice the flour mix with cinnamon, nutmeg, and a bit of clove. Use part wheat germ. Use light brown sugar.

**Hand-mixing**

Prepare ingredients as above, mixing the dry ingredients in a bowl before adding the butter cubes; use a pastry cutter or two knives to cut the butter into the flour mix until it looks like



coarse breadcrumbs. Or pick up bits of flour mix and butter and quickly and lightly rub the flour mix into the butter with thumbs and fingers. Add the milk little by little, tossing lightly (fingers work best) to mix it in.

You can, of course, buy Garibaldi's. Here's a typical ingredient list for commercial cookies:

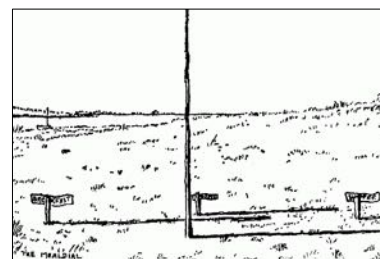
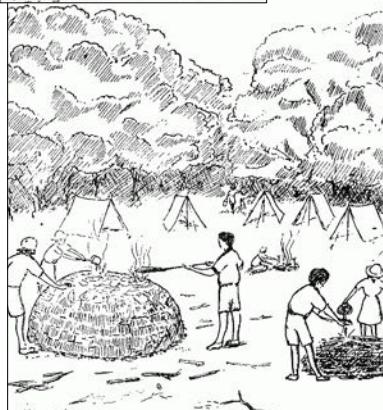
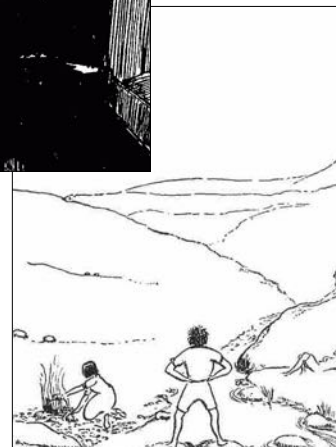
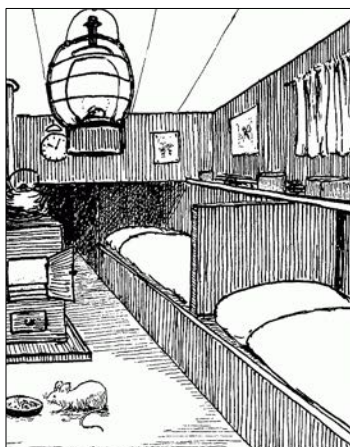
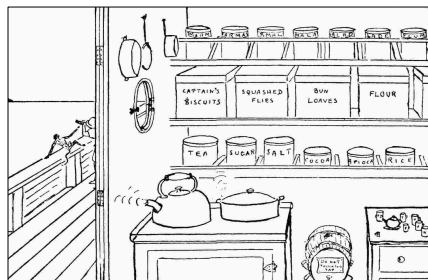
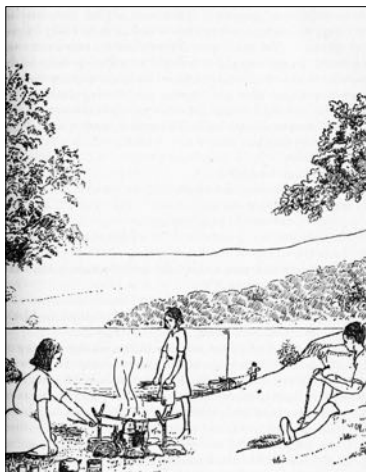
*currants, wheat flour, palm oil, wheat starch, sugar, glucose syrup, wheat dextrose, skimmed milk powder, lactose (milk sugar),*

*sodium hydrogen carbonate, ammonium hydrogen carbonate, salt.*

I think I'll make my own.

## Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

All these illustrations about cooking or eating come from the Swallows and Amazons books. Can you figure out which books they come from? (Well, one isn't exactly cooking!) – Ed.



*Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* is a joint publication of TARSUS (The Arthur Ransome Society USA) and TARS Canada.

The position of TARSUS coordinator is open; if you are interested, please volunteer...

The TARS Canada coordinator is Ian Sacré, [gallivanterthree@shaw.ca](mailto:gallivanterthree@shaw.ca)

The editor is Simon Horn, [sjhorn@gmail.com](mailto:sjhorn@gmail.com)

Please send contributions, questions and suggestions for the newsletter to the editor.