

MIXED MOSS

THE JOURNAL OF THE
ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY
2023

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unexplored



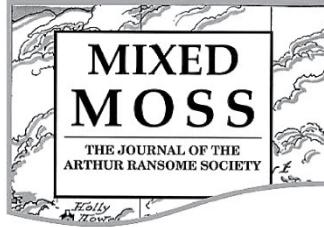
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OUT OF CAPTAIN FLINT'S TRUNK



This has been a year of achievement and change. TARS has acquired the dinghies *Swallow* and *Amazon* that appeared in the classic 1974 film of *Swallows and Amazons*. Once they have been restored to their original glory, there will be opportunities for TARS members to sail them. Our first two articles celebrate this important moment in the Society's history.

The Society's membership has been growing and *Signals* has reported on the wide range of activities in the regions: it is especially encouraging to see ever more young members camping, tramping and sailing in true Ransome tradition. TARS Library has moved to its new home alongside the TARS Stall – it is a wonderful resource and we encourage members to make use of it. Amazon Publications is thirty-years-old and still going strong. Its birthday is marked here by Christina Hardymont, one of its founders.

None of this would happen without the time and effort of those at the helm. After many years of service, Alan Hakim has stepped down from Amazon Publications and Winifred Wilson has handed over the running of the Library to Christine Rae (who already manages TARS Stall). Peter Wright has served two terms as Chairman and under his leadership TARS has discovered a new energy. Rather than slip into well-deserved retirement, Peter is now becoming Editor of *Mixed Moss* and has already helped hugely with this edition. Mike Glover has taken over as Chair. Finally, at the top of the tree, John Sergeant, the acclaimed political journalist and author, has followed Libby Purvis as our President. We are hugely indebted to them all.

Now, after seven editions, I really am signing off as Editor but am leaving *Mixed Moss* in safe hands. I have enjoyed almost (!) every moment and am grateful to everyone who has supported me – especially Paul Wilson for his immaculate proof-reading and the many contributors for the steady stream of fascinating articles. Goodbye and good luck!

Julian Lovelock

SCREEN DOUBLE

It's not often a traditional boatyard hosts cinema celebrities. Neville Khambatta, chairman of The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust at Hunter's Yard, is naturally star-struck.

Forget your list of the ten most iconic yachts and think instead of two quite small dinghies. Two little boats which have a great deal to answer for, as they are very likely the reason that many of us got the 'sailing bug' when we were children. I'm talking of two lugsail dinghies: *Swallow* which carried John, Susan, Titty and Roger Walker, and *Amazon* crewed by Nancy and Peggy Blackett, on their adventures in Arthur Ransome's Lake District.

As foreign correspondent for the then *Manchester Guardian* newspaper, Arthur Ransome had reported from Russia on the Revolution in 1917 before escaping with his Russian wife to the UK's Lake District to concentrate on fiction writing. From *Swallows and Amazons* published in 1930, his engaging series of children's boating stories extended to twelve books but it is that first title which has inspired screen versions on television and in two cinema films. For some of us, it's no exaggeration to say: 'Arthur Ransome taught me to sail!'



Swallow and *Amazon* were typical of boats which could be found around boatyards, pulled up on the foreshore, and at sailing club jetties throughout the British Isles in the first half of the twentieth century. Some were yacht tenders, others rowing dinghies for hire; nearly all were stable, burdensome little craft which looked after their owners and did what was asked of them. If they had a sail it would almost certainly be a lugsail, with mast, boom and gaff just the right length to stow in the boat; no need for shrouds or forestay. To go sailing all you had to do was step the mast by lifting it up and lowering it through the hole in the forward thwart until it was seated firmly in the mast step on the hog. Simple. All that remained left to do was to untangle yourself from the boom, gaff and sail, find the free end of the halyard and hoist the sail ... Then realise that you should have kept hold of the mainsheet.

Stars of the silver screen

In 1974 we were treated to a film of that first book. Directed by Claude Whatham, with young protagonists who really looked like children of the 1930s, not 1970s, it stayed remarkably close to Ransome's original storyline and they found two dinghies to play the title roles. After the filming was finished, the boats disappeared from view. *Swallow* went to Turk's Boatyard on the Thames and *Amazon* rested in the depths of a boatshed in the Lake District.



When Turk's Boatyard closed and everything was auctioned off, one item in the sale was listed as the boat used in the film. By then The Arthur Ransome Society – TARS – had been formed and the members crowd-funded the purchase of *Swallow* at the auction.

SailRansome was created and the boat was looked after and taken around the country to TARS events. *Swallow* has a large 'WK' carved on the inside of the transom which stands for 'William King', whose boatyard at

Burnham-on-Crouch in Essex is where she was built. Sophie Neville, who played Titty in the 1974 film, recalls hearing *Swallow* was built in the 1930s.

Back in the Lake District, two families wanted to hire a boat on Coniston as their children loved the Ransome stories. Seeing their enthusiasm and hearing that they knew the books the yard owner said: 'I've got something you should see.'

He led them into the depths of his boat shed and there was a little varnished dinghy with *Amazon* painted on her transom: 'That's the boat used in the film.'



They bought her and the children rowed and sailed her until, as time passed, life got in the way. *Amazon* has a builder's plate for Borwicks of Windermere; Google that and you will find a photograph of a lovely little rowing boat which could be *Amazon's* twin sister.

Swallow and *Amazon* were now in safe hands and enjoyed by many Ransome devotees. Wooden boats take looking after and varnished clinker boats can take up a great deal of time and energy. After many years looking after their charges, SailRansome and the owners of *Amazon* approached The Arthur Ransome Society.

Serendipity ...

... is defined in the dictionary as 'the making of pleasant discoveries by accident'. There was no collusion; it just happened that TARS was given the opportunity of becoming the keeper and carer of both boats at the same time. It knew that there would need to be work done to allow as many people as possible to be able to enjoy *Swallow* and *Amazon*. But who could do it and where could it be done?

Last summer a group of TARS members camped and sailed on the Norfolk Broads. One of their planned expeditions had been to our base,

Hunter's Yard in Ludham (www.huntersyard.co.uk). It was from here that the BBC had hired the yacht *Lullaby* to play the part of the *Teasel* in a serialisation of *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*, two more of Ransome's books in the series. When the repainted transom proudly proclaiming *Lullaby* to be *Teasel* had to be replaced, it was hung on the workshop wall. So when the TARS party came to visit and it became clear that it was proving very hard to find anyone in the Lakes to repair, restore and maintain *Swallow* and *Amazon* to allow them to be used, one or two committee members suggested Hunter's Yard. They knew we maintained and hired out a fleet of traditional varnished cabin yachts and that people could hire a dinghy to tow behind their own boat as a tender. What better place to approach?

What they didn't know was that yours truly, the chairman of The Norfolk Heritage Fleet Trust, the charitable body which runs Hunter's Yard, is not only a member of TARS but owes his entire sailing life to those twelve books and to their author, Arthur Ransome. The thought of those two film stars coming to the Broads and to the Yard so that they could be hired for a picnic or a sail was just too good to pass up for this self-confessed Sad-Boat-Anorak.



Old boats need work

Swallow is nearly 100 years old and among other things has some cracked timbers which will need replacing, while *Amazon* had a centreboard put into her for the film. Apparently it has always leaked, so that's a challenge. Then, of course, both boats will eventually need to have their beauty restored,

which will mean a scrape and re-varnish, inside and out. Now that really will be a labour of love!

It is hoped that *Amazon* will be ready to be rowed, perhaps sailed and definitely taken for a picnic or two this season by any who are able to use and enjoy her. Certainly both boats are heading back to the Lakes next summer when TARS members will be gathering to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1974 film, so they will have to be ready for that.

On my bookshelves alongside the twelve in the Swallows and Amazons series is one which Ransome began but never completed. *Coots in the North* took some of the characters from *Coot Club* and *The Big Six* and sent them up to the Lake District, where they met the Swallows and Amazons.

We will now have a real-life sequel: '*Swallow and Amazon on the Broads*'. It will take a little time but this story, which has only just started, will be finished and when it is, the two little boats will be good for another century.



This article first appeared in the *Watercraft* magazine (www.watercraft-magazine.com), by whose kind permission it is reproduced. Photographs by Val Khambatta.

FIFTY YEARS ON – MEMORIES OF SWALLOW, AMAZON AND OTHERS

Sophie Neville

‘The smell is just the same.’ Suzanna Hamilton began rowing me across Coniston Water from Bank Ground Farm, taking us back to childhood days. ‘It sounds the same too.’ The colours, the landscape, the *feeling* of being out on the water was still magical.

As girls, Suzanna and I had appeared as Mate Susan and Able-seaman Titty in Richard Pilbrow’s original film of *Swallows and Amazons*, adapted by David Wood and released in cinemas on 4 April 1974. It starred Virginia McKenna and Ronald Fraser but it was the two of us who were invited to return to the film locations in 2003 to be interviewed by Ben Fogle for an episode of the long-running BBC series *Countryfile*. Thanks to sunshiny weather and the support of Geraint and Helen Lewis, his report proved so successful that it was repeated on *Country Tracks* and featured in the series *Big Screen Britain* alongside iconic landscape movies such as *The Dam Busters* and *Whistle Down the Wind*.

We had been talking about swimming off Peel Island soon after we began filming *Swallows and Amazons* in the Lake District in May 1973. The director, Claude Whatham, was fresh from making the rock-and-roll movie *That’ll be the Day*, starring David Essex and Ringo Starr, and a BAFTA nominated adaptation of *Cider with Rosie*, in which he’d cast Sten Grendon as the young Laurie Lee and me as Eileen Brown. He offered us the parts of Roger and Titty after watching us out on the water.

Claude spotted Suzanna at the Anna Sher after-school Theatre Club in Islington, but the producer Richard Pilbrow had insisted on looking for ships’ captains who could sail well rather than audition young actors and

teach them to sail. This was pivotal. They found Simon West (to play John), Kit Seymour (Nancy) and Lesley Bennett (Peggy) at sailing clubs where they had already gained confidence and a natural feeling for the wind. We were only given a couple of days to get used to the little boats used as *Swallow* and *Amazon* before filming began and yet the skill of the two captains ended up making the film a classic.



Claude Whatham watching Swallow arrive in Rio

Although happy out on the water, Claude knew little about boats. We had instruction from a sailing director in the form of a good-looking actor called David Blagden. He'd recently crossed the Atlantic in a nineteen-foot yacht called *Willing Griffin* but was unfamiliar with blustery Lakeland winds and did not know how to break down a script. Simon, aged eleven, ended up explaining to Claude how to get a decent shot. Suzanna took her lead from him and I clung to the gunwales, trying hard not to shiver in a costume designed by Emma Porteous that consisted of no more than a short yellow dress and an enormous pair of navy-blue gym knickers.

It was unusual for a movie to feature so many scenes set in two small dinghies. Mike Turk, whose family had reputedly been building boats since 1295, and Nick Newby of Nicol End Marine on Derwentwater, took up the challenge of adapting a cross-shaped pontoon to act as a mobile camera mount so that our dialogue could be captured. This extraordinary vessel had two outboards but wasn't easy to handle. The dinghies were wired to it with underwater cables but tended to pull away. The base to *Swallow*'s mast broke, proving safety was an issue, but the idea eventually worked.



Richard Pilbrow's photograph of Amazon rigged up to the camera pontoon with Swallow alongside.

A grey punt was also used. It was easy to transport from one lake to another but must have been tippy. Somehow David Cadwallader, the grip, managed to keep the horizon horizontal using no more than a spirit level on the camera tripod. Shadows were lifted from our faces by using huge reflector boards apt to catch the wind. It must have been impossible to operate filler lights out on the water, although they somehow managed to power a number of sets on Peel Island.



Behind the scenes: Roger and Titty row to Cormorant Island with Swallow wired to the camera pontoon on Derwentwater – and (below) what the camera eventually captured:



Looking at the photographs, it would have been good if *Swallow*'s hull had been painted white in line with illustrations in the books. Her varnished planks are a nod to the 1970s when everyone was busy stripping pine, but the important detail is that she has a keel rather than a centreboard. It makes her difficult to turn, and markedly slower than *Amazon*, but it grants her stability. This feature may have saved us when we really did nearly miss colliding with MV *Tern*, a Windermere steamer, which alarmed my father who was on the *Tern*'s deck. He knew it would be difficult for *Swallow* to go about when the larger vessel took our wind. We were fully laden with camping gear and yet lacked buoyancy of any kind.



Sophie Neville on the camera pontoon on Derwent Water

One secret of filming *Swallows and Amazons* is that it was set on four different lakes, a smelly lily pond that served as Octopus Lagoon, and Mrs Batty's barn where night sailing sequences were shot with *Swallow* mounted on a cradle. One challenging scene was when the Swallows were cast off

from Wild Cat Island to sail north to the Amazon River, leaving Titty behind to light the lanterns. I slipped underwater whilst pushing her free of branches overhanging the landing place but regained my footing and waved them off. Simon caught ‘a fair wind’ but the boom swung so far out that Suzanna held the mainsheet by the figure-of-eight knot and *Swallow* sped up Coniston Water like a ‘pea in a peashooter’, as Ransome wrote in *Winter Holiday*. A gust hit them broadside as they cleared the island and *Swallow* gybed, but Simon calmly stood to catch the boom, spilled the wind and took her on up the lake. Watching the sequence still brings tears to my eyes.



Sophie Neville having captured the Amazon, with the lighting cameraman and 35-mm Panavision Camera in her stern. Swallow is moored alongside.

No one had given much consideration to the rowing involved in the story. Built as a run-about boat by William King of Burnham-on-Crouch, *Swallow* has two sets of rowlocks but it was tricky to keep time when she was wired to the camera pontoon. The first scene attempted was when the Boy Roger and I had to row her back from the charcoal burners with Susan at the tiller. We rowed again on Derwentwater, making our way out to Cormorant Island to look for the treasure. It took everything in me, but I later managed to row *Amazon* out of Secret Harbour in one take at the end of a long day's filming. The action was repeated with Denis Lewiston, the lighting-cameraman, and his 35-mm Panavision camera in the stern. Cold, and with wet feet, I completed the scene but had to be carried ashore by a frogman acting as the safety officer. Titty later anchors *Amazon* off Cormorant Island on Derwent Water, but the shot of her wrapped in the sail, sleeping aboard, was taken in the darkened barn at Bank Ground Farm. The fishing scenes were recorded on Elterwater with *Swallow* moored near the reed-beds.

My one regret is that we didn't follow the book when sailing the captured *Amazon* back to Wild Cat Island. The wind was up and Claude Whatham needed Simon to sail *Swallow* ahead of the *Amazon* which was lashed to the pontoon. I originally took the tiller, as Titty is urged to in the story, but had trouble with the rudder, so Susan is at the helm on the cover of the paperbacks and on the DVD brought out to accompany the film.

When we went to post-sync the film, I was somewhat surprised to find *Swallow* outside the Elstree Studios. They had set up a tank on the sound stage so that Bill Rowe, the dubbing editor who was later to win an Oscar for *The Last Emperor*, could capture the noises often taken for granted and yet so evocative of handling wooden boats. I was concerned that *Swallow* had been given away (and she nearly was) but, as Richard Pilbrow had made plans to adapt other Ransome books, she was sent to Mike Turk's vast warehouse in a former submarine depot at Chatham dockyard and stored with maritime props such as the *Grand Turk*, a replica of HMS *Indefatigable*, built in Turkey in 1996 for *Hornblower*. (I was once sent to the warehouse by *Classic Boat* to view *Swallow* and I vividly remember the emotional moment

when she was lifted down from a high rack and set down in front of me; she had her sail rolled up around the mast, with the dummy patch just showing.) When Mike's collection was eventually auctioned in 2010 I was alerted, first by my father, then by Magnus Smith. We found *Swallow*'s details online, took one look at the photos and clubbed together to purchase her, launching SailRansome at the 2011 London Boat Show.



Swallow at Turks Prop Hire, Chatham dockyard

It is wonderful that this year TARS has been able to reunite *Swallow* and *Amazon* for the fiftieth Anniversary of the 1974 film and will preserve them for future generations. Everyone gasped when Rupert Maas valued *Swallow* highly on BBC's *Antiques Roadshow* in 2021, but the true worth of both *Swallow* and *Amazon* is akin to Captain Flint's hidden treasure: instead of gold ingots his trunk contained precious memories that no doubt kept him on course when the storms of life blew in. Just as Arthur Ransome's books

grant us solace, my prayer is that many will be able to grab the chance of sailing the little boats that take us into the stories immortalized on film so long ago.

Of course, the 1974 *Swallow* and *Amazon* had their precursors. Arthur Ransome was taught to sail on Coniston Water by the Collingwoods in a boat they kept below Lane Head, now known as *Swallow I*. *Swallow II*, a sea-going dinghy with a standing lugsail, built by William Crossfield, was sailed by the Ransomes, kept on a mooring in Bowness Bay and looked after by a boatman called John Walker. She was sold in September 1935 and sadly ‘vanished without a trace’. The first *Amazon*, originally named *Mavis* and sailed by the Altounyan family, now resides in the John Ruskin Museum at Coniston where she can be visited much like a great aunt. Ransome’s dinghy *Coch-y-bonddhu* (or *Cocky*), the model for *Scarab* in his books, was acquired and restored by TARS. She is on display at Windermere Jetty, the museum where the fourteen-foot RNSA dinghies used in the 2016 movie of *Swallows and Amazons* have been moored. Some of the steamboats used to dress the Rio scenes set at Bowness-on-Windermere in the 1974 film, such as *Osprey* and George Pattinson’s launch *Lady Elizabeth*, may be in residence as well. Windermere Jetty is currently restoring the steam launch *Esperance*, used by Ransome as his model for the houseboat, which is exciting.



Sophie Neville with Titmouse at Hunter’s Yard

Not so very long ago, a few TARS joined me at Keswick for a talk and screening of *Swallows and Amazons* at the Alhambra cinema when we grabbed the chance to go aboard the *Lady Derwentwater*. Nick Newby explained how our Oscar-winning set dresser, Ian Whittaker, temporarily converted her into Captain Flint's houseboat in 1973.

The boats on the Norfolk Broads stir yet more memories. In 1983, I worked behind-the-scenes on the BBC drama serial of *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*, now available as a DVD. It is entitled *Swallows and Amazons Forever!* as the producer was hoping to adapt more Ransome books. We spent three months filming in East Anglia using the four-berth gaff sloop *Lullaby* to play the *Teasel*, a vintage dinghy for *Titmouse* and a punt for Tom Dudgeon's *Dreadnought*. They are still kept at Hunter's Yard, near Ludham in Norfolk, where you can hire classic boats. While exploring the Broads you can track down the *Death and Glory*, *Janca*, used to play the Hullabaloo's *Margoletta*, and the wherry *Albion* used for *Sir Garnet*, along with yachts such as *Pippa* that were also featured in the serial. Hopefully, Arthur Ransome's 'good little ship' the *Nancy Blackett*, bought with his 'Spanish gold' or royalties, will one day star as *Goblin* in a film adaptation of *We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea*.

Half a century has now passed since the original film *Swallows and Amazons* first came out in cinemas. Thanks go to Magnus Smith, Rob Boden, Pattinson's, The White family, Hunter's Yard and all those who have looked after and lovingly restored the inspirational boats that appear in the movie. They mean so much to so many. And three million cheers to those at TARS who have worked so hard to bring both little ships together. If all goes to plan, you will soon be able to take them out yourselves. When you do, smell the freshness for me. Stroke the varnish, take in the feel of the ropes, the weight of the oars. It may be chilly, there may be a bit of hanging around, but that too is part of the experience of liaising with old boats out on the water.

You can read more of Sophie Neville's memories in *The Making of Swallows and Amazons*, published by the Lutterworth Press and now available as an audiobook narrated by the author.

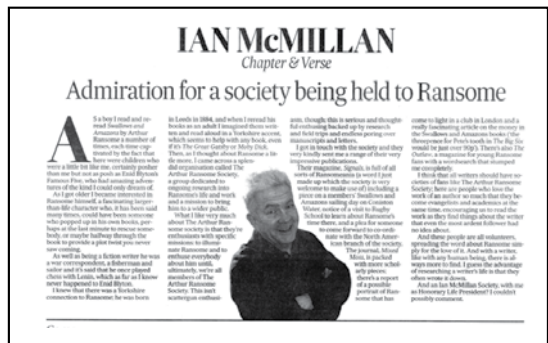
ADMIRATION FOR A SOCIETY BEING HELD TO RANSOME

When the Midlands region asked **Ian McMillan** (poet, journalist and presenter of BBC Radio 3's *The Verb*) if he would give a talk at the 2024 LAGM, we received a reply from his agent stating that Ian no longer wished to travel around the country and instead was concentrating on his writing and radio work. He did, however, believe TARS would make an interesting topic for the radio or print column and we were asked to forward our latest newsletter or journal. Copies of all three of our publications were duly sent off and shortly afterwards, on 4 February, the following article appeared in the *Yorkshire Post*, by whose kind permission it is reproduced here. If we had tried to write our own publicity piece, we could hardly have done better. See what you think!

As a boy I read *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome a number of times, each time captivated by the fact that here were children who were a little like me, certainly posher than me but not as posh as Enid Blyton's Famous Five, who had amazing adventures of the kind I could only dream of. As I got older I became interested in Ransome himself, a fascinating larger-than-life character who, it has been said many times, could have been someone who popped up in his own books, perhaps at the last minute to rescue somebody, or maybe halfway through the book to provide a plot twist you never saw coming.

As well as being a fiction writer he was a war correspondent, a fisherman and sailor and it's said that he once played chess with Lenin, which as far as I know never happened to Enid Blyton.

I knew there was a Yorkshire connection to Ransome: he was born in Leeds in 1883, and when I reread his books as an adult I imagined them written and read aloud in a Yorkshire accent, which seems to help with any book, even if it's *The Great Gatsby* or *Moby Dick*. Then, as I thought about



Ransome a little more, I came across a splendid organisation called The Arthur Ransome Society, a group dedicated to ongoing research into Ransome's life and work and a mission to bring him to the wider public.

What I very much like about The Arthur Ransome Society is that they're enthusiasts with specific missions to illuminate Ransome and to enthuse everybody about him until, ultimately, we're all members of The Arthur Ransome Society. This isn't a scattergun enthusiasm, though: this is serious and thoughtful enthusing backed up by research and field trips and endless poring over manuscripts and letters.

I got in touch with the society and they very kindly sent me a range of their very impressive publications. Their magazine, *Signals*, is full of all sorts of Ransomeania (a word I just made up which the society is very welcome to make use of) including a piece on a members' Swallows and Amazons sailing day on Coniston Water, notice of a visit to Rugby School to learn about Ransome's time there, and a plea for someone to come forward to coordinate with the North American branch of the society. The journal, *Mixed Moss*, is packed with more scholarly pieces: there's a report of a possible portrait of Ransome that has come to light in a club in London and a really fascinating article on money in the *Swallows and Amazons* books (the threepence for Pete's tooth in *The Big Six* would be just over 90p today). There's also *The Outlaw*, a magazine for young Ransome fans with a word search that stumped me completely.

I think that all writers should have societies of fans like The Arthur Ransome Society: here are people who love the work of an author so much that they become evangelists and academics at the same time, encouraging us to read the work as they find things about the writer that even the most ardent follower had no idea about.

And these people are all volunteers, spreading the word about Ransome simply for the love of it. And with a writer, like with any human being, there is always more to find. I guess the advantage of researching a writer's life is that they often wrote it down.

And an Ian McMillan Society, with me as Honorary Life President? I couldn't possibly comment.

TWO ARTHURS AND THE QUAKERS

Winifred Wilson

Both my grandfathers married twice and each of them had two large families, so that I began life with a vast number of uncles and aunts. On the one side were the Ransomes, with in the past a strongly Quaker and East Anglian background and, by the time I was born, an almost unbelievable number of parsons and complex North Country connections with Butterworths, Jacksons, Remingtons and Binyons ...'

Back in 2006, Margaret Ratcliffe, founder of TARS Library, received a parcel of five books from someone who saw the name 'Arthur Harold Ransome' inscribed in them and assumed they had belonged to 'our' Arthur. However, Margaret realised at once that this Arthur was a different person, consulted member Judy Andrews' book *Arthur Ransome's family from 1649-1975* (self-published in 2002) and found Arthur Harold (1872-1943) in one of the many useful family trees. He was the youngest son of John Henry Ransome (1828-1892) and Emily Binyon, whose great-nephew Laurence Binyon was the poet referred to by AR in his autobiography as his 'cousin', whom he approached as a young man when he first moved to London. John Henry was AR's great-uncle, the brother of his grandfather, Thomas. Their father, AR's great-grandfather, was John Atkinson Ransome, the surgeon who left Ipswich and settled in Manchester.

*

In 2011, when TARS Library came into my care, I had a look at the inscriptions in the Quaker books, so-called because they are indeed all related to the Society of Friends (Quakers) in various ways. The donor had, in fact, given TARS first refusal on the books before offering them to the Library of the Society of Friends in London. Here they are, with the inscriptions as they are written in them, in **bold**:

1) *The journal of George Fox: being an account of his life, travels, sufferings, and Christian experiences.* In two volumes, 1902 (1852) (8th edition)

Arthur Harold Ransome
2nd/12th mo/1916 [2 December 1916]

2) *William Penn: founder of Pennsylvania*, 1916, by John W. Graham

Arthur Harold Ransome,
from Emily Susan MacDonald,
and Dora Frances Mary Ransome
14th/10th/1917
“Disce Pati: Vincit qui patitur”

Arthur Harold was born on 14 October 1872, and this was a birthday present from his two elder sisters.

3) *A book of Quaker saints*, 1918 (1917), by L. V. Hodgkin

A. M. Butterworth
Arthur H. Ransome
from
Lucy A. Butterworth
in memory of
Ada M. Butterworth
1925

It seems from this that the book had originally belonged to A. M. Butterworth and was given to Arthur Harold after Ada had died in 1925. Lucy and Ada were sisters-in-law and were both cousins of Arthur Harold.

4) *A testament of devotion: with a biographical memoir by Douglas V. Steere*, 1943, by Thomas R. Kelly

(No inscription)

5) *Elizabeth Fry*, 1909, by Georgina King Lewis

**Motto of
Ransome family:
“Disce pati:
Vincit qui patitur”
“Learn to suffer:
He conquers who suffers”**

**Arthur Harold Ransome
from
Elizabeth Agnes Wood
New Years Day 1917**

On the verso of the front endpaper is the following:

**Richard Ransome, Miller, of North Walsham, born 1649,
was “convinced of truth” about 1676, (owing to
instrumentality of George Fox or Edward Burroughs?),
and for about 15 years suffered imprisonment for
conscience sake –**

**He was forefather of (a) Hitchin (b) Ipswich & (c)
Manchester Ransom(e)s.**

**John Atkinson Ransome, (Manchester), left the Friends,
7th 11th mo. 1836. He and Joseph John Gurney were at the
Hardshaw E. monthly meetings 1836.**

The latter inscription refers to the first Ransome we know about in AR's family tree, as published in Judy Andrews' book. She describes him as:

Richard, a miller of North Walsham and an early, much persecuted Quaker preacher. “Convinced of Truth” 1676. Died of smallpox in Bristol 9.8.1716.

So far, I have found no trace of the donor, Elizabeth Agnes Wood, but she must have known something about the Ransome family, to be able to

quote their motto. The book she gave to Arthur Harold is a children's biography of Elizabeth Fry.

The long inscription may require explanation. As we know, the Ransomes were originally from East Anglia, hence the references to Hitchin and Ipswich (probably meaning the Quaker Meetings in these places). There were also branches of the family who spelt the name without the terminal 'e'. Joseph John Gurney (1788-1847) was a brother of Elizabeth Fry and a prominent Quaker, and the Hardshaw East monthly meetings (regular meetings for business) of 1836 where a controversial paper presented by Isaac Crewdson caused a great disruption. Crewdson's proposal that the light within a person was of more importance than the Bible eventually led a number of people, including John Atkinson Ransome, and indeed whole families, to leave the Quakers in protest. Isaac Crewdson happened to be one of John Atkinson's patients in Manchester.

*

Each of the Quaker books has also been inscribed by a later owner of the books, thus:

Norman L. Ferguson

28th – 7th mo. 1943

Norman was also clearly a Quaker, as he uses their form of writing the date, adopted because the names of the first eight months of the year are derived from pagan gods. So how did he come by the books in the year of Arthur Harold's death? Did AH give them to him before he died? Or did some relative pass them on to him? We can only guess what the relationship might have been, but what I find interesting is that the Ransomes had not been 'Friends', or Quakers, since 1836 and indeed several of them had been ordained in the Church of England, including Arthur Harold, his father and two of his brothers. Had he expressed an interest in learning more about the faith of his ancestors? Or did the donors think he *ought* to know about it?

In my earlier researches I came across an official record of baptisms at St Ann's Church in the centre of Manchester. The first one of relevance to

us was on 31 March 1841, and was of Susan Ransome [child] of John Atkinson Ransome and Susanna (née Hoyle). She was born on 10 March 1834 and became AR's great-aunt Susan. On the same date, her younger sister Edith (1836-1847) was also baptised.

Although most of the children and some of the grandchildren of John Atkinson Ransome were eventually baptised, the list does not include either himself or his wife. He died in 1837, and his second wife, Susannah, in 1880. Remember that one of our inscriptions tells us that he had left the Quakers/Society of Friends only in November 1836. Did that decision kill him? The records of baptism do not include his eldest child, Thomas, who was to be AR's grandfather, nor John Henry, his younger son, who was later ordained priest in the Church of England, and was the father of three more clergymen, including the owner of our books, Arthur Harold.

In an article in *Mixed Moss*, 2007, after Margaret had written about the 'Quaker books' in *Signals*, Judy Andrews speculated as to whether, in spite of the inscription, John Atkinson R. could still have been a Quaker when he died in February 1837, because he was buried beside his first wife, Mary Hunton, in the Manchester Friends' burying ground, and the Quakers had a very strict rule that only their members could be buried in their grounds. However, his daughter Susan's biographical notes are clear: '... our father was buried in the Friends' Meeting House in Mount Street. I can't think why, as he had been baptized and received into the Church'. Perhaps the fact that he and Mary Hunton had both been Quakers when she died in 1815 meant that the rule was waived in his case. Susan herself did not remember her father, as he died before she was three years old, but she writes 'it often comes to my mind now how much we owe to our highminded, upright, genial father, and our sweet, unselfish, loving mother'. Susan wrote the notes at the request of her nephews and nieces – who included AR's father, Cyril.

The Church of England at this time was building churches and ordaining clergy at a rate of knots in the north-west of England, owing to the increase in population caused by the industrial revolution. Did they turn to ex-Quakers as a likely source of candidates? Sadly, many of the churches are

now being closed, including St Matthew's Barrow, where Arthur Harold had also served. (There is, too, an online reference to him as being Vicar of St Mary's Dalton, which does still thrive.)

John Henry Ransome (1828-1892), Arthur Harold's father and Susan's brother, was probably the first in the family to take advantage of *not* being a Quaker and attend university. No 'non-conformists' were allowed to attend Oxford University, nor to graduate from Cambridge University, until the middle of the nineteenth century, so his own father, John Atkinson Ransome (1779-1837), qualified as a surgeon by working an apprenticeship, and his son Joseph (by Mary Hunton) and grandson, another Arthur, followed in his footsteps.

The Rev. Arthur Harold Ransome was among the mourners listed at his mother Emily's funeral in 1904 as 'Rev. Arthur Ransome, St Matthews Barrow (son)'. There are not only many family members, including 'Miss Susan Ransome, The Terrace, Windermere (sister-in-law)', but also 'Miss Rebecca Akister (Grange), Miss M. J. Robinson (Windermere) and Miss S. Blair (Grange) (old servants of 30, 41 and 8 years respectively, and still with the family)'. In AR's *Autobiography*, he describes looking forward to his Sunday after-church visits to Great-aunt Susan as a refuge from Windermere School. 'She lived there with her ancient maid, Mary Jane Robinson', who made toffee for him.



St Oswald's Parish Church, Kirkoswald, Westmorland and Furness

But to return to the Rev. John Henry – he came to my attention again recently when we were in the vicinity of St Oswald’s Parish Church in Cumbria (now Westmorland and Furness), where he was Vicar, and a Canon of Carlisle Cathedral, from 1877 until his death in 1892, in the ancient village of Kirkoswald. I knew about the church from reading Judy Andrews’ book. Here is her description of it:

The church of St Oswald is ancient, with many mediaeval grave-slabs and an early cross-head. The belfry is detached, being on the top of a nearby hill, apparently to ensure that the bells could be heard throughout most of the parish. The present tower is a Victorian replacement for the original Tudor one. On the outside of the church, below the west window, is St Oswald’s well, fed by a stream which flows under the nave of the church ...



St Oswald’s Well

This description has intrigued me since I first read it and so we went to have a look. There on the top of a hill, to the left of the road leaving the village, is the tower, as pictured in Judy Andrews’ book, and there is an ornate gateway to a path, fringed by snowdrops in February, which curves

Two Arthurs and the Quakers

around the hill until it reaches the church in the valley. And sure enough, close to the wall of the church itself, is a slab covering the deep well, with an inscription above it and, adjacent to it, steps going down to the level of the water, with a door into the lower part of the building.

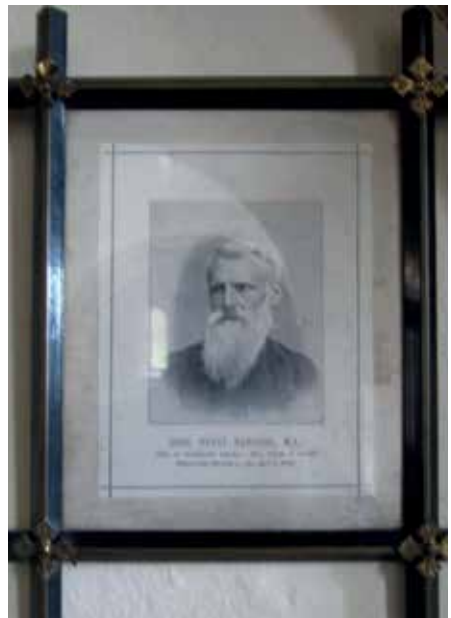
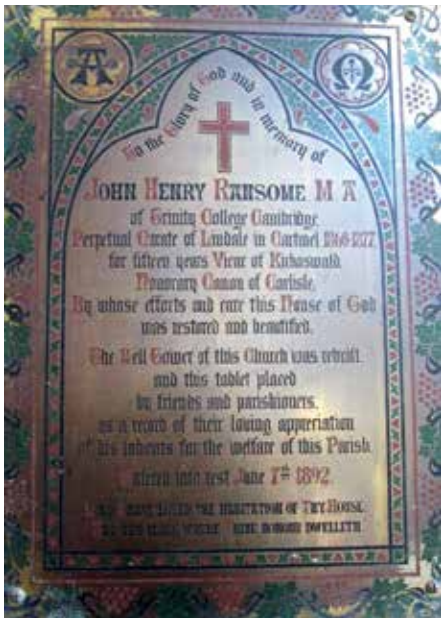


The Snowdrop Path



St Oswald's Tower

Returning in April, we climbed over a stile into the field, and scrambled up the steep hill to the tower itself, where we photographed the inscription in the stonework – ‘This tower was rebuilt 1893 in memory of John Henry Ransome Vicar 1877-1892’. Inside the church is a brass plaque over the pulpit in his memory and, on an adjacent wall, a picture of the man himself, clearly a revered pastor of his people:



Two Arthurs and the Quakers

So, did the young Arthur ever meet this particular great-uncle? I like to think so. The first chapter of his *Autobiography*, including the quotation at the top of this article, would imply that he saw quite a bit of his huge extended family and certainly his father, Cyril, was close to John Henry when he was Perpetual Curate of Lindale-in-Cartmel. As John Henry died in 1892, Arthur could well have met him – and his son Arthur Harold.



The Old Vicarage, Kirkoswald, taken from the top of the tower hill – where the Rev. John Henry and Emily brought up their large family, including Arthur Harold.

Margaret Ratcliffe's *Genetic building blocks: the forebears of Arthur Ransome* (Amazon Publications, 2012) is a fascinating read for anyone interested in the subject, including as it does not only Cyril's previously unpublished autobiography, but also that of his sister Edith which, as Margaret remarks, throws a much happier light on their childhood, and is full of interesting details and some very funny stories.

Judy Andrews and others quote from Great-aunt Susan's biographical notes, which were published within a large tome by Harold Waring Atkinson, entitled *The families of Atkinson of Roxby (Lincs) and Thorne and Dearman of Braithwaite: and families connected with them especially ... Ransome ...*

I omit the rest of the long subtitle. Harold self-published this record of his researches in a limited edition of 500 copies in 1933, and TARS Library has now acquired one of them. The families recorded are all Quakers and the connections between them are numerous. There are also extracts from letters of various Ransome family members, including one from John Atkinson R. to his sister, Hannah Martin, which refers to the disruption of 1836 and his own bitter feelings about it.

This book weighs over two kilograms, so I don't think Christine Rae will be posting it out on loan but, on your visit to TARS Library, do ask her for a look at it.

COME ALONG

Arthur Ransome seemed to show no interest in canals – in the early twentieth century they were, after all, industrial waterways in gradual decline and leisure boating hadn't yet arrived. However, the numerous narrowboat names which remind of Swallows, Amazons and Coots suggest that there are now a good many Ransome enthusiasts on the cut. *Mixed Moss 2022* carried a photograph of narrowboat *Mixed Moss* and here is one of a canal tug with an obvious debt to *Coot Club*.



RATTLETRAP

David Hambleton tells the intriguing tale of Arthur, two Aidas, an Alex, a Robin and a rattly car

In 2010 I wrote in *Mixed Moss* about my quest to track down Ransome's Trojan car and establish whether it was the basis for 'Rattletrap' in the *Swallows and Amazons* novels. I had discovered from Ransome's diaries that he bought his Trojan on 10 October 1928 from a lady whose name I couldn't decipher and owned it until the early autumn of 1934. I had also found an out-of-focus photograph of the car in the Leeds University collection which showed it to be a Trojan Three-Door Tourer, a model manufactured from 1925 until around 1928. Sadly, despite my best efforts, I could not make out more than a couple of the numbers of the registration – which were ?54? – but visits to and letters from people who had seen or ridden in Ransome's Trojan revealed it was khaki in colour and originally fitted with solid tyres. These must have been changed later as the photograph, which dates from the early 1930s, shows the car with pneumatic tyres.

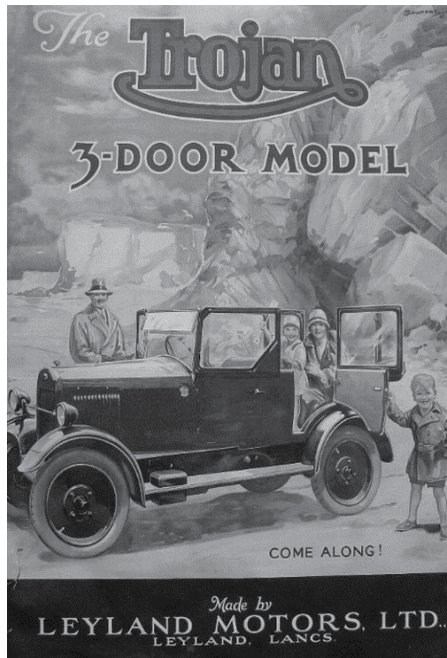


One of Ransome's 'Hollywoods' for Winter Holiday, showing his Trojan in the background. Photo with kind thanks to Leeds University

It came to light that during most of the time Ransome had his Trojan he owned a more comfortable Clyno 13, registration number NF129, as well.



This was puzzling because at the time it was unusual for people to own more than one car and particularly strange for Ransome when in the late 1920s he was fairly short of money. I suspected it was because the Trojan was very slow but extremely good in conditions where these days only Land Rovers are happy – so an ideal car for Ransome to get to and from his remote home at Low Ludderburn during the winter – while the Clyno had the speed for longer journeys in the summer months. Nevertheless, it still seemed a huge luxury for Ransome at a time when he wasn't given to spending his money



So that is where I reached in my quest in 2010. However, a year later, after an adapted version of the article appeared in the Trojan Owners Club magazine, a member asked if I had a photo of the unreadable signature as his brother was a handwriting expert. I immediately sent off a photo and a couple of days later I had the ‘translation’. The lady who sold Ransome his Trojan car was Aida Deborah Starr Borchgrevink. Her descendants all appeared to be Norwegian and, thanks to the fact that the full Norwegian tax records for every citizen are available online, I was able to discover a postal address for one of her great-grandchildren. So I wrote a letter to Norway and two weeks later received a phone call from a lady in Bath. She was the great-granddaughter of Aida and still had some of her letters and journals. The journal entries told me that Aida had bought the Trojan at the beginning of July 1925 and that its registration letters were YK (issued in London in June-July 1925, though sadly she hadn’t noted down the full registration). It also became clear that Aida was a close friend of Robert Allason Furness, Robin to his friends, who was also a school friend of Ransome and with whom Ransome had stayed when visiting Egypt.



Aida Deborah Starr Borchgrevink

But there was a puzzle. It appeared that Aida was still occasionally using the Trojan in the years after she had sold it to Ransome, which didn't at first make sense. The only other new information I had was a letter Christina Hardymont found for me in the Leeds archive – from Aida Foster, Aida Borchgrevink's daughter, to Ransome. Dated 31 August 1933, it mentioned seeing Ransome out in 'the' Trojan and enquired about coming round for tea. It is significant that the car is referred to as 'the', implying common knowledge of the car, and it also shows a friendship between Aida Foster and the Ransomes.

We now come to last summer when I read Margaret Ratcliffe's latest book, *No Holds Barred* (Amazon Publications, 1922), a collection of the diary entries of Evgenia Ransome from 1927 to 1933. Thus armed, I decided to put all of Arthur's, Evgenia's and Aida's diary entries into date order on the same piece of paper and a picture of what really happened started to develop. I talked again to Aida's great-granddaughter, who pointed me to King's College, Cambridge.

*

Here it is time to tell you about Aida Borchgrevink, a lady it would have been wonderful to know. She was born Aida Deborah Starr in 1861 in Oaklands, California. Her parents were Mary Ann Teegarden and Abraham Dubois Starr who were descended from early settlers in California. In the 1870s Aida was taken by her mother to Europe. Initially it was to seek medical advice, but she stayed to be educated in Paris and Dresden, returning to Oaklands for just a few months each summer. In 1880 she accompanied her mother on a trip up the Nile. One of her fellow passengers was a Norwegian barrister, Johannes Berg Borchgrevink, the half-brother of the famous Norwegian Antarctic explorer Carstens Borchgrevink. They fell in love and decided to marry, but Aida decided she would wait until she was able to talk to Johannes in Norwegian, so she returned to Oaklands with a Norwegian maid to help her learn the language.

Aida and Johannes were married in 1882, by which time Johannes had been appointed judge in the International Mixed Courts in Alexandria.

They bought The Cliff House in the Ramleh suburb of Alexandria and later also bought a summerhouse in the mountains above Oslo. They had two children – Aida Louise, who was educated by a governess in Egypt and then went to boarding school in England, and Harold Starr, who was educated in Norway and later settled there. Hence the family is today split between England and Norway. Aida was clearly quite a character as she kept her maiden name as well as adopting her husband's name and gave her son her maiden name as a middle name – both very unusual for the time.



The Cliff House

Johannes died in 1910, but Aida stayed on in Egypt and developed a new life amongst some of the more colourful characters of Alexandria. One of these, who became a very close friend, was Robin Furness, who was 22 years her junior. Their friendship remained extremely close until the end of Aida's life.

Robin Furness, born in 1883, attended Rugby School with Ransome and then went on to King's College, Cambridge. There he became close friends with John Maynard Keynes, though he never followed Keynes or his own brother, John, in joining the famous Apostles of Cambridge (it was from the Apostles that the Bloomsbury Group developed). Robin was bisexual and had many affairs as a student. After university he entered the Egyptian Service in 1906 and had an illustrious career in Egypt until the 1950s, eventually receiving a knighthood in 1951. He was also an accomplished Greek scholar and published various translations over the years.

After a meeting with Robin in the early summer of 1911, John Maynard Keynes wrote in his diary that 'Even Robin was talking of getting married',

which seemed to Keynes to be a bit of a betrayal of his sexuality. This made me wonder if, in fact, Aida was Robin's proposed wife and a letter from Aida to Keynes (21 May 1911) in the King's College archive seems to be a response to Keynes's disapproval of such a marriage. Perhaps it was Keynes's intervention, along with the 'family objections' that Aida mentions, which resulted in the marriage never taking place, but Aida and Robin remained an almost inseparable couple for the rest of Aida's life.

In 1913, whilst touring England with Robin, Aida spent time in the Duddon valley. She saw Hole House above Ulpha and negotiated with Mrs Stillings, the farmer's wife, to rent rooms there the following summer, for herself, her daughter and son-in-law (Aida and Guy Foster), and their daughter. But the 1914 stay only lasted a few weeks before the Fosters were called back to Egypt when war broke out. After the war, the Fosters continued to rent rooms each summer at Hole House, whilst Aida rented High Hollin House nearby.



Aida Foster

Aida became close friends with E.M. Forster who was working in Egypt during the war and actually hand-wrote one of his manuscripts for him. She was also good friends with Viscount Allenby and Robin's brother John, who was headmaster at Khedivia Secondary School in Cairo. Through Forster she became friends with other Bloomsbury Group members, Clive Bell and Robert Trevelyan. John Furness once described Aida as 'an ebullient, romantic woman who sang Wagner at the top of her voice while she drove'. All these people lived in and around Alexandria and the suburb of Ramleh.

Rattletrap

It was the norm for expatriates living in Egypt to spend the very hot summer months away from the country and after the war Aida would return to High Hollin House for the summer. On 1 May 1925 she wrote a letter from Egypt which looks forward to High Hollin House and to the new Trojan which she had probably ordered directly from Trojan in Croydon, hence the London registration. On 3 July 1925 we learn that she has just arrived at High Hollin and is 'patting YK' rather nervously to try to 'make friends'. Robin is with her, so whether the Trojan was delivered to High Hollin for Aida or was brought up by Robin is not clear, but either way she had yet to drive it. A few days later she talks of a trip in the Trojan, visiting the Trojan agent, Mr Irving, and picking up a man who had daringly driven a Trojan over Hardknott Pass and who took them for an off-road driving lesson. The Trojan was very different from a normal car of its time, so it is not surprising that Aida and Ransome, both of whom had been driving for years, had to get used to it. Evgenia, also an experienced driver, apparently never got the hang of the Trojan and was happy to remain a passenger.

Thus a long-term relationship began between Aida and the local Ulpha garage owners, Mr Dawson and his daughters Vera and Phyllis. Mr Dawson, who had built up a shop and garage beside the upper road bridge in Ulpha, took on the maintenance of Aida's car and was left to look after it whilst she was in Egypt. Mr Dawson had his own car as well, a Stanley Steamer, which he used to give tours to visitors and to hire out as a taxi.



The Trojan Car at Dawson's Garage. The Boy at the Wheel is Vera Dawson's Cousin.

*

That, then, is Aida, but now to the problem of her Trojan and Ransome. Arthur seems to have first met Aida on 10 October 1928, when he bought the Trojan from her; presumably they were introduced to each other by Robin. But then on 17 May 1929 Aida is writing of using the Trojan and further mentions it through the summer of 1929. There is a lovely matching pair of diary entries, with Aida describing a long trip in the car with Robin, and Evgenia recording Robin and Aida coming for tea. Ulpha to Low Ludderburn is quite a drive for a Trojan! There are other trips mentioned by Aida and the Ransomes, with Aida using the car in the summer and the Ransomes in the winter. Then on 1 October 1931 Evgenia writes in her diary that Mrs Borchgrevink has died at High Hollin House. On the 13 October Arthur writes that 'Furness and Mrs Foster brought the Trojan over from Seathwaite' and Evgenia writes of 'Furness and Mrs Foster who is very like her mother'. After this the Trojan is mentioned frequently in the Ransomes' diaries and indeed becomes their only car when they sell their Clyno 13 on 7 January 1932, just before sailing to Aleppo.

The story continues as there was now obviously a friendship between the Ransomes and Aida Foster. When the Ransomes stopped off in Alexandria on their way to Aleppo on the 24 January 1932, they were picked up by the Fosters and taken to The Cliff House for lunch and tea. The next day they entertained the Fosters to lunch on board their ship. The Fosters inherited The Cliff House from Aida and continued to live there until it was compulsorily purchased and knocked down to make way for a new road just before the Second World War.

What, then, can we conclude about the little Trojan car, registration YK?54? I believe Robin Furness must have suggested a 'car share' scheme between his two friends, Arthur and Aida. Arthur and Evgenia needed an off-road car for the winter to enable them to get out and about from their remote home, while Aida saw that her car was not getting much use at the Dawsons' but still wanted to drive it in the summer months. So I think the car was sold to Arthur at a low price on 10 October 1929, on the understanding that Aida had full use of the car during the summer; and, of course, Robin Furness and Aida Foster brought the car back to him very

soon after Aida's death. Such an arrangement would also explain why Ransome kept the Clyno 13 until after Aida died, at which point the car-share scheme would have come to an end.

After Aida's death Robin and Aida Foster commissioned a memorial bridge on their land in her memory. It was built by Mr W. Grisenthwaite and has plaques with Aida's initials and a star to represent her maiden name. The bridge and Crag End Wood were later donated to the National Trust by Aida Foster and Robin in 1933.



Aida's Bridge

So that, I think, is how Aida Borchgrevink, Aida Foster, Robin Furness and their home town of 'Alex' are linked to Ransome and his Trojan car. But I'm sure it is not the whole story. I would still love to get in touch with Mary Alison Anthea Furness (Viscountess Waldegrave), Robin's daughter, who married very late in life in 1945. She might just have Robin's diaries!

LIFE AT LOW LUDDERBURN

Helen Caldwell, who has lived at Low Ludderburn for the past 44 years, reflects on the changes since the Ransomes' time there.

It is 98 years since the Ransomes bought Low Ludderburn and for the last 44 of those intervening years it has been my home. What changes have there been? The Amazon publication of *No Holds Barred – Evgenia Ransome's Diaries 1927-1933*, edited by Margaret Ratcliffe, has added interesting domestic detail to the information contained in Arthur's *Autobiography* and his letters published in *Signalling from Mars*.

Most people will be familiar with the story of the purchase – the failure to find any suitable property the Ransomes could afford in the Windermere area; the estate agent's diffident suggestion of this small cottage; the adjacent barn which Evgenia immediately envisaged being turned into Arthur's workroom; and the enchanting view down the Winster Valley, across the Kent Estuary to Arnside and to the Forest of Bowland beyond, while to the east Ingleborough's distinctive shape takes one into Yorkshire.

The modest price of £550, agreed on that first visit, reflected the lack of services which we would now consider essential. There was no piped water supply, although the sale contract included the right to install a pipeline from the well 100 yards up the hill. So drinking water had to be carried from that well and a large metal tank collected water from the roof of the barn/workroom for washing – far from convenient and a source of considerable frustration for Evgenia when cold weather caused the tap to freeze up. An earth closet in a little building a few yards from the back door must have been their only toilet.

The lack of an electricity or gas supply was normal in rural areas at the time and in fact mains electricity did not arrive here until 1964. Lighting was provided by paraffin lamps and candles: in winter filling the lamps and trimming the wicks would be a regular afternoon chore while there was still

daylight. An open fire burning wood is mentioned by Evgenia and a hint that they might have had a paraffin cooker. The extent to which we now rely on our electricity supply was brought home to us very abruptly last year when Storm Arwen cut us off for a fortnight.

The lack of a telephone must have been an inconvenience in Arthur's communications with the *Manchester Guardian*, even if the signalling system devised with Colonel Kelsall was adequate to make arrangements for going fishing or hosting afternoon tea. Little wonder that Evgenia became preoccupied with the time of the postal delivery each day when Arthur, in poor health, was sent abroad by the *MG* leaving her at Ludderburn. While she fretted over deliveries by bicycle from Windermere any later than 10 a.m., our post now rarely arrives before 1.30 p.m. in a van. But we have the advantage of emails as well as landline and mobile phones, the post mostly bringing unwanted circulars and begging letters from charities.

Frequent references to problems with the Ransomes' car are a reminder of how the reliability of motors has improved over the years. Relatively few drivers today will, like Evgenia, have had to use a starting handle (and been instructed on the stance required to avoid injury to the hand or shins if the engine 'kicked back'). Apart from starting problems, their most frequent issue was with broken springs – mentioned on at least three occasions. Was this due to the state of the roads or the design of the car? Their experiences of blown gaskets, a radiator leak, carburettor problems and the need for decarbonising (decoking) the engine were all relatively common even 50 years ago.

However, repair workshops were much more plentiful back then and they undertook repairs on the spot rather than 'We'll order the part, it should be here next week'. Even in the 1970s there were three such garages in Bowness, two of them associated with the big hotels. Today there are none in Bowness and only one in Windermere.

In spite of the unreliability, the Ransomes did not hesitate to drive some distance to visit friends or to fish an unfamiliar river. Day fishing trips to Appleby and to Hawes were typical, for example, and weekends further afield. Driving tests were not introduced until 1935, for new drivers only, so

both Arthur and Evgenia will have been self-taught. However, the Trojan which they bought from Aida Borchgrevink in October 1928 was notoriously difficult and was left to Arthur to drive.¹

There were occasions when this left Evgenia alone at Ludderburn without transport and very dependent on their friends Colonel and Mrs Kelsall at Barkbooth. Evgenia was sometimes invited to stay there while restoring order and warmth to Ludderburn after a winter absence. Barkbooth was a relatively modern (1903) and spacious house with amenities such as a plentiful piped water supply, central heating, and lighting by gas from a private supply.² One can imagine Evgenia gratefully sinking into a hot bath there. It is interesting that in the diaries we never learn the Kelsalls' Christian names.



Low Ludderburn today. The window in the barn and the wooden garage were both the Ransomes' additions.

Whereas we now have the option of food deliveries by refrigerated van from several different supermarkets, travel to Windermere or Bowness seems to have been the only option used by Evgenia. Her diaries record that she sometimes walked to Windermere to shop (5½ miles each way) or

caught the bus to Bowness from the main road 1½ miles away. There is no suggestion that she used the village shop at Bowland Bridge (now closed) although that would have involved a much shorter walk.

Evgenia was a keen gardener and must have grown some of their food. There is no complaint about the wild deer (red and roe) which made vegetable growing virtually impossible for me in later years but she does record damage by escaped sheep. Both she and Arthur took an interest in the birds in the garden and recorded the progress of a nesting spotted flycatcher and a redstart – both species which I regret are increasingly rare in this locality. Arthur mentions seeing a swallow but I was surprised that there was no record of their nesting in the stables, as they have done every year since we moved here. In a letter to Tabitha, Arthur talks of feeding the birds and comments that the marsh tit is his favourite – mine too!



Dangerous beams

Both Evgenia (in 1927) and Arthur (in 1933) sustained broken ankles, and in August 1928 Evgenia fell downstairs. She was lucky to get away with a badly cut elbow and bruised ribs because the stone staircase, with its

narrow treads worn smooth by three and a half centuries of use, was and remains a serious hazard. The low beams also provide a risk of concussion for anyone over 5' 5" and it must have taken a little while for both Arthur and Evgenia to get into the habit of ducking under them without thinking.



And dangerous stairs

Altogether, Ludderburn was far from being an ideal home, although we must remember that Arthur and Evgenia were both accustomed to the cold of Russian winters and the very restricted space afforded by life aboard *Racundra*. After ten years on Cartmel Fell the Ransomes decided to move to East Anglia. The success of the children's books meant that they could have afforded the piped water supply which was immediately installed by their successor at Ludderburn,³ but the move was also motivated by a longing to sail larger boats than *Swallow* on more extensive waters than Windermere. Nevertheless, Ludderburn was remembered fondly by them and they never stayed for as long at any of their subsequent homes.

As I write this in January, I can see the first snowdrops emerging which carpet the orchard each February, apart from one year when the red deer inexplicably decided they were edible. As Arthur reported, the snowdrops

are followed by wild daffodils in March and then bluebells in April/May. Combined with the unparalleled view and the history of the house, they make it difficult for me to imagine living anywhere else.



¹ See article on Arthur's Trojan on p. 30.

² Dick Kelsall wrote: My parents moved into 'Barkbooth' on 21 April 1923. There was a small stone building in the field to the east of the house which housed a water-powered petrolgas plant supplying gas for illumination in 'Barkbooth' using incandescent mantles. Water was supplied by the reservoirs on the higher ground.

³ Ethel Rubina Johnson, aunt of Amy Johnson, the pioneering aviator.

ARTHUR RANSOME, RUPERT HART-DAVIS, AND THE MARINERS LIBRARY

Donald Tunnicliff Rice

In 1941, while serving in the Coldstream Guards, Rupert Hart-Davis received a letter from David Garnett in response to a letter he'd written. 'I suppose if they don't kill you, or cripple you, you will remain in the army till after the war. Have you thought of what you'll do then? I ask because your letter has suddenly put into my head that you should set up your own account as a publisher, and I might conceivably join you if I have any capital at that time. I may have.'¹

The two men had become acquainted when Hart-Davis, prior to his military service, was employed as a director at Jonathan Cape, and Garnett, a member of the Bloomsbury Group and co-founder of Nonesuch Press, was a sometime reader. In making his suggestion, Garnett was taking a particularly sanguine view of the future, but fortunately the war did come to an end and the right side won.

Although not keen on returning to Jonathan Cape, Hart-Davis wrote a letter to Cape outlining the conditions of his re-employment that included a doubling of his pre-war salary. Cape, a well-known skinflint, turned him down flat. After considering a number of prospects in the publishing world, he decided to take up Garnett's suggestion. Garnett was still willing to invest in the project and to offer his expertise where needed, but he had no interest in helping to manage the day-to-day affairs. To assist in that department they recruited Teddy Young, a decorated submarine captain who was currently working at World Press. He turned out to be an excellent choice and was crucial to the firm's reputation as a publisher of high-quality books. He wasn't, however, able to invest more than a few hundred pounds

in the venture. Hart-Davis sold his allotted shares in Jonathan Cape for £3,000 and tossed that into the pot. Garnett and his family added £10,000 more. The surgeon and author Geoffrey Keynes chipped in £2,000 as did Hart-Davis's closest friend, Peter Fleming.

Another early investor – at £500 – was Arthur Ransome. They'd met during Hart-Davis's tenure at Jonathan Cape, the publisher of Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* series. As a junior partner, Hart-Davis had been given the chore of dealing with rude, difficult, and less important authors. Yet somehow he was assigned to Ransome, an important children's author and not the least bit difficult. It has been suggested that any difficulties relating to Ransome might have been associated with his wife, Evgenia, but that's another story. At any rate, the two men became great friends with many shared interests.

By the time Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd became an officially registered company in March 1946, it was capitalised to the tune of £30,000. That would equal approximately £1.6 million in today's money. At first glance that might seem like a lot, but it was hardly sufficient. It must be remembered that as a new publisher Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd had no backlist to provide income. Until the first book was published and began selling, it would be all outgoings: advances, salaries, rent, utilities, paper manufacturers, printers, and so on.

Undercapitalisation was to be a chronic condition for the company. In 1950, it was badly in need of £10,000 and Hart-Davis approached Ransome for an additional £5,000. 'I feel we are old enough friends for you not to mind my asking. Nor would I ask at all if my confidence in the firm's success in the long term was not great.' But Ransome replied that he couldn't even 'dream of buying any more shares at present. Sir Stafford Cripps's bony fingers grip my throat.'²² Cripps was Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time. Then there appeared an angel in the form of a wealthy Swiss bibliophile who added £8,000 and Hart-Davis was able to breathe freely, at least for a while.

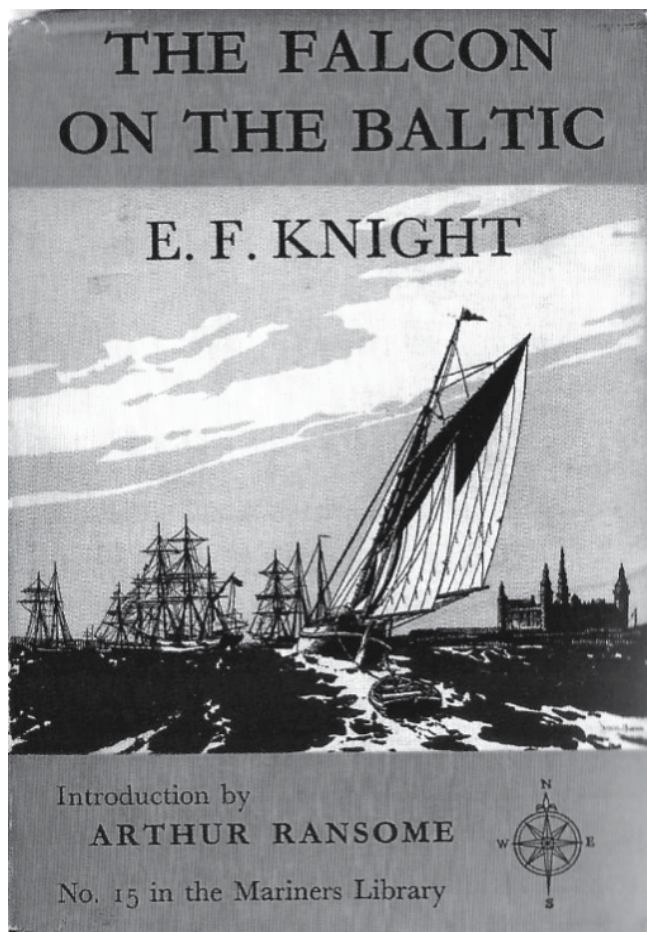
Ransome may have been a minor investor, but he became a major contributor to the publisher's success in other ways. In the epilogue to

Arthur Ransome's autobiography, Hart-Davis mentions a conversation he had with Garnett about the possibility of publishing a nautical book to please their junior partner, Teddy Young. "What about circumnavigators," I said. "Captain Cook?" David said, "Slocum?", but that famous sailor was only a name to both of us. At that moment the telephone rang. It was Arthur, anxious to apologize for something. "I'll forgive you", I said, "if you'll tell me about Slocum." "Joshua Slocum", said Arthur, "wrote the best sailing book in the world, and if you republish it I'll write you an introduction for nothing." "Done," said I."³

That conversation marked the birth of the Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd series, The Mariners Library. Captain Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone around the World*, containing Ransome's promised introduction, was published in 1948 and it sold quite well.⁴ Hart-Davis admitted that it 'was not a literary masterpiece', but he noted that it would be 'excellent reading for boys and sailors', the latter of which we can assume meant 'people who sail', as opposed to members of the Royal Navy.⁵

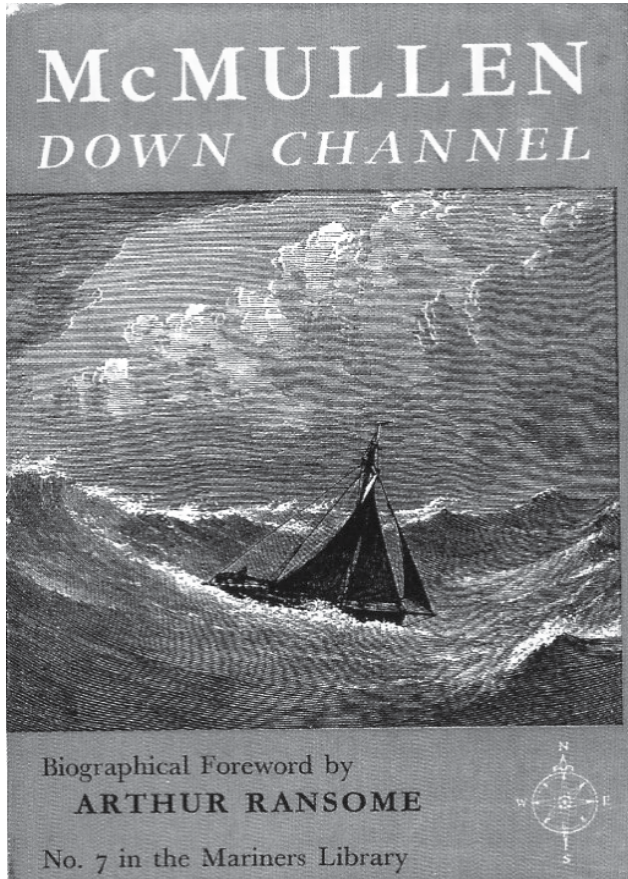
Slocum's book set the tone for the following forty-seven titles published in the series over the next twenty years, including Ransome's *Racundra's First Cruise* in slot No. 38 in 1958. For the most part they were reprints of small boat cruises, many of which were already classics of the genre. Ransome's participation didn't stop there. Hart-Davis gratefully acknowledged his enthusiastic assistance, noting that he 'acted as godfather and nanny to the series. No title was included without his approval.'⁶ And Ransome wasn't shy about giving his advice. When Hart-Davis queried him about including Charles Knight's *Cruise of the Alerte*, Ransome urged him instead to choose Knight's *The Falcon on the Baltic*. The *Alerte*, he pointed out, was a big vessel with a crew of thirteen, whereas the *Falcon* was a converted commercial lifeboat with a crew of exactly two: Knight and one other. Why should this matter? Because in the post-war period many people were converting ship's boats for cruising adventures and therefore such a book would find more interest among buyers. Furthermore, 'It is a real beauty of a book, from the sailing point of view, and from the merely human. It is without one single dull paragraph.... If you have not read it, I can lend you my copy, but God

preserve you if you lose it, for I read it at least once a year.²⁷ Eventually both books were published.



Hart-Davis pointed out that, in addition to Slocum's *Sailing Alone around the World*, Ransome wrote introductions to *Down Channel* by R. T. McMullen (1949), *The Cruise of the Teddy* by Erling Tambs (1949), *The Falcon on the Baltic* by E. F. Knight (1951), *The Cruise of the Alerte* by E. F. Knight (1952), *The Cruise of the Kate* by E. E. Middleton (1953), and *The Voyage Alone in the Yawl Rob Roy* by John MacGregor (1954). The implication was that Ransome wrote these introductions for The Mariners Library editions. This isn't quite accurate. The introduction to *Down Channel* was originally written for the 1893 Horace Cox edition by McMullens's friend, the yacht designer Dixon Kemp. When George Allen & Unwin reprinted the book in 1931, they

retained that introduction and tasked Ransome with writing a biographical foreword. Both the introduction and foreword were included in The Mariners Library edition of 1949, with only a few changes to a Note appended by Ransome.



The situation with Erling Tambs's *The Cruise of the 'Teddy'* was similar. In this case Ransome had written the introduction for a 1933 edition published by Jonathan Cape, and Hart-Davis reprinted it. And it probably should be noted that the introduction to *Alerte* is a truncated version of that to *Falcon*, starting with the ninth paragraph and having the first sentence altered.⁸ This leaves the total number of introductions written specifically for The Mariners Library at only four and not seven, as is often reported. This isn't to diminish Ransome's role in the development of the series, but only to set the record straight.



Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd published many other nautical titles in addition to those in The Mariners Library and for one of them – *The Wind in the Sails*, a historical sailing fantasy by the French author Jacques Perret – Ransome played an important role. The truth is, he played three important roles. First, he was instrumental in getting it published. Second, because it was ‘so abominably translated’ from the French, he and Richard Garnett (David’s son) laboured mightily to put it into publishable form. It required so much work, in fact, that Garnett later wrote, ‘Ransome threatened that if we did not leave the original translator’s name off the title page he would add ‘with several hundred corrections by another hand’.⁹ And, third, Ransome favourably reviewed the book for *The Sunday Times*,¹⁰ an act that doesn’t seem quite sporting, considering his involvement.

So appreciated were Ransome’s contributions – along with his insistence that he not be paid a shilling in return – that in 1949 Hart-Davis gave him a copy of the twelve-volume (plus supplement) *Oxford English Dictionary*,

which he knew Ransome coveted. Nothing could have pleased Ransome more. ‘Not one of my hats,’ he wrote to Hart-Davis, ‘will any longer fit my head as I go prancing round, the owner of a *Great Oxford Dictionary*. Long ago, in the time of the Zulu wars, Sir Garnet Wolseley told the drill sergeant of my prep school that the British soldier should walk “as if one side of the street belonged to him and he expected the other shortly”. What sort of walk would he have prescribed for owners of *Great Oxford English Dictionaries*? Hang it, with that book in my room, I have BOTH sides of the street already.’¹¹ When Ransome died in 1967 he left the dictionary to Hart-Davis.

Ransome had also written in his letter, ‘Are you sure your fellow Directors have not passed a vote of censure on you for gross extravagance? What chance has the firm got of ultimate success if it begins by hurling *Great Oxford English Dictionaries* quite unnecessarily at people who never expected anything of the kind?’¹² Though written tongue-in-cheek, Ransome may have been expressing a genuine concern. He was obviously aware of the company’s undercapitalisation.

It was not for nothing that Hart-Davis was referred to as ‘The King of Editors’. Among the 600-plus books published under his imprint there were any number of best-selling titles: Stephen Potter’s *The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship*, Gerald Durrell’s *The Bafut Beagles*, Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, Alistair Cooke’s *Letters from America*, and so on. He also had a hand in many notable literary titles and collections of letters. More than twenty writers dedicated books to him. Unfortunately, as his friend Ernest Mehew noted, ‘Rupert had more expertise in books than in business.’¹³

By 1955 it was obvious that the company could survive only through a merger or an outright purchase by another publisher, which turned out to be the case. The buyer was Heinemann’s, the firm at which Hart-Davis started out in the publishing business as an underpaid assistant in 1929. The Rupert Hart-Davis imprint was retained along with Hart-Davis’s editorial independence. During this period *Racundra’s First Cruise* and a dozen or so other titles were added to The Mariners Library. The situation with Heinemann, however, was far from being idyllic, and in 1961 Rupert Hart-

Davis Ltd was sold to the American firm, Harcourt Brace. Harcourt Brace, in turn, sold it to Granada in 1963, at which time Hart-Davis retired from publishing and spent his last years doing what he liked best, writing and editing – including, in effect, writing Ransome’s autobiography.

When he died Ransome left behind what Philip Ziegler described as ‘a jumble of uncoordinated passages, repetitive, inaccurate and with only three or four pages to cover the thirty-five years since the publication of *Swallows and Amazons*.’¹⁴ As we know, Hart-Davis sorted it all out wonderfully. The historian A.J.P. Taylor described it in *The Observer* as the ‘most enchanting book of the year, or indeed of any year’.¹⁵ The degree of Hart-Davis’s involvement in the ‘autobiography’ also explains the unlikely fact that his name is not mentioned even once in the entire text.

By the late 1960s, The Mariners Library had run its course. Booksellers were placing fewer and fewer orders, and just four more titles were added to the series, with Eric Newby’s *The Last Grain Race* becoming No. 48 in 1968. Yet the series lives on; used copies abound online and many titles have been reprinted, particularly those with Ransome’s introductions. In his biography of Ransome, Hugh Brogan wrote that the introductions ‘make up a miniature history of cruising books. ... They are vastly superior work, written in the ease of old acquaintance with the books themselves and with their subject, small-boat, seagoing navigation. With unassuming authority Ransome indicates what a good cruise-book ought to be: how, for example, it ought to contain plenty of useful information for yachtsmen likely to follow in the author’s track. But the strongest impression these prefaces are likely to leave is their writer’s relish in human individuality. ... It is a wonderful portrait gallery, and one of Ransome’s worthiest achievements.’¹⁶

It was, perhaps, with those thoughts in mind that Christina Hardyment gathered Ransome’s introductions into *Ransome on Blue Water Sailing* (Amazon Publications, 1999) along with seventy-two of Ransome’s book reviews and, as a bonus, his essay ‘Saturday to Saturday’, a description of a cruise in the *Nancy Blackett* from Harwich to Portsmouth and back.

Those of us who enjoy opening a book and devouring its contents aren’t usually aware of the long, circuitous, and sometimes tedious processes by

which these delights are placed in our hands. It's good now and then to remind ourselves.

¹ Rupert Hart-Davis, *Halfway to Heaven: Concluding Memoirs of a Literary Life* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), pp. 2-3.

² Philip Ziegler, *Hart-Davis: Man of Letters* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004), p. 148.

³ Rupert Hart-Davis, Epilogue in *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 354.

⁴ As Ransome wrote in his introduction, 'Other men may repeat the feat. No other man can be the first.' At the time of this writing 220 sailors have completed the solo journey, and in 1968 one of them managed to accomplish a new 'first.' Robin Knox-Johnston was the first ever to make a *nonstop* solo circumnavigation. Then in 1978 there occurred yet another 'first' – one that Ransome hadn't even imagined. Krystyna Chojnowska-Liskiewicz became the first woman to make the solo journey.

⁵ Ziegler, p. 146

⁶ Hart-Davis, Epilogue, p. 354.

⁷ Hugh Brogan, ed., *Signalling from Mars: The Letters of Arthur Ransome* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), pp. 329-30.

⁸ Wayne G. Hammond, *Arthur Ransome: A Bibliography*, (New Castle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press), pp. 200-1, 203-5, 210-7, 211-4.

⁹ Richard Garnett, 'Rupert Hart-Davis Limited: A Brief History', *The Book Collector*, Vol. 50, No. 4, 2001, p. 399.

¹⁰ Christina Hardyment, *Ransome on Blue Water Sailing* (Kendal: Amazon Publications, 1999), p. 119.

¹¹ Sir Garnet Wolseley was the actual model for Gilbert and Sullivan's 'modern Major-General'.

¹² Brogan, *Signalling*, p. 328.

¹³ Ernest Mehew, 'The King of Editors', *The Wildean*, No. 17, July 2000, p. 51.

¹⁴ Ziegler, pp. 258-9.

¹⁵ http://allthingsransome.net/literary/rev_au.htm

¹⁶ Hugh Brogan, *The Life of Arthur Ransome* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 414.

‘SWALLOWS AND AMAZONS AS SEEN FROM ABROAD’

Kirsty Nichol Findlay

I visited the ‘Swallows and Amazons as Seen from Abroad’ exhibition at Brantwood, Coniston, on the last day. How I wished I had managed to get there sooner! Then I could have gone back – and back again! This was a beautifully curated show of quite major significance in many ways, and not by any means of interest only to readers of Ransome. The venue itself was lovely – a high-ceilinged square stone room, the Severn Studio, part of the complex of original buildings at Brantwood, a cool, quiet, flag-stoned space.

Immediately my attention was taken by a series of large accomplished atmospheric paintings hung at the highest level, above the display-boards



Photograph: Paul Flint

which were at human height around the walls. At first I assumed these impressive works were not part of the Ransome-related exhibition, but some sort of permanent attribute of the space. *By no means!* They were the work of Zdeněk Burian (1905-1981), a Czech painter, book illustrator and palaeoartist, whose work played a central role in the development of palaeontological reconstruction, and

were his powerful and passionate response to moments of emotional strength in Ransome’s novels.

After long gazing at these evocative paintings with cricked neck, I was drawn to the more ‘normal’ responses displayed. The range of illustration in foreign editions is familiar from Robert Thompson’s *Ransome’s Foreign Legion* (Amazon Publications 2009). But somehow, here, physically displayed so

that one could be immersed in Japanese to Dutch or other cultural context, alongside Ransome himself, the effect was revelatory.

We all read with knowledge derived from our own culture. Mine was British, but foreign. So I was intrigued in childhood that Ransome’s characters wore plimsolls (sandshoes) and woollies (jerseys) and knickers (shorts) and bathers (swimming-suits) or what Dick called bags (trousers) and clambered over stone walls (unknown). Ransome’s illustrations, expecting readers to be culturally diverse, are integral to his narrative; his pictures are precise; he shows what a stone wall looks like and where you might find foot-holds; sometimes they provide additional information, such as how a pigeon could ring a bell.

Ransome’s meticulous drawings identify place and culture. But just as Renaissance writers in England ‘Englished’ foreign texts, so that they became true English books for English readers, so also many illustrators of Ransome from foreign cultures show his characters and places in their own known landscapes, or use their own artistic idiom, giving us what may seem a caricature of Englishness – we see the ‘Dutched’ Nancy and Peggy jauntily wearing chequered knickerbockers. Stylised, comical characterisations often reduce the individuality and seriousness of the Swallows’ enterprises to no more than charming children’s games. The effect of this is to present an external, adult, distanced viewpoint, contrary to the spirit of Ransome’s creation and to the immersive experience he hoped his young readers would have. For example, the Czech illustrator Černý’s ‘Message at Cache Island’ gives no sense of the weather or night dangers; the characters are sweet children, not even wearing coats; the illustration is untrue to the text and to narrative tone. Ransome never showed small creatures next to towering adults, which some of these artists do, diminishing the stature and validity of narrative experience. Some illustrators may merely have ‘illustrated a children’s book’ – unaware of Ransome’s complexity.

The exhibition gave a thought-provoking immersion in cultural difference, challenging us to reflect on differences of approach and tone in place and character. It was surprising, illuminating, accomplished, and sometimes moving, and it deserves a permanent home.

AMAZON PUBLICATIONS

Christina Hardyment celebrates the first thirty years of a Ransome publishing adventure

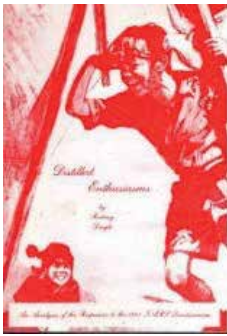
In November 1991, at the first TARS Literary Weekend held at Bowness, Rodney Dingle showed me the 7000-word summary he had created of members' responses to a questionnaire he sent out in the spring of 1991. It was too long for an article, but, as the best analysis of Ransome's enduring fascination and value that has ever appeared in print, it deserved to be preserved in full. What to do? I remembered what a good response there had been when, in 1989, I wrote to all the readers of *Captain Flint's Trunk* who had written to me and other Ransome enthusiasts, asking for whatever contributions they could afford to save *Maris*, the original of *Amazon*, and suggesting we found an Arthur Ransome Society. We succeeded in doing both.

The idea of a similarly funded publishing wing for the society came to me, and with the financial and technical support of the eminent book collector John Cowen, techno-whizz Dave Sewart and David Rye as treasurer, we produced 800 copies of Rodney's witty and informative summary *Distilled Enthusiasms* and sent them gratis to TARS members, asking for contributions to the publishing of our next offering, *The Blue Treacle*. Their response was immensely gratifying and Amazon Publications on a pre-paid subscriber-funded basis was launched (two years before Jeff Bezos began an internet bookselling site called Amazon.com).

I never thought then that AP would keep going for over 30 years. Its long-serving team members have done Ransome proud. Here is a complete list of the wonderfully various publications. Those who order the next book when it is announced get their names listed on its end pages; pre-orders also allow the AP team to decide on hard or soft covers and the use of colour.



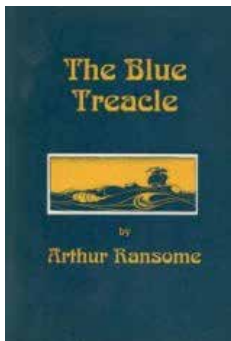
Three of the Original Team: Christina Hardyment, John Cowan and Dave Sewart



1. 1992 ***Distilled Enthusiasms*** by Rodney Dingle.

Introduction by Christina Hardyment

AP Team: Designer Dave Sewart, Printer John Cowen and David Rye (on his school's duplicator), Labels Keith Paull, Envelope-stuffer Christina Hardyment



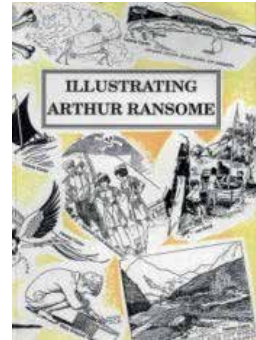
2. 1993 ***The Blue Treacle: The Story of An Escape*** by

Arthur Ransome, written *c.* 1913, illustrations with decorations from Ransome's play *Aladdin* (1920)

By kind permission of Rupert Hart-Davis and John Bell, the then executors of the Arthur Ransome Literary Estate, AP's first real book was Ransome's never-before published fantasy. Dave Sewart tidied up the text. Explanatory afterword by Christina Hardyment. Limited edition of 400 numbered copies. AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardyment, Dave Sewart

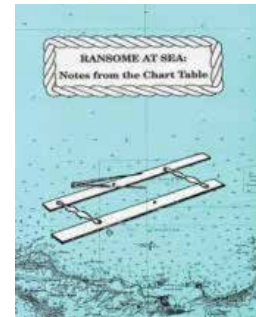
3. 1994 *Illustrating Arthur Ransome*. Illustrations from the various British editions of the twelve *Swallows and Amazons* books with examples from some foreign editions, collected and introduced by Dave Sewart.

AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardyment, Dave Sewart



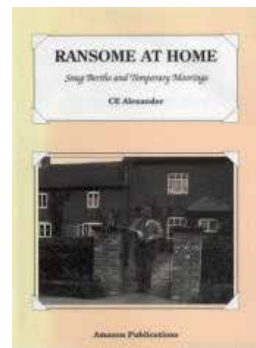
4. 1995 *Ransome at Sea: Notes from the Chart Table*, edited by Roger Wardale. A transcription of Arthur Ransome's various logbooks, from 1920 to 1954, illustrated with photographs.

AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardyment, Dave Sewart



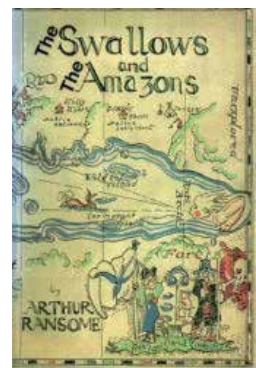
5. 1996 *Ransome at Home: Snug Berths and Temporary Moorings* written and photographed by C.E. (Ted) Alexander. With an additional chapter on the Ransome family homes in Leeds by Margaret Ratcliffe.

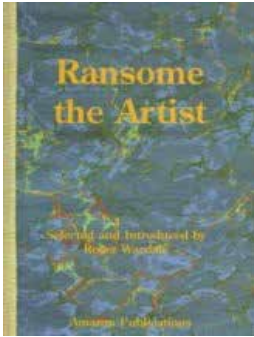
AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardyment, Claire Kendall-Price (Designer), Dave Sewart



6. 1997 *The Swallows and The Amazons* by Arthur Ransome. A transcription made by Dave Sewart of an early draft of *Swallows and Amazons* held at Abbot Hall, with the original illustrations, by Stephen Spurrier, which were commissioned but never used.

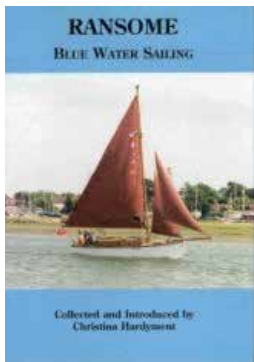
AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardyment, Claire Kendall-Price, Dave Sewart





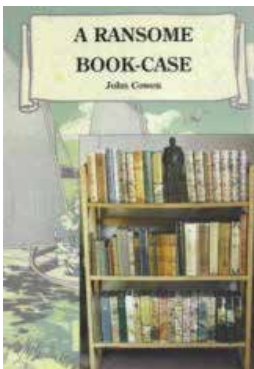
7. 1998 *Ransome the Artist: Sketches, illustrations and paintings by Arthur Ransome*, selected and introduced by Roger Wardale.

AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardymont, Claire Kendall-Price, Dave Sewart



8. 1999 *Ransome on Blue Water Sailing*, collected and introduced by Christina Hardymont. Includes Ransome's introductions to six volumes in The Mariners Library and his reviews of sailing books published in national newspapers.

AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardymont, Claire Kendall-Price, Dave Sewart



9. 2000 *A Ransome Bookcase* by John Cowen.

A lavishly illustrated account of John's magnificent collection of Ransome's books, with descriptions of each of them.

AP Team: John Cowen, Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardymont, Dave Sewart



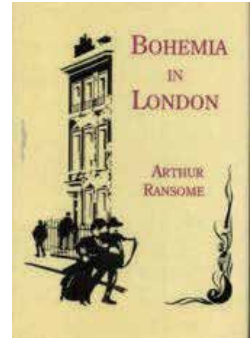
10. 2001 *In Aleppo Once* by Taqui Altounyan, with the original illustrations and additional photographs, and a Postscript by Jill Goulder.

AP Team: Denis Dunstone (Treasurer), Christina Hardymont, Dave Sewart, Elizabeth Sewart

11. 2002 *Bohemia in London* by Arthur Ransome, illustrated by Fred Taylor.

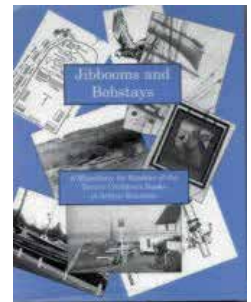
Originally published in 1907. Preface by Paul Crisp. Epilogue from the introduction to the 1984 OUP edition by Sir Rupert Hart-Davis.

AP Team: Paul Crisp, Trevor Johnston, David Jones, Roger Wardale



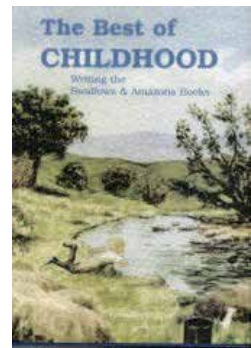
12. 2003 *Jibbooms and Bobstays: A Miscellany for Readers of the Twelve Children's Books of Arthur Ransome*. Written and compiled by Amazon Publications, with additional chapters by Paul Heiney and Libby Purves on Penny Whistling and John Irving on Stars.

AP Team: Paul Crisp, David Jones, Claire Kendall-Price, Diana Sparkes, Roger Wardale



13. 2004 *The Best of Childhood: Writing the Swallows and Amazons Stories*. Compiled by Amazon Publications. A chapter on the writing of each novel, setting it in the context of AR's life at the time, enriched with quotes from relevant letters.

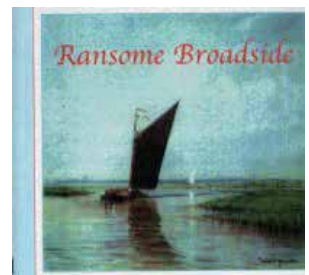
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Trevor Johnston, David Jones, Claire Kendall-Price, Diana Sparkes, Roger Wardale

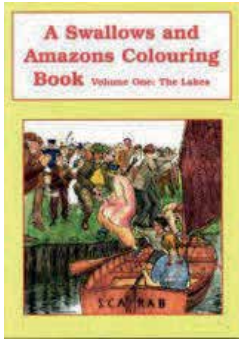


14. 2005 *Ransome Broadside: A Miscellany*

Compiled by the AP team of writings about the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads related to Ransome.

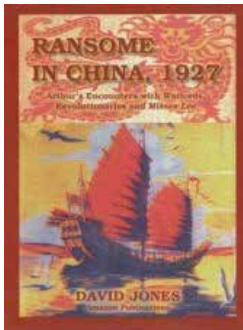
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, David Jones, Claire Kendall-Price, Diana Sparkes, Roger Wardale





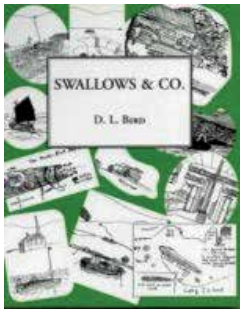
15. 2005 *A Swallows and Amazons Colouring Book: Volume One The Lakes*. Twelve pages for children to colour-in. This was given away to those who ordered *Ransome Broadside*. Surplus copies were given to winners of competitions in *The Outlaw*. As yet there is no volume two.

AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, David Jones, Claire Kendall-Price, Diana Sparkes, Roger Wardale



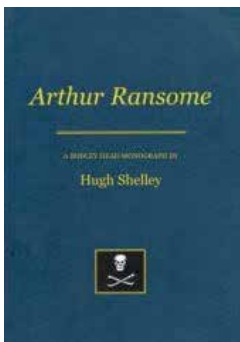
16. 2006 *Ransome in China, 1927* by David Jones. Arthur's encounters with warlords, revolutionaries and *Missee Lee*.

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17. 2006 *Swallows & Co* by D.L. Bird. Written in 1945 when the author was aged 14 because Cape had told him the war prevented them publishing more books by Ransome. Limited edition of 350 numbered copies.

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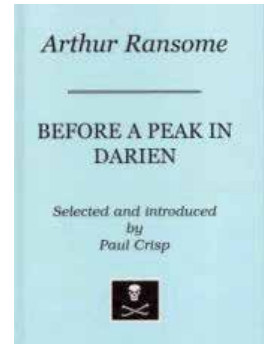


18. 2007 *Arthur Ransome* by Hugh Shelley. Reprint of the 1960 Bodley Head monograph.

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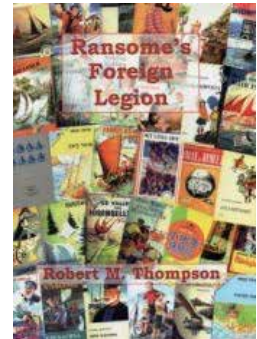
19. 2008 *Before a Peak in Darien* Extracts from Arthur Ransome's early published books, selected and introduced by Paul Crisp.

AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Roger Wardale



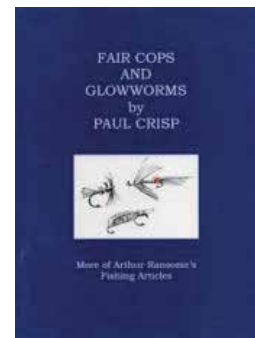
20. 2009 *Ransome's Foreign Legion* by Robert Thompson. Covers and illustrations from foreign editions of the twelve Ransome Swallows and Amazons novels.

AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Robert Thompson



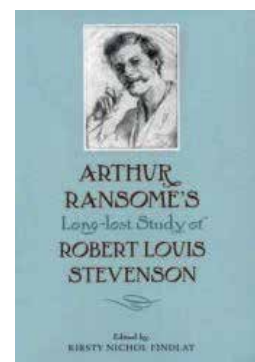
21. 2011 *Fair Cops and Glow-worms*, edited by Paul Crisp. More of Arthur Ransome's fishing articles from 1910 to 1935 together with thoughts and stories from other fishing writers ancient, contemporary and modern.

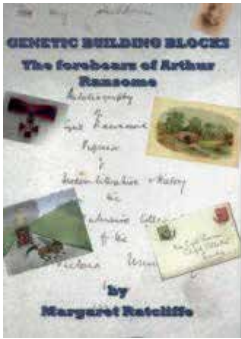
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Diana Sparkes, Robert Thompson



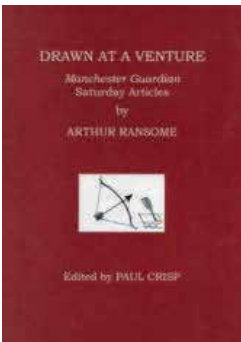
22. 2011 *Arthur Ransome's Long-lost Study of Robert Louis Stevenson*, edited by Kirsty Nichol Findlay. Hardback published by Boydell and Brewer with a paperback edition of 250 copies exclusively for AP subscribers.

AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Diana Sparkes, Robert Thompson

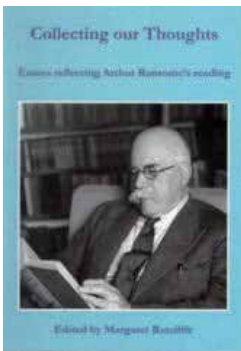




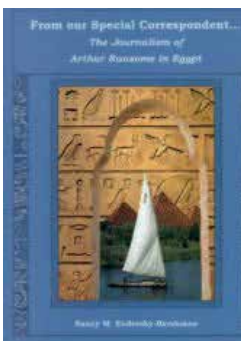
23. 2012 *Genetic Building Blocks: The Forebears of Arthur Ransome* by Margaret Ratcliffe.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Diana Sparkes, Robert Thompson



24. 2014 *Drawn at a Venture: Manchester Guardian Saturday Articles by Arthur Ransome*, edited by Paul Crisp.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Margaret Ratcliffe, Diana Sparkes

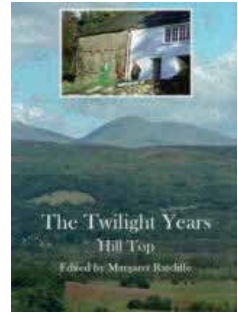


25. 2015 *Collecting Our Thoughts: Essays reflecting Ransome's Reading*, edited by Margaret Ratcliffe. Introductory Features from TARS Library Catalogues 2000-2009 and new essays on related themes.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Margaret Ratcliffe, Diana Sparkes

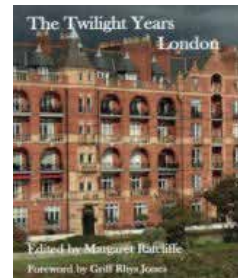


26. 2016 *From Our Special Correspondent: The Journalism of Arthur Ransome in Egypt* by Nancy M. Endersby-Harshman.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Margaret Ratcliffe

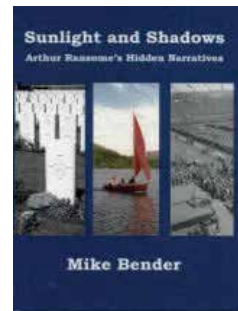
27. 2017 *The Twilight Years: Hill Top*. Extracts from Arthur's late diaries edited by Margaret Ratcliffe.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Margaret Ratcliffe



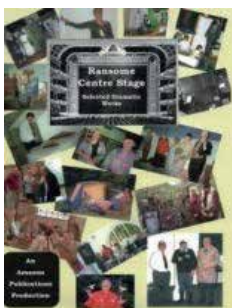
28. 2018 *The Twilight Years: London*. Extracts from Arthur's final diaries edited by Margaret Ratcliffe.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Christine Rae, Margaret Ratcliffe



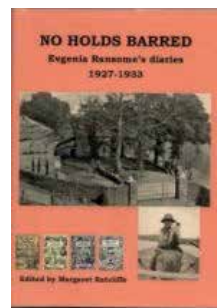
29. 2020 *Sunlight and Shadows: Arthur Ransome's Hidden Narratives* by Mike Bender
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Christine Rae, Margaret Ratcliffe



30. 2021 *Ransome Centre Stage: Dramatic Productions based on Arthur Ransome's Life and Works*, edited by Alan Hakim.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Christine Rae, Margaret Ratcliffe



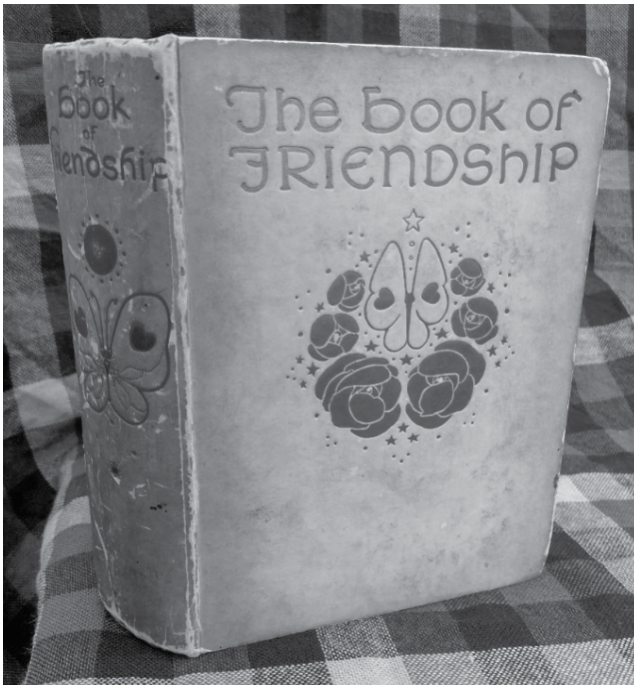
31. 2022 *No Holds Barred: Eugenia Ransome's Diaries 1927-1933*, edited by Margaret Ratcliffe.
AP Team: Paul Crisp, Alan Hakim, Christine Rae, Margaret Ratcliffe



THE UNICORN AND THE ELECTRICIAN

Julia Jones explores Arthur Ransome's
The Book of Friendship

The Book of Friendship, compiled by Arthur Ransome, is a substantial and attractive volume, published by T.C. & E.C. Jack of Edinburgh in 1909 and seemingly designed for giving. I heard of it first when a friend told me he'd bought a copy to give a friend as a wedding present. Once I'd acquired a copy of my own and taken a look, I wondered whether that wedding present would bring a blessing or a curse.



The Book of Friendship was the first book that Ransome worked on with his wife, Ivy. They had married in the spring of 1909 and, after a two-week honeymoon in Paris, had settled in a cottage near Petersfield, found for

them by Edward and Helen Thomas, who lived nearby. AR had needed to hurry to complete his *History of Story-Telling* for Jacks as it was already late when he and Ivy returned from honeymoon. *The Book of Friendship* was his next commission. It’s a collection of essays, poems and proverbs about friendship which both shows the depth and breadth of AR’s reading and draws on a literary canon which isn’t really ours today.



Frontispiece: David and Jonathan

There’s a rough sense of chronology in the arrangement, beginning with the story of David and Jonathan and moving on through some Old Testament proverbs to a weighty essay by Cicero, some sayings of Confucius, Mohammed and Li Po, a deliberation by Montaigne, a Scottish ballad, poems by Spenser and Lyly, an essay by Bacon and then (sigh of relief from this reader) a group of sonnets by Shakespeare and Donne’s

great poem ‘A Valediction Forbidding Mourning’, before a few pages of merrymaking with Ben Jonson at the Mermaid Tavern. Then prose returns with an extract from Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, liberally sprinkled with Latin tags. Onwards to the eighteenth-century essayists and the nineteenth-century romantics – although in this context more concerned to analyse their feelings rather than portray them. This is why, I think, that the poems in this anthology often have a vividness and immediacy that the prose lacks – at least for the twenty-first century reader.

‘Show, don’t tell,’ is received wisdom for writers now. In his *Autobiography* Ransome expresses a related thought as he differentiates narrative from essay or article: ‘In narrative it is as if the mind moves forward effortlessly with the story: in essay or article the mind remains as it were tethered and makes sallies this way or that before returning to the tethering post once more.’ At this stage of AR’s career, essays or articles were his livelihood and they also comprise the bulk of *The Book of Friendship*. Lyric poems sound a different note. Shakespeare’s ‘Blow, blow thou winter wind’ sings out apparently effortlessly with its complex mix of pain and cynicism in just twenty lines.

It’s followed – cleverly – by one of AR’s favourite authors, William Hazlitt, writing an essay on character. Hazlitt is saying how little we truly know of other people. He’s combative, fired up for argument, ready to shock with his views on matters such as the validity of first impressions, the impossibility of understanding between classes, the mutual ignorance of near relatives as to each other’s personalities and the blindness of married couples. *Table Talk* – Hazlitt’s two-volume essay collection from which this is taken – was an acknowledged favourite of AR’s. Here he follows Hazlitt’s multiple challenges with a deceptively simple poem by E.V. Lucas. It’s called ‘Friends’ and I’m including it in full:

‘You ask me “why I like him.” Nay,
I cannot; nay, I would not say.
I think it vile to pigeonhole
The pros and cons of a kindred soul.

You “wonder he should be my friend,”
But then why should you comprehend?
Thank God for this – a new – surprise:
My eyes, remember, are not your eyes.

Cherish this one small mystery;
And marvel not that love can be
“In spite of all his many flaws.”
In spite? Supposing I said “Because.”

A truce, a truce to questioning:
“We two are friends” tells everything.
Yet if you must know, this is why:
Because he is he and I am I.’

In his introduction AR states that – as far as possible – he’s resisted the temptation to abbreviate and extract from his chosen works. ‘There is an almost inexcusable impertinence in taking a finger from a statue, a patch of colour from a picture, leaving the author responsible for what has lost its value in losing its setting.’ There was no easy copy-and-paste facility in the summer of 1909. As I read, I was conscious of the sheer amount of hand-copying that must have been involved in filling these 475 pages. It was good to see Ivy Ransome thanked for her ‘incredible labours in transcribing and correcting’. The following year she would also assist with a second anthology for T.C. & E.C. Jack, *The Book of Love*. I’ve not seen that volume and I wonder what choices AR made while living through what he later described as the ‘bad, incredible dream’ which was their marriage.

The chronological arrangement of *The Book of Friendship* inspired AR to consider the ‘changing atmospheres that have hung about the word’. Diffidently he traces a development from the ‘stern’ Romans to the ‘witty good comradeship’ of the Elizabethans, the solemn heartiness of Dr Johnson and the ‘more spiritual friendships’ of Carlyle and Emerson. Friendships mattered deeply to AR, perhaps especially up until this time. His friends – people such as the Collingwood family, Edward Thomas, Gordon Bottomley, Cecil Chesterton and the dedicatee of this book, poet

Lascelles Abercrombie – ‘shared the simple view that as long as it was possible to pay one’s way without starving, work was what mattered’. They had enabled him to escape the atmosphere of family disapproval, the sense of guilt that he was not living up to his parents’ expectations. In his preface to *The Book of Friendship* he mentions ‘the finely shaded companionship we share today’. They walked, they talked, they smoked pipes, they drank together. With sad irony, this was precisely the period that several of those friendships began to crack.

A new marriage or relationship is often a challenge to friendship. The allocation of time has to be adjusted. There’s a charming little snippet included from William Lamb to Samuel Coleridge: ‘I shall half wish you unmarried (don’t show this to Mrs C.) for one evening only to have the pleasure of smoking with you and drinking egg-hot in some little smoky room in a pot-house, for I know not yet how I shall like you in a decent room and looking quite happy. My best love and respects to Sarah notwithstanding.’

By far the majority of the friendships celebrated in this collection are male friendships – ‘passing the love of women’, as David and Jonathan’s love was described. A few are overtly misogynistic: Montaigne trots out the nasty Latin tag ‘*Desinit in piscem mulier formosa superne*’ which AR translates as ‘A woman fair for parts superior / Ends in a fish for parts inferior’. (One can only assume he’d never looked at himself in a mirror with his clothes off.) Sir Thomas Browne speaks for many when he states: ‘I have never yet cast a true affection on a woman, but I have loved my friend as I do virtue, my soul, my God.’ AR – who did have women friends – regrets that he has ‘found little in the classics of friendship between man and woman or of the friendship of women for each other, an affection that men of all ages have been in a curious conspiracy to distrust’. He expresses a slightly feeble hope that ‘in this book of the friendship of men, women will not find it hard to recognise the accents of their own mutual tenderness’. He also writes, ‘Sexes make no difference; since in Souls there is none and they are the Subjects of Friendship.’

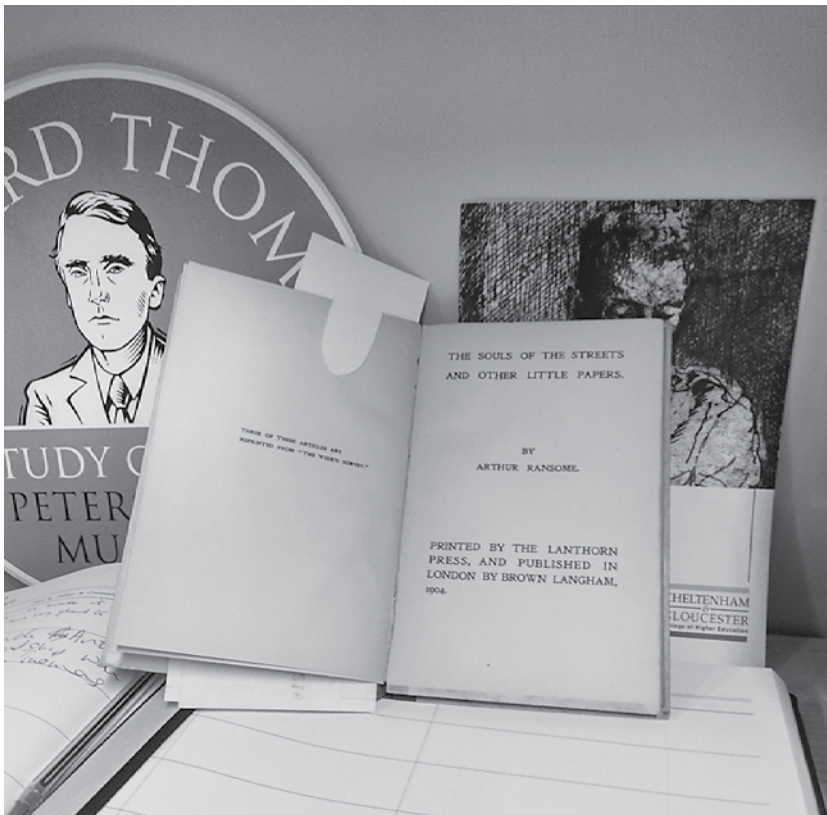
That attitude would serve AR well later on in his career, but in the summer of 1909 sex was the presenting problem. At Stonor Hill Top in 1909 Arthur and Ivy were strongly physically attracted and enjoying marital intimacy ‘entwined like serpents on the lawn’ as he later, tactlessly, told his daughter Tabitha. Their neighbours, Edward and Helen Thomas, complained that the couple were in bed all day. But the real problem was that in 1909 they didn’t like Ivy and started to dislike Arthur too, nicknaming them the ‘Unicorn’ and the ‘Electrician’. Thomas saw Ivy as a snob: ‘She belongs to the higher orders and no connection of hers has ever been in trade.... She is pretty and spirited and clever but not clever enough to do her own hair.’ Happily, friendships wax as well as wane and some years later, when Arthur had left Ivy and fled to Russia, and Thomas had found his own vocation as a poet, he began to see her in a far more positive light.

There’s no record of Ivy having friends of her own. She didn’t take to the Lakeland life. Later, when Dora Collingwood came to stay at Hatch Cottage in Wiltshire to get to know her goddaughter, Tabitha, and paint AR’s portrait, she had clearly hoped to become friends with Ivy. It wasn’t long before she was bewildered by Ivy’s changeableness and wrote in her diary, ‘I shall be glad to get away from a household where people live on their emotions to such an extent.’



Petersfield Museum: home of the Edward Thomas Study Centre

The Book of Friendship is the only completed product of Arthur and Ivy’s time near Petersfield. I went to the Edward Thomas Study Centre at Petersfield Museum to see what else I could find. It’s a delightful and welcoming quiet room, full of a collection of Thomas’s books and memorabilia made by Tim Wilton-Steer, a fervent admirer of ‘Petersfield’s luminously great local poet’. Although *The Book of Friendship* was not there, I was thrilled to discover a rare copy of *The Souls of the Streets* (Brown Langham, 1904), AR’s first book of essays, a real testament to the happy days of tramping friendships which he had shared with Thomas, Gordon Bottomley and Lascelles Abercrombie. Somehow it seemed poignantly sad that almost 120 years later its pages remained uncut. The copy was in the museum but no one had ever read it.



The Souls of the Streets: AR’s first book of essays

IMPRESSIONS THAT REMAINED:

**Arthur Benson and Arthur Ransome
on the Norfolk Broads**

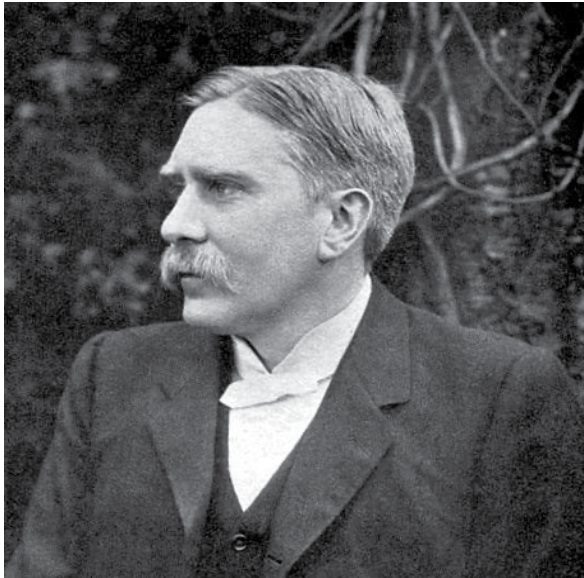
Bridget Falconer-Salkeld

‘... a delicious day.’ So wrote Arthur C. Benson, FRSL (1862–1925) at the beginning of his diary entry for Thursday, 4 September 1902. Benson was an educator, novelist, biographer, essayist, lyricist and the unofficial Poet Laureate to the royal court at Windsor. After a spell as a housemaster at Eton (1885-1903), he was elected a Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge, in 1904, then President, and finally Master from 1915 until his death in 1925; he was a generous benefactor of the College.

Since I am drawing on Benson’s written record, it is important to note that his diaries, among the longest ever penned, were written wherever he happened to be, and at speed – he seldom re-read or corrected them; he simply pressed on. They were *ex tempore* sketches and vignettes written for himself alone and were so personal that he stipulated they be embargoed for a period of fifty years after his death. The entries have vitality and freshness; the comments and judgments are fearless and sometimes even caustic. Benson’s recorded impressions while staying at Aylsham Old Rectory in 1902 seem almost to prefigure certain of the impressions Arthur Ransome has given us in his Norfolk Broads novels. Coincidentally, Thorpe railway station, Norwich (1886), was the scene of discomfiture for both Benson in fact, and Ransome’s characters in fiction. On arrival here from Kent, via London, Benson missed the friends who were waiting for him with a car; and it was here that in *Coot Club* (1934) Dorothea felt uneasy that the journey to Wroxham station was not going to plan.

Impressions that Remained

Arthur Ransome and A.C. Benson, as he is better known, were both born in the Victorian era, but a generation apart, Benson in 1862 and Ransome in 1884. There are striking similarities and differences between the two men. Both had fathers who were educators. As an adult, Benson suffered feelings of inferiority by the knowledge that his contemporaries had advanced to the highest levels in their respective fields, whereas he had not made the necessary effort, while Ransome suffered from feelings of inadequacy in relation to his father. Both were also affected by bereavement in their youth – in Benson’s case, the death of his elder brother, Martin, a brilliant scholar at Winchester College, in whom all his father’s dreams had been invested. From growing up in the shadow of this brilliant elder brother, he was suddenly the eldest of five siblings and ill-equipped for the role. In Ransome’s case, the early death of his father was a heavy blow from which he possibly never recovered. Both men also shared an artistic sensibility that caused them to be attracted to, and completely in harmony with, the atmosphere and scenes enacted on and around the Norfolk Broads – their remoteness, their loneliness, their very strangeness were all part of the attraction.



A.C. Benson, c. 1899. Photograph by Allen Hastings Fry

Arthur Benson, from frequent introspective self-examination, knew himself to be, from boyhood on, ever the spectator, ‘... always on the edge of Paradise’. He wrote that his chief occupation as a boy was simply looking and trying to describe in words the object of his concentration (he was too young for it to be described as ‘contemplation’), much as John Ruskin urged his readers to do with pencil and brush. He witnessed comings and goings, first at Wellington College, where his father was the founding headmaster; then, as his father rose through the ranks of the Church, at the Chancery of Lincoln Cathedral, at Truro, and finally at Lambeth Palace and Addington Palace. All his formative experiences had the quality of success and continuity. Not so with Ransome, where his formative experiences are best described as disjointed. Although Ransome’s school career was mostly of struggle and failure, and his early career in London was at the lowest-rung of publishing, his spectatorial and negotiating skills as a journalist, at home and abroad, soon came to the fore, as it were, ready-made.

Thus Benson and Ransome were two complex, insecure literary figures, but in unequal proportions. Benson remained a Victorian; Ransome was an Edwardian (given it is recognised that the Edwardian era began in the 1880s, in the dying decades of the reign of Queen Victoria). Consequently, their attitudes and life experiences were different. As an adult, Benson saw the introduction of the telephone and the motor car: he first saw a telephone being used in 1901 at Windsor Castle (where he was co-editing Queen Victoria’s letters) and he rode in a motor car during his stay at Aylsham in 1902. By the time Ransome had reached adulthood, these inventions were no longer such a novelty, and total reliance on horse-power, and the sense of their relative speeds, were becoming a distant memory. Both men engaged in sports from early manhood: Benson, a member of the Alpine Club, and with sufficient stamina and courage until injury forced him to relinquish the sport, was otherwise a cautious character, though trenchant in conversation. Ransome, a skilled yachtsman, had a streak of the daring-do about him, took risks, and at times lived dangerously. They both shared a love of the outdoors and took long walks in the countryside; Benson was also a keen long-distance cyclist, a mode of

transport fast enough to cover a respectable mileage in a day, but slow enough to observe the wayside scenes. In field sports, they were keen on fly-fishing (Ransome took it to a high level), for which well-developed observational skills are a pre-requisite.

It is somewhat ironic that, from a shaky start, Ransome achieved the greater success, winning the first Carnegie Medal, as well as honorary academic awards and plaudits. The works that Benson wrote for a mass-market readership were heavily criticised by his colleagues, but they were so popular in their day that they earned prodigious royalties. These were augmented by a generous American patron (whom Benson never met) and enabled him to become, during his life-time and afterwards, Magdalene College's greatest benefactor. As an eventually wealthy man he founded the Benson Medal (1916). Benson's novels and essays are no longer read, but his monographs and biographies are well regarded. Today, he is best remembered for his diaries and his patriotic lyrics, in particular 'Land of Hope and Glory', set to the music of Elgar's Coronation Ode (1902).

Not surprisingly, therefore, the impressions and responses to scenes on the Norfolk Broads by these two literary figures found expression in very contrasting ways – for Ransome, whose diaries are irregular and mainly factual, they are transfigured into characters, plots, and narratives; for Benson they find expression in the literary sketches or vignettes contained in his diaries. One such is the following diary entry of a morning's game-shooting on a friend's country estate, which shows his deep appreciation of the Norfolk countryside:

[Ditchingham Hall] *September 13 ... then we went off shooting, driving by Hovingham [sic] Hall, out to a lonely high kind of plateau. Our first task was to walk up long wide pasture fields with thick hedges - a gun and a beater in each field so that for some time we were alone. There was nothing of any kind to shoot - but somehow, what with the bright sun, the flowers of the pasture, the green trees and hedges - the thistles rising softly, like*

wading men, out of the light brown grass, I fell into a mood of keen, conscious and elated happiness, such as I have seldom known since I was a boy. It was all so fresh and sweet, so quiet and lonely, as we walked like tiny insects in the chequered square of the wide countryside. So small we must have seemed from above, so busy about nothing. But the peace and glee of the unvisited land, with its hazel-shadowed lanes, its undisturbed woods - with the clouds flying over it, in a bright blue sky came into my very soul; and I had a beautiful and happy hour, for which I thank God.¹

We know that Ransome enjoyed motoring,² but Benson's diary includes a description of an earlier motoring adventure for a distance of some thirty miles through the Norfolk countryside from Ditchingham Hall back to Aylsham on 13 September 1902. The previous day Benson had left Aylsham Rectory by car (*'... the motor came hissing and snorting to the door'*) with a party bound for Ditchingham Hall and noted: *'Certainly a motor is delightful; I feel inclined to say like Dr Johnson that there could be few pleasures greater.'*³ The return to Aylsham was made all the more exciting because so many of the roads in Norwich are on an incline. The excerpt is complete in itself and describes not a meandering jaunt along Norfolk's country lanes, but a swift dash in the gathering darkness:

[Ditchingham Hall] September 13. ...The motor was late but we took it tranquilly. Then we had a delicious run back [of nearly thirty miles]. The lamps were lit in Norwich, and we tore through the narrow winding streets - it was like a dream to flash into the centre of a busy market town, to speak to no one and yet pass so close, - and we must have seemed mysterious passengers too, sweeping in and out again. A good many people stopped to look at us. Then through the grey wolds and woods of S[tratton] Strawless -

*the moon rose, and when we got to Aylsham the Church tower stood out in incredible beauty, tipped with gold, a few clouds sailing in a dark sky.*⁴

However, it is on the Norfolk Broads that we can see most clearly the points of connection between Benson and Ransome. Readers of *Mixed Moss* will no doubt be familiar with *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*, and can compare Ransome's enthusiasms, descriptions and concerns with those of Benson in the diary entry that concludes this article. Both men complain about overcrowding and excessive noise, and even the noisy, quarrelsome *Hullabaloo*s aboard their hired motor cruiser have a prototype in Benson's diary. But it is important to note the difference between the character of the Broads in 1902, when they were a holiday destination only available to the wealthy, and the situation in the 1930s.



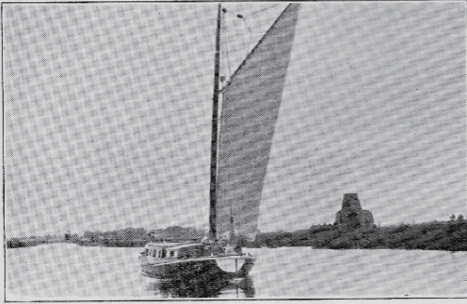
Wroxham Bridge, c. 1900. Source: Library of Congress

In little more than a quarter of a century, the environment (and ambience) of the Broads was altered by the felling of riverine trees (to allow wherries to be tied-up for loading and unloading) and the craft available for hire changed beyond recognition.⁵ In 1902, before the introduction of the

internal combustion engine, they were sailing yachts and pleasure wherries, luxuriously fitted out, often fully-crewed and provisioned (even a piano could be added to the amenities on board), whereas by the 1930s, largely as a result of Harry Blake's agency, smaller and more affordable craft were attracting an entirely new clientele. No wonder Ransome was preoccupied by the threat to a settled way of life and was in particular deeply concerned about the disturbance to wildlife. His use of the term 'foreigners', shared with many in the 1930s, is a *triple-entendre* – meaning either the new breed of holidaymakers on the Broads, threatening foreign powers or even, I would suggest, secret agents, a subject about which he knew more than most.

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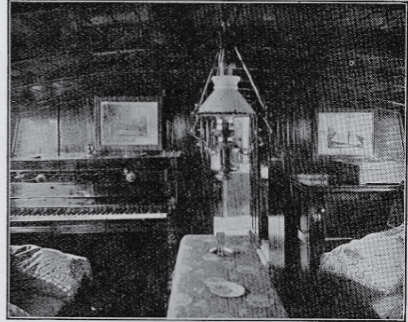
Wherry "REINDEER" (Wroxham).



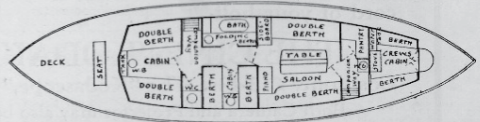
The "Reindeer" is a large Wherry. Her accommodation plan is doubtless the best that can be produced for a Pleasure Wherry, and she is one of the best fitted Wherries on the Broads, and one of the largest Wherries to cross Hickling Broad. She is fitted with four cabins, and will accommodate eleven persons. Saloon 12 ft. by 10 ft., fore cabin 12 ft. by 7 ft., double side cabin 7 ft. by 6 ft. 6 in., single cabin 6 ft. by 6 ft. Her cabins have over 6 ft. head-room, and are fitted with spring berths throughout. w.c. The cabins are well fitted with wash basins, drawers under berths, cushions, blankets, bed linen and table linen, crockery, cutlery, piano, dining table, side-board, and hanging lamp. She is fitted with all necessary cooking utensils, and a Centre-board Sailing Dinghy.

Terms per week, with two attendants—

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SALOON.



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A page from Harry Blake's catalogue, 1932. Source: Museum of the Broads, Stalham.

Perhaps the strongest points of connection between Benson and Ransome are the Norfolk landscape and the subject of fishing. Benson's fishing vignette is minute and closely focused – a domestic, riverside scene, a little drama where reactive emotions run high, whereas Ransome gives us a whole chapter, 'The World's Whopper', in *The Big Six* (1940). The two pieces of writing hardly bear comparison – a puny dace (surely destined for the cat's own supper) to a thirty-pound pike. Not only that, but the

viewpoints are different. Benson is a spectator (as usual). Ransome writes himself into the action as a participating character, owner of the *Cachalot*, although absent during the heroic struggle to land the pike. ‘The World’s Whopper’ was, in fact, written (as well as the descriptions of the eelman and The Roaring Donkey) long before the rest of *The Big Six* and could be considered one of the springboards for the novel; it opens with a sketch, a model of economy and precision, of the living Norfolk landscape shortly after dawn – ‘one of the few moments in *The Big Six* where there is time to enjoy the Norfolk countryside.’⁶

So we come to Benson’s day on the Bure. The date is September 1902. Benson is aged forty, a housemaster at Eton College, and a keen observer (he described himself as a life-long spectator), in tune with everything and everyone around him. He was one of a party of eight, and those named are: Stuart Donaldson (a fellow housemaster at Eton), Miss Amy Buxton (a student at the Royal College of Music), the Birkbecks (of West Acre, Norfolk) and John, the party’s footman. Stuart Donaldson’s new wife and baby (wisely) stayed behind, but his brother, St Clair, later Bishop of Salisbury, was also with them. The Buxtons and Birkbecks are landed Norfolk families, closely related. (The transcriptions in this article are taken directly from Benson’s manuscripts and reproduce his punctuation style and occasional idiosyncratic spelling.)

Thursday Sep 4 a delicious day. We went off early [from Aylsham Rectory] and caught 9.50 train to Wroxham then a difficulty occurred. We were told we might have a steam-launch, and by going to get it lost the wherry we had provisionally engaged. Stuart was greatly annoyed and spoke with tempered indignation to an old man like a clergyman with a chin beard. However we were at last accommodated with a big roomy sailing-boat and sate [sic] round. Miss Buxton was with us. (SAD, S^r Clair, May, Algy, Childers and John the footman).⁷ We had books and papers and jested innocently.

We sailed slowly down the Bure tacking from side to side. This broad rushy river, with the great flat on every side, with the low distant rising ground, with alder clumps and dykes, and opening into still sheets of water on every side, was extraordinarily beautiful. Much meadowsweet and loosestrife and valerian. But there were many too many people about. The river winds very much, and it is beautiful to see ahead of you apparently in the fields the white graceful sails of a huge wherry (a wherry is not a row-boat, but a big, broad sailing boat) moving silently along. We passed many happy parties - fathers with their boys, undergraduates etc. The dirty flannels and tumbled hair, unbrushed after bathing, betrayed the campers-out. The undergraduate, sullen, conscious, puffing his pipe is a disagreeable sort of creature, I think [Benson writes from the perspective of an Eton housemaster]. A nasty [did Benson mean 'noisy'?] regatta was going on at Horning, the banks crowded and the boats tacking as they raced. It was more still and silent as we tacked briskly up the creek to Ranworth - a man was mowing sedge underneath a broken pumping-mill which made a pleasant picture. We landed on a quay, covered with sedge-stacks. A little boy proffered me 'beans, peas, potatoes, apples and plums.' Then we walked up to Ranworth Church, by a pleasant thatched house in a trim garden. The bare high flint tower is impressive. It is being restored, with care and love. The great painted screen is fine, but few people seem to realise that it must have been hideous when new, and that age is the toning grace. The most interesting thing there was an old pre-reformation chanting-desk with a hideous painted eagle, and an old 'Gloria' with musical notation

painted on the upper part for the choir to sing from. The font worm-eaten. We rambled about a little in the grassy acre, and came back to lunch at the boat - a rich lunch of cold meats, fruits and jellies. Then we got slowly under way and went on to a ruined abbey. S^t Bene't-at-holm - which sent an abbot to the House of Lords - and the Bp [Bishop] of Norwich still sits as abbot of this place. It lies in a great green marshy flat on a low island. The gate-house is fairly intact, with a groined roof, but a huge brick pumping-mill has been built in it - very incongruous - the old precinct wall is visible, and part of the nave and transept of the church among grassy tumbled mounds. It must have been a very lonely place. The two odd ivy-grown towers of South Walsham - and many other grey towers visible far off over the green flat. The barn of a farm close by is the chapel of the hospital. We embarked again, the wind dropping every moment, and a golden light falling over the lazy ripples and reeds - the sedge in a high wind, such as we had in the morning, is the most delicious thing both to see and hear it - we got a little tired, I think, but talked and jested - I should have liked a little more serious feeling talk, I think - more in tune - but perhaps impossible for so big a party - there is a sadness about so bright sweet and happy a day fading slowly to evening - one has not too many of such days. Horning Church tower stood up among the dark trees like an old engraving. [*At the foot of the page Benson added this explanatory note, seemingly addressed to a future reader: 'This sounds horribly priggish; but I don't mean it so. What I mean is that all sorts of little gentle thoughts hovered about, and yet one could not speak of them, tho' probably everyone else was feeling the same.']*

We saw an odd little drama here on returning. A stout lady had just returned from fishing, with one still silvery dace in a net. She hobbled to the house, with some wraps [shawls], and a black cat took advantage of her absence to steal the dace and walk swiftly off with it. The lady returned; the cat went off round a shed, but we could see both - and to see the cat glaring with the dace in its mouth. and the fat lady hunting in an agonised way in all directions for the fish was very funny - she went sadly off at last, thinking I suppose that the dace had revived and skipt [sic] away.

Then the wind dropped - and we had to row with sweeps. This was disgusting drudgery, and came at the end of so sweet a day, and just when everything was at its very best - a merry party of Birkbecks went past in a steamer, and knowing Miss A. screamed out with full mouths that they were having tea.⁸ 'Then you are very greedy!' said Miss A. severely and was greeted by derisive cheers. The silhouette on the top of the cabin, a tall slim girl with blowing hair being helped to tea by slender handsome brothers was very nice. We dragged slowly on - mocked by silent sleepy fishermen, and by a huge stout man on a launch going downstream, whose head slowly revolved to watch us.

We determined at last to quit the boat ; we plunged into a quiet mere, Salhouse, belonging to the Cators, with a rustic tea-house among the trees - got on shore and through green lanes and quiet villages, hurried to Salhouse station, leaving poor John with the luggage.⁹ ... We caught the train and rumbled home,¹⁰ a merry tired party.

I can't understand the conformation of this country - its extreme flatness, rising a few inches straight from the water's edge. I think it must have been pushed up by volcanic pressure a little, and the soil in the marsh bottom, the river the deeper channel, the Broads the deeper pools. But it is all rather mysterious.¹¹ It gave me a sense of seclusion to look from the populous river into the green flat, with its waving sedge and alder thickets.¹²

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the Pepys Library and Special Collections, Magdalene College, Cambridge.

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¹ *Diaries of A.C. Benson*, vol. 18, pp. 30–31.

² See David Hambleton's article on 'Rattletrap' on p. 30.

³ Benson, vol. 18, p. 20.

⁴ Benson, vol. 18, p. 35.

⁵ Tree-felling on a massive scale occurred prior to and during WWI; the woods of Norfolk are yet to recover fully.

⁶ Julian Lovelock, *Swallows, Amazons and Coots: A Reading of Arthur Ransome* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2016), p. 157.

⁷ These bracketed insertions are in the MS., and suggest that Benson had some future reader in mind.

⁸ Benson hated rowing at Eton; his burly physique, which he disliked, was not suited to the sport.

⁹ Salhouse Broad, 32 acres in extent, was part of the Cator family's extensive estate at Woodbastwick. The walk to Salhouse station (saved from demolition in 2021) was in fact some 5½ miles.

¹⁰ 'rumbled home' – from Aylsham station in a wagonette.

¹¹ Benson was not to know that the Broads were formed not by geological forces but by the historic industrial-scale extraction of peat and sometimes sand.

¹² Benson, vol. 17, pp. 72-74, and vol. 18, pp. 1-3.

WHY RACUNDRA?

Martin Beech

Look Here! Jibbooms and Bobstays, just what is all this? Such might be Nancy Blackett's response to Arthur Ransome's letter of 29 March 1922 to his mother Edith in which he explains he is having a new boat constructed, and 'Her name is to be *Racundra*'.¹ The name is given in a very matter-of-fact way, with no explanation of its origin. Indeed, Ransome felt no obligation to explain where the name *Racundra* came from in any subsequent letter or published work. But, of course, this won't do and I for one have been puzzled since first reading, now long ago, *Racundra's First Cruise*.

The word *Racundra* is unusual and even strange, but it sounds as though it should have some meaning – it is surely not just a random jumble of letters. Boats have been given odd and intriguing names, but usually there is some rhyme or reason behind their christening. Humour is often at play, but even humorous names need to be understandable if they are to be appreciated by an otherwise oblivious audience. Many boats have been named after famous people and historical figures, or a family member, or a story-book character, an animal or mystical creature. But *Racundra* stands out as being altogether different. Look in any English dictionary, and you won't find *Racundra*. Look online and use your favourite search engine, and the only *Racundra* references that will appear are those relating to Ransome's books or notes about them. Look in Ransome's autobiography and the various biographies, and there are no answers – it is a singular mystery.

A measure of just how singular *Racundra* is as a word can be gauged through Google Ngram. This internet tool determines the frequency (appearances per year) of a specific key (*n*-gram) word within the corpus of some 40 million scanned books and print sources published between 1500 and 2019. Figure 1 reveals the results for the search-string 'Racundra'. The first usage of the word coincides exactly with the 1923 publication date of *Racundra's First Cruise*, and every single additional appearance of the word is in reference to that book or, post 2003, to *Racundra's Third Cruise* as well.

The word is entirely unique to Ransome, and has no other appearance or association in the English language.

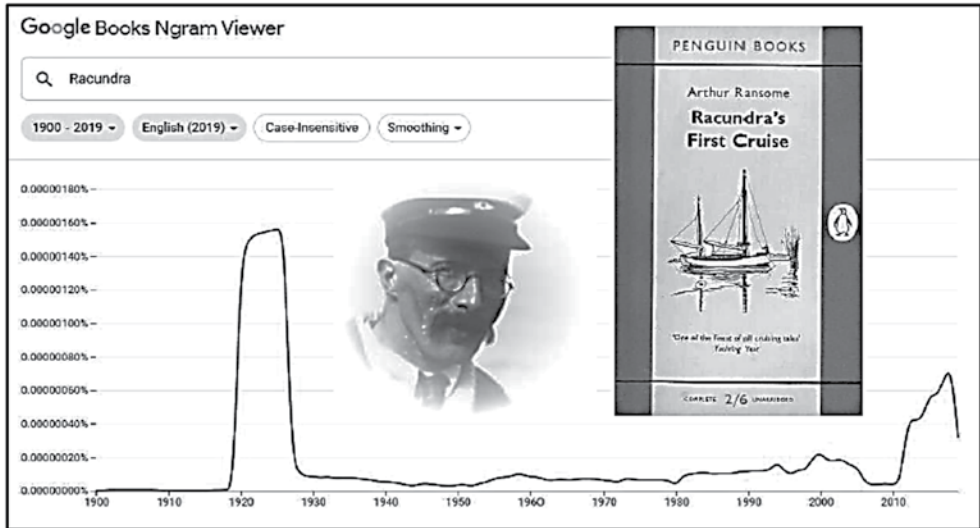


Figure 1. Results of a Google Ngram search on ‘Racundra’. The curve indicates the yearly appearance of the word between 1900 and 2019. The first peak between 1920 and 1930 corresponds to the 1923 publication of *Racundra’s First Cruise*. A search using a lower-case r, as in ‘racundra,’ gives zero known occurrences. Insets show Arthur Ransome (1922) and the 1956 Penguin edition of *Racundra’s First Cruise*.

As a writer and reporter, Ransome spent many years in Russia and Eastern Europe, and was proficient in several languages, including French, Russian, Romanian, Esthonian and Latvian.²² Again, turning to the internet, Google Translate enables one to search for word meanings in 109 different languages. Once keyed-in, ‘Racundra’ produces no known word associations. The closest comparison is the Corsican word *raccundra*, which means ‘will tell’. A case could possibly be made for this word being the origin of *Racundra*, since the boat was intended to be both a home-base and a writing studio – from which Ransome intended to develop and tell his travel stories, but this is unlikely and the Google searches have only deepened the mystery.

Clearly the name *Racundra* was extremely important to Ransome. It carried history and emotion, and upon selling her in 1925 he insisted that

the new owner change the name. Indeed, on 19 July 1925 Ransome wrote to Adlard Coles of ‘... the name that I had carefully devised with the object of having a name in which no one else could have any sort of copyright’.³ On the latter point he certainly succeeded. The letter is more interesting, however, since Ransome says he ‘devised’ the word, and his insistence upon the boat being renamed indicates that it had a deep personal meaning, not to be shared with anyone else. Ransome also insisted, much later, on a name change when he sold *Lottie Blossom I*, noting in his diary (25 April 1952) that:

A yacht is a pleasure boat, a boat that gives pleasure... This pleasure is given in so direct and personal a way that we feel discomfort until we can thank the boat for the pleasure she gives, so that she must have a name. And this name, whatever it is, gathers to itself associations till it has a magical power of evocation, like the name of some scrubby human being, which for its mother has angelic attributes perhaps perceived by no one else.⁴

Word play and word invention is the stock-in-trade of the story teller and Ransome was more than capable of creating intriguing words: witness, *Karabadangbaraka*, the greeting between savages and explorers in *Secret Water*. Indeed, *Racundra* could be an invented rhyming word that Ransome simply liked the sound of. Certainly, many other authors, especially Ransome’s contemporary J.R.R. Tolkien, have used the sound of a word to invent an object, or a being, or a nation to go with it.⁵ Pursuing this, one can readily attempt to look for, and invent, possible origins for *Racundra*. Richard Tizard, for example, after a short stint of crewing on *Nancy Blackett*, wrote that Ransome was ‘unequaled as a raconteur’.⁶ A raconteur, of course, is a teller of anecdotes and stories, presenting them, to the reader or listener, in a skilful and amazing way. So could *Racundra* be a word invented by Ransome to describe the components needed to generate a story – the atomic make-up, as it were, of narrative? Such an idea would parallel Terry Pratchett’s invention of the word ‘narrativium’ to describe the vital ‘oil and essence’ that makes a story work.

What about other possibilities? When Ransome commissioned *Racundra* he was not a wealthy man and the costs could well have resulted in his ‘rack

and ruin', so the name could be a slurring-homophone. The other great stock-in-trade of the wordsmith is the anagram, and *Racundra* gives us 'a card run', and 'AR Cunard'. The first of these has no obvious connection with Ransome's life, but the second offering does give us Ransome's initials and a nod to the Cunard shipping line. Is the underlying meaning of *Racundra*, therefore, the notion that the boat would provide Ransome with a luxurious cruising experience – after all, the cabin was specially designed to accommodate Ransome's typewriter and the expansive spread of his books, notes and sea-charts? More to the point, while the Cunard Line became associated with luxury cruising, the company's origins were in the running of transatlantic mail packets, and, like the mail packet, *Racundra* was supposed to be a regular provider of news, stories and livelihood.

If not an anagram, perhaps *Racundra* is the broken-down remnant of a word-string. It has been suggested, for example, that *Racundra* could be composed of **Ra** from Ransome, **c** from Carl Schmel, **und** from the German word for 'and', and **ra** for Evgenia Ransome.⁷ This has some logic behind it, but one feels that Ransome would have produced something altogether different and more interesting from such a collection of names – *Archever*, or *Melom*, or *Rascal Sea Some*. In the terminology that Ransome used in *The Blue Treacle*, the three-name suggestion for *Racundra* has *Gik* (logic) but it lacks *Ashion* (imagination). Indeed, a construction from the word-string **Racing Under Rainbows** would make more sense and reflect the freedom and opportunities that Ransome was looking for in his new yacht.

On a different tack, Ransome had a life-long interest in rural traditions and folklore, both English and Russian, and maybe *Racundra* was inspired by some fairy-tale association. Names such as Rumpelstiltskin and Rapunzel spring to mind, but these have no obvious association with *Racundra*. In Russian folklore, the word *Rusalka* refers to a female water spirit and, while such a spirit has resonance with the idea behind the construction of *Racundra*, it is not clear how the two words might be typographically linked.

What else? Can anything be gleaned about *Racundra* from the names of other boats owned by Ransome or from the boats that feature in his books? The names of his other boats have well-known histories: *Slug* was a slow and sluggish boat; *Kittiwake* was named after the sea bird and because

Evgenia liked the word; *Coch-y-bonddhu* was named after the Welsh fishing fly; and *Lottie Blossom I* and *II* were named after a favourite character in *The Luck of the Bodkins* by P.G. Wodehouse. *Nancy Blackett* and *Peter Duck* are Ransome characters, and *Selina King* was named by Evgenia, who liked the name Selina, and added a tribute to the boat's builders, Harry King and Sons of Pin Mill.

In the same way, the boat names found within the pages of the Swallows and Amazons novels are entirely understandable. They evoke animal images (e.g. *Wild Cat*, *Cachalot*, *Titmouse*, *Pterodactyl*, and *Scarab*), or refer to historic ships (e.g. *Cutty Sark*, *Thermopylae*, and *Mayflower*), military ships (e.g. *Iron Duke* and *Dreadnought*), mythology (e.g. *Goblin*, *Imp*, and *Wizard*), working boats that Ransome knew (e.g. *Arrow*, *Welcome*, and *Sir Garnet*), or evoke the speed required of a racing boat (e.g. *Flash*, *Shooting Star*, and *Grizzled Skipper*). The only boat name that has some passing oddity in a Ransome story is *Bonnka*, the motor cruiser in *Coots in the North*, but fortunately an editorial note by Hugh Brogan informs us that '*Bonnka* or *bonker* is an East Anglian word meaning "very large", or "a big strapping person".⁸

So there is nothing to help us here and we are still left with a conundrum – and, it is on the word conundrum that I can perhaps finally make some progress. Although it reads as if it should be Latin-based, conundrum has, in fact, a slang origin and was first used in the sixteenth century to mean pedant or whim.⁹ With time and usage it evolved in the late-seventeenth century into its modern form to mean a riddle, pun or seemingly insoluble problem. Added to this, there is some continued debate as to its plural form: does one have multiple conundrums or many conundra?¹⁰ The former is the standard OED recommendation, while the latter is built on the rules of Latin pluralization. Here, my argument will pivot on the Latin form and the fact that at the time that *Racundra* was being designed, built, and commissioned, Ransome was struggling with the resolution of many different conundra. In short, I am suggesting that Ransome may have devised *Racundra* by wordplay and contraction from the word-string 'Ransome's conundra'.

While I have not found a single instance where Ransome has used the word conundra, the conundra that he was dealing with as *Racundra* evolved

from dreams, to plans, to construction, and eventually to a short-lived home, can be readily identified. The boat itself provided many conundra: how to pay for it, how to make it work as an office, how to make it a home, and how to make it an object of freedom. Furthermore, Ransome had to solve the conundra of how and where to get *Racundra* built and eventually how to get the builders to finish it on time. All these conundra and their solutions are described in *Racundra's First Cruise*, which presages the utopian world he would later present in the 'twelve'. At the same time as dealing with the building of *Racundra*, Ransome also had to solve the conundra of the estrangement of his daughter Tabitha, the acrimonious divorce from Ivy, and how he could make a living and return to a life in England. One way or another these conundra were all eventually resolved, just leaving us with the one-hundred-year-old conundrum of the name *Racundra*.

¹ Brian Hammett (ed.), Arthur Ransome, *Racundra's Third Cruise* (Arundel: Fernhurst Books, 2003), p. 40.

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⁶ Brogan, p. 243.

⁷ Christina Hardyment, *The World of Arthur Ransome* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2012, p. 64).

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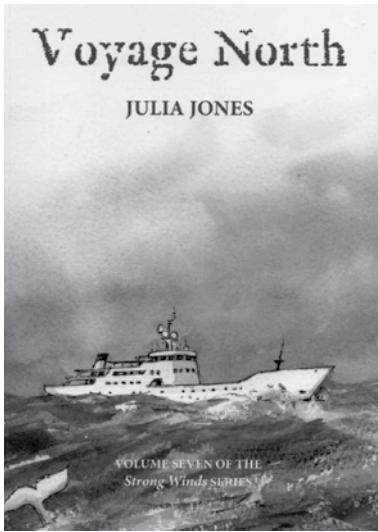
⁹ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095635954>.

¹⁰ 'What is the correct plural of conundrum?', *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/notesandqueries/query/0,5753,-5253,00.html#:~:text=The%20plural%20of%20conundrum%20is%20conundra>.

BOOKSHELF

Julia Jones, *Voyage North*
(Chelmsford: Golden Duck,
2022). ISBN 978-1-899262-54-0

This is the latest book in the Strong Winds series and is very much a direct sequel to the previous book, *Pebble*. Much of what happens in *Voyage North* only makes sense if *Pebble* is read first, although these two books could be read without, necessarily, having to read the whole series.



The book describes a journey by sea from Suffolk to the farthest north point of Europe on a high-tech super yacht (ex-Russian Navy vessel) belonging to a Russian billionaire. This makes a

departure from the sailing vessels featured in the earlier novels.

I don't want to give away too much of the plot. There is not any set-up (as I say, it follows directly on from the previous book) and the action starts from page one. Donny, who was the central character of the first three books, is again the central character. Some of the children from the previous books are here, too, and some are missing. Some new children and young people are also introduced.

What is very noticeable, if you read the whole series, is that themes from the opening of the first book are revisited here, providing some answers and more questions about Donny's family.

The children are once more facing serious dangers and difficult decisions. The people they are up against are powerful, ruthless and nasty. Even the adults with the children are hard to understand, with their own motives and hidden agendas, making them untrustworthy.

There is an epilogue which

rounds off the story and, in her acknowledgements, Jones uses the phrase, ‘this final book’. This would suggest that this is the last book in the series. If so, then a number of questions are left hanging. Personally, I think it is a good place to end, leaving readers a chance to imagine answers for themselves, and making the characters more real, with some mystery about them.

The main controversy of the Strong Winds series is its connection with Ransome’s own books. Jones’s characters are related to Ransome’s as second- or third-generation relatives. Some people may be drawn in by this and find it an intriguing continuation of Ransome. Others might find it off-putting or even disrespectful. I fall between these views, but find the connection rather unnecessary, as the plots do not follow on from Ransome.

The subjects of Jones’s books are more adult than Ransome’s. They face greater dangers and more evil adults, suffering much more, both physically and emotionally. Their world is not the good and happy world of

children’s literature from earlier times. It is instead a dangerous and threatening world that the children have to confront. Nevertheless, they do win out: they stick together and look after each other, and a message that good will overcome evil comes through.

I have really enjoyed this series of books in which Jones has made me care about her characters. They highlight the issues faced by today’s children and are a valuable read for anyone who wants to contrast children’s and young adults’ literature from the 1930s with the very different literature of our own century.

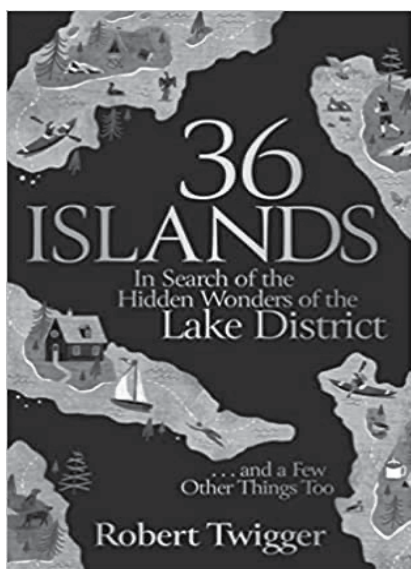
Iain Khan-Gilchrist

Robert Twigger, *36 Islands: In Search of the Hidden Wonders of the Lake District* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2022). ISBN 978-1-4746-2162-5

I didn’t approach this book with any great enthusiasm. If it hadn’t been a choice for the TARS Book Group, I wouldn’t have read it. I assumed that it would be a travelogue of the islands of the Lake District with literary

references, among which would be references to Arthur Ransome. I was wrong.

Robert Twigger is obviously steeped in Ransome knowledge. References to Ransome and his life seem to be the skeleton around which the book is constructed. I would have found it helpful if the origins of his references had been indicated. Twigger presents as facts what I thought may have been his opinions about Ransome and Evgenia's attitudes. My knowledge is not encyclopaedic and I would have enjoyed following up his references. However, this is not designed as an academic book so doubtless the author made a conscious decision not to do this.



36 Islands did not make me think 'I would love to do this, or at least some of it'. Most of the islands are presented as being overused and rubbish ridden. Twigger debunks any idea that one could go for a peaceful and isolated weekend on one, even if one is officially allowed to land – I would be in permanent fear of being harangued and evicted for trespassing. He seems to have made his trips as uncomfortable as possible; his boats leak air, his car smells and is damp, and he seems to choose the most unpleasant routes to get to the islands, in the worst of Lake District weather.

However, his thoughts about his trips, written down at the time, his musings about Ransome (and sometimes about Enid Blyton's *Kirrin Island*), and his descriptions of the islands, their shorelines and their history, are fascinating. It is a well-written book and I really liked the quirky illustrations.

So, in the end I really enjoyed *36 Islands*. If you like travel books, books about the Lake District, and especially if you are interested

in the life and works of Arthur Ransome, you may enjoy it too.

Elizabeth Williams

***Winter Holiday* (adapted for the stage by Chris Eldon Lee and performed at Theatre Severn, Shrewsbury, February 2023).**

Turning a much-loved 350-page story into a play would be daunting for anyone, but with the added complication of it being set in winter, with a frozen lake, it is surely a nigh on impossible task. So it was with some apprehension that my family and I took our seats at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn, wondering if Chris Eldon Lee's adaptation would 'come off'. Looking around the full auditorium, however, it was pleasing to see a wide range of ages including many young people. This reassured me that my two eight-year-olds wouldn't be the only ones wriggling and whispering at times; but as the show progressed, I was surprised at how the younger viewers stayed wrapped in the story.

As to Chris's adaptation, all worries were dispelled within seconds as, with the clever use of

screen projections of AR's *Winter Holiday* illustrations, and with minimal but carefully selected props, the Observatory, Dixon's Farm and the Holly Howe signalling wall were instantly recognisable. As the players came on dressed in mufflers, Argyle sweaters, and duffle coats, and with much rubbing of hands and stamping of feet, we were left in no doubt that we were in the depths of winter. At the required point, clever use of lighting suggested the falling of snow. Chris is to be congratulated on his achievement, as what followed was a hugely enjoyable and entertaining musical play suitable for young and old.

Dick, the nervous astronomer/scientist, and Dorothea, the supportive budding author, had the starring roles alongside the Walkers and Blacketts, but the glue that helped pull the storyline together was the ingenious use of an additional character – AR himself, explaining and summarising throughout the play and cleverly doubling up as Captain Flint. The play stuck faithfully to Ransome's

storyline although purists may point out that the igloo scenes were omitted, but this was done in the interests of length.

Memorable scenes included the cragfast sheep, skating on the ice, the tall Dutchman returning to the *Fram*, the blizzard scene en route to the pole and a memorable music hall song extolling the virtues of Mrs Dixon's pies. The audience was encouraged to join in some shanties, and at one point there was a spontaneous touch of pantomime with an 'Oh yes, it is', 'Oh no, it isn't' response to Captain Flint thinking the *Fram's* store cupboard was full. A very clever minor adaptation of the ending of the book (no spoilers) made for a memorable, apt and moving final scene.

All the characters were enthusiastically played by adults (some playing more than one part) but this did not detract from our belief and enjoyment. There was humour aplenty, although my one criticism was that most characters were depicted as a little too immature and jolly, with the result that they were more

caricatured than in the book.

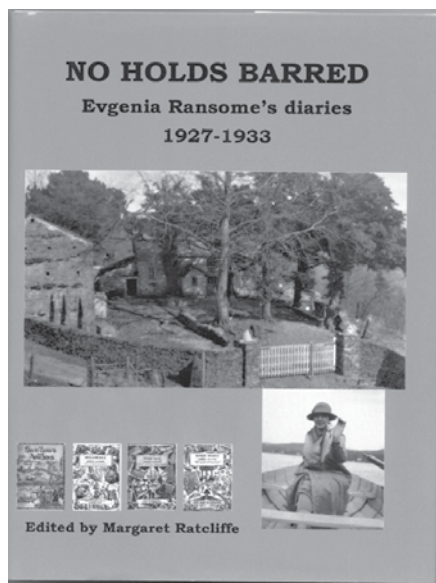
Surely one of Ransome's greatest skills was in making his youngsters truly believable. All in all, however, this was a hugely successful world stage-premiere of the book and one all present thoroughly enjoyed. I'm sure we weren't the only family with three generations present, surely a testament of AR's endless appeal.



A nice touch at the end was meeting the cast, who came out into the foyer in character and spent a long time joking and playing with us. I got berated (quite rightly) by Nancy for suggesting that it would be a more sensible option to have adventures during daylight hours rather than in the snow at night!

Emma Bailey-Wright

Margaret Ratcliffe (ed.), *No Holds Barred: Evgenia Ransome's diaries 1927-1933* (Amazon Publications, 2022).



It's probably fair to say that Evgenia's diaries are at times sparse, at times inconsistent and at times frustrating. They are, however, endlessly fascinating and give a good insight into Evgenia and her marriage to Arthur. To give two examples of typical entries:

29 January 1930, 'Telegram from Arthur asking me to come to London to meet him (ed. *following AR's trip to Egypt*). Drove to Windermere to send the reply: NO. A lovely day.'

3 October 1930, 'Went to the dining room for breakfast, but the room was so crowded, the tables so wobbly, the people so unpleasant, the family at the next table having such awful colds that decided to have all our meals in our own room.'

These give glimpses into Evgenia's forthright character but, in contrast, many of her entries comprise just one line: 2 Dec. 1930, 'Arthur went to London and Manchester'; 8 Dec. 1930, 'Arthur came home looking and feeling bad.' There are many entries saying who came to tea or which flowers were out in the garden. Nevertheless, over the course of the seven years we get a real sense of Evgenia's likes and dislikes, her moods, opinions and her regular illnesses (Arthur's too). Perhaps most revealing of all in the diaries is her love of fishing for which there are many entries. For example, 2 July 1931, 'Fished from the Gondola Pier. Caught 2 trout 5oz and 13ozs.'

Occasionally, for comparison, Margaret gives us Arthur's entry

for the same day. Sometimes their entries relate to the same topic, at other times they are completely unrelated. Occasionally they simply promote intrigue, such as:

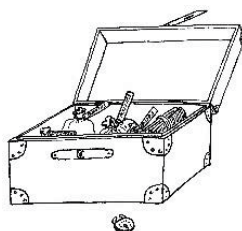
30 March 1932, **ER** –
 ‘Ernest humbly apologised to me for having been rude yesterday explaining that he did not mean to insult.’; **AR**
 – ‘Ernest and Genia !!!!’

Two exceptions to Evgenia’s normal style are her accounts of two cruises on the Broads in 1931 and 1933 where entries are much longer, giving a record of the holidays in which we get a good feel for the ups and downs of their adventures. Perhaps the most frustrating section is her account of their trip to Aleppo.

Whilst the travel to and within Aleppo is well documented, there is little detail of life with the Altounyans. It’s been well documented elsewhere that their trip came to an abrupt, unhappy end, although little of this is recorded in Evgenia’s diaries. In fact, there are just two entries, one of which I’ve quoted above.

Margaret Ratcliffe is to be congratulated on her work in compiling these diaries. The real bonus, however, is the quality of the publication. It is beautifully illustrated with pictures and photographs, particularly the Broads cruises and the Aleppo trip, which add considerably to the book’s appeal. It won’t appeal to the masses, but is definitely essential reading for all Tars.

Peter Wright



STILL GOING STRONG

After thirty years, **Amazon Publications** is very much still alive and flourishing. For 2024 we are offering the script of *Red Skies*, a play by Ivan Cutting. Some of you will already have seen this production.

The script is a fascinating read in its own right: tense and taut from the first scene, with AR almost unaware of the seething distrust emanating from Evgenia towards their ‘guest’, the somewhat louche or insouciant George Orwell. The subtly nuanced dialogue is possibly even better appreciated through reading than being seen on the stage.

But who is spying upon whom? – not just back in the day in Russia, but in the UK in the decade 1939-49 in which the play is set.

The playwright’s Preface – especially written for this publication – gives a first-hand and very personal insight into the gestation process of this totally credible and riveting fiction.

Amazon Publications is teaming up with the Nancy Blackett Trust to offer this title to members of both organisations. More details in *Signals* and the NBT’s *Jibbooms and Bobstays*, with Subscription Forms in the December publications. The launch will be at TARS Literary Weekend in Harrogate in April 2024.

Titles for 2025 and 2026 are already in progress ...

Margaret Ratcliffe

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NATIVE
SETTLEMENT

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LAGOON

