

SIGNALS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY

JANUARY – APRIL 2020

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Editorial Comment

Paul Wilson

Here is your magazine for the New Year, which you may receive before then. This issue includes Despatches for the IAGM in Lechlade in May and the usual regional reports. We have some feedback on the very successful Literary Weekend in Cirencester in September and full details of the expedition to Eastern Europe in September 2020 (p. 9): book soon!

It is hoped to make all our journals available in electronic format in 2020, with the subsequent advantages for the environment and postal costs if there is a significant uptake for this. Further details are in 'News from the Board' (p. 4) and the advert on p. 11. On the subject of electronic media, we are also looking for assistance to redesign, update and maintain TARS website (see p. 11).

As you are already aware, I step down from my editorship of *Signals* with this issue, after 3 years in the post. I have enjoyed my time doing this and hope that the changes we have made have met with your approval. Graham Knott and Simon D'Arcy, graphic designers at Alba Printers Ltd, have given me considerable assistance with their expertise in layout and design, and in seeing *Signals* through the press.

One of the remarkable points about being editor is how little feedback one receives from members. Perhaps no news is good news! But – it's your magazine, so please tell us what you would like or even send in a contribution. Peter Willis takes over from me with the next issue in April 2020, so please send your comments and contributions to him in future (see p. 32). I have every confidence that, with his professional background and experience, you will continue to see improvements. As for the last issue, Peter has sub-edited this one and also written some pieces this time.

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Advertisements

We are pleased to accept advertisements from Members in *Signals*, either included in the magazine or an insert, by arrangement with the Editor and subject to usual copy deadlines.

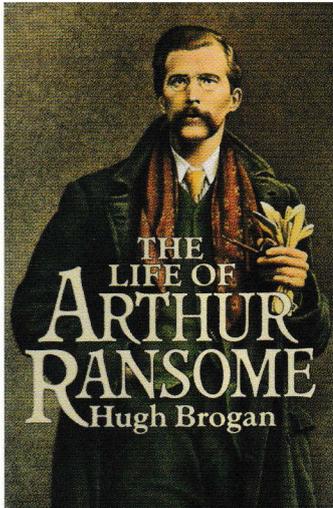
Half page: £100 Quarter page: £50

Eighth page: £25 Flyer with mailing: £100

Hugh Brogan, Ransome's biographer

Hugh Brogan, who died on 26 July at the age of 83, was a distinguished historian – Emeritus Professor at Essex University – but he will be remembered by TARS chiefly for his *The Life of Arthur Ransome*, which became one of the foundation stones of our society.

The book was initiated almost by accident when he read a review of the 1974 film of *Swallows and Amazons* that described Ransome as a 'frightful old Tory'. What happened next is well known. Brogan, who had been enjoying a bibulous evening in the senior common room at St John's, Cambridge, where he was a fellow, dashed off a furious letter to Ransome's publishers, complaining that such ignorance was due to the lack of a proper biography, and immediately posted it in a nearby pillar-box. This led to an offer from the publishers and to Evgenia, Ransome's widow, appointing him as her husband's official biographer.

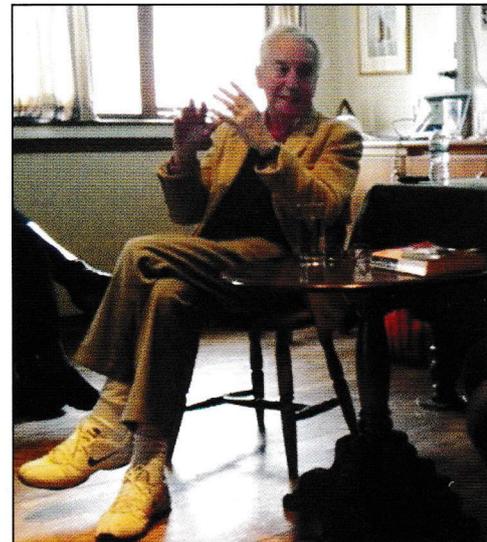


The Life of Arthur Ransome was published in 1984, Ransome's centenary, and played a major part in the revival of interest in its subject. Hugh had taken 10 years over its writing, which he did in tandem with his major *History of the United States*, but his interest in Ransome had begun much earlier, when he was given a copy of *Swallows and Amazons* at

the age of nine, and he had spent the intervening years collecting information and ideas about Ransome. Even so, as he told a meeting in 2017, 'I knew very little about Ransome before I got started ... we forget how meagre the record was before I got to work. And I discovered how meagre it was, but that meant more time in the libraries. And then this remarkable man began to emerge.'

He also uncovered 'a huge amount of latent goodwill and interest in Ransome; I asked everyone who was suggested to me. And they all responded. I can't think of a single disagreeable response and of course that tells us something about Arthur Ransome. Everybody liked him.'

Brogan followed it up with *Signalling to Mars*, a selection of Ransome's letters, in 1997. In between he edited a collection of Ransome's previously unpublished Russian



stories, entitled *The War of the Birds and the Beasts* (1984), and Ransome's unfinished draft of a 13th *Swallows and Amazons* book, to which he gave the title *Coots in the North*, putting it together with a selection of other previously unpublished stories, in 1988.

Once TARS was under way, he spoke at two of the Literary Weekends, in 1993 on Russia and in 1997 on the letters – transcripts of both are in the TARS Library, and are well worth reading. His last public appearance at a Ransome-related event was at the Pin Mill Jamboree commemorating the 50th anniversary of Arthur's death in 2017 where, despite failing health, he spoke for nearly an hour, off-the-cuff, on many aspects of Ransome's life and work, and his own efforts in recording it.

Hugh was a genial and affable companion and, naturally, an engaging speaker. At his funeral, the oration was given by his childhood friend Sir John Tusa, who said Hugh was very clever but always carried his cleverness lightly without superiority. Sir John also recalled an incident where an older boy told the 9-year-old Brogan he was eccentric. 'Seventy years later Hugh would talk of how he spent the rest of that day asking passing grown-ups what "eccentric" meant. Was he eccentric? Almost certainly.'

He was also witty, humane, self-composed and a firm believer in the theory that every book is in a sense autobiographical. This, he felt, was certainly true of Ransome's own books, but it is also true of his biography of Ransome.

Peter Willis

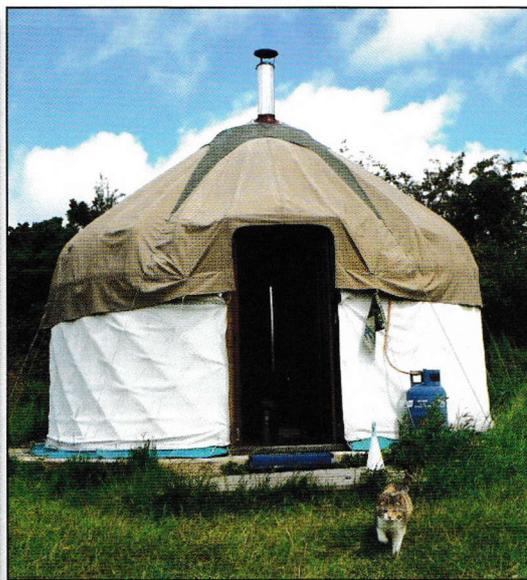
Extracts from the 2017 Pin Mill event are to be published in the next *Mixed Moss*.



Sou'westers and Seaboats News from the SW Region

Camping Weekend – Friday 14th – Sunday 16th June 2019

South Penquite Farm near Bodmin was a wonderful base for our camping weekend, with the option of yurts, pods or tents. Due to the weather forecast only five hardy SW TARS members decided to go ahead. After arriving on Friday we explored each other's night-time accommodation before eating and catching up on news. We also met one of the farm cats who liked to visit all farm visitors, especially the yurts at night. On Saturday we went to visit our adopted armadillo at Newquay Zoo; although we were hoping to see one of the three armadillos they have, we were unlucky as they were not in the zoo's nocturnal area. We enjoyed visiting the other animals though, especially the meerkats.



In the afternoon a visit to the beach nearly ended in two of us being cut off by the tide: too much chatting and not enough paying attention. Luckily we only ended up with wet trousers. We were able to follow the farm walk, after a barbecue dinner, because of the long summer evening. We parted ways early the next morning as the weather started closing in.