

**SIGNALS**

**THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY**

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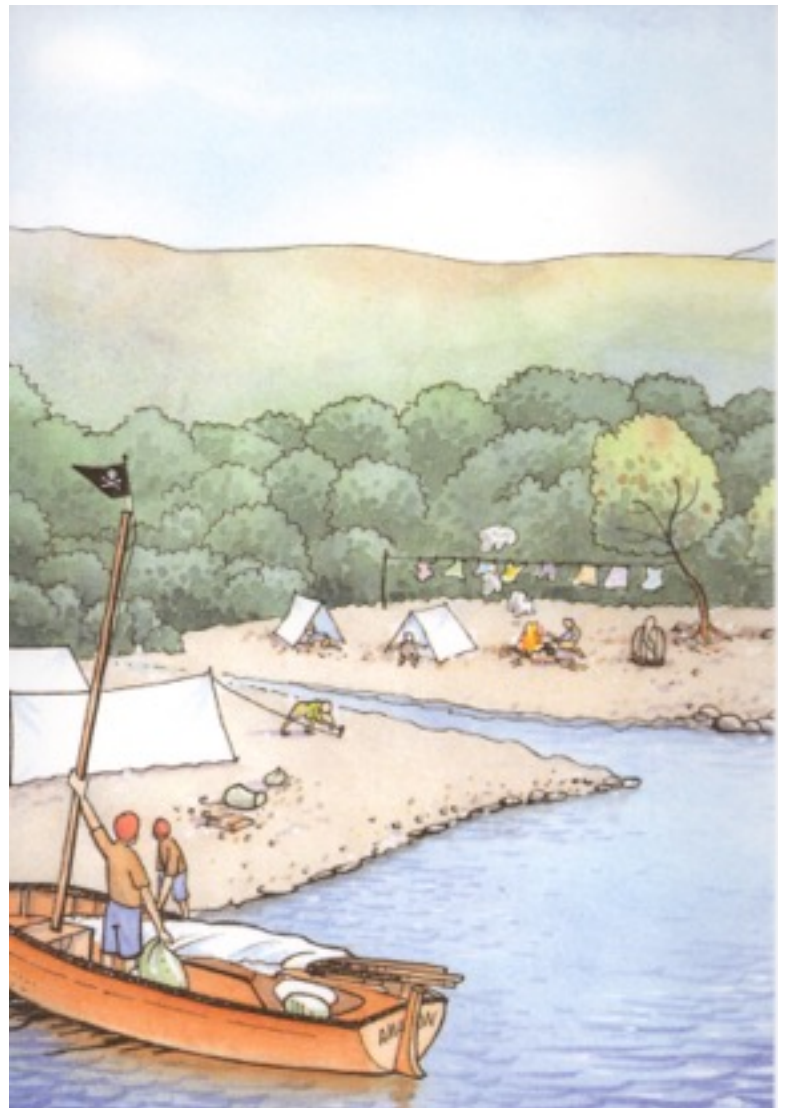


**COOTS' CAMP  
and  
HUNTER'S YARD**

**DISCUSSING  
DOROTHEA**

**FINDING  
FACEBOOK**

**SWALLOWDALE'S  
HOUND TRAILS**



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**SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2022 WITH REGIONAL NEWS**

# The Arthur Ransome Society

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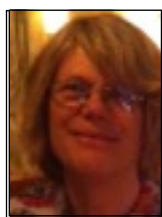


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# SIGNALS



## THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 2022

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### From the Editor

## Camping and tramping

Well, not so much of the tramping (but read on...); however there does seem to have been an outbreak of outdoorsiness this summer, with camps springing up everywhere in the wake of Midland's Coniston camp at Hoathwaite last year. I don't think any single event has matched Hoathwaite's numbers, but taken together they probably match, or even exceed that figure.

Doyen of the TARS camps, though, is Southern's Cobnor, which started in the early 90s – we and our children loved it – and Southern more recently added the more sheltered Warnford (see p24) with lake sailing, ideal for getting the very young onto the water.

What I'd like to hope is the first of a series of Broads camps, organised by Marc Grimston for TARS East, attracted members from other regions, as it should (see report on p8). Midland has its Rudyard Lake event and this year ventured into West Wales, while South-West still has one to come in September (p20). No better way to encourage and attract a new generation of Ransome fans!

And as for tramping, only TARS East has its own official long-distance footpath – the six-mile Arthur Ransome Trail alongside the River Orwell, which visitors to the IAGM might like to explore. But for anyone with a mobile phone, ART's new Swallows and Amazons app opens up Ransome's Lakes country with suggestions and directions (see p7).

Going back to the bookshelf – thank you **Christina Hardymont** for responding to my query in the last Signals about the proper sequence of *Peter Duck* and *Swallowdale*. She writes: "I think I say in one or other of my AR books that AR wanted PD to come first, but Cape decided that the Public wanted more of the same, and so he wrote *Swallowdale*. I suspect I got it from Brogan. What I don't know is whether he'd actually finished PD and then had to start SD." Next question then – does anyone know that? And in which of Christina's books does she mention it?

**Peter Willis**

**This issue's cover:** A change from our usual book cover illustrations, this ("In Horseshoe Cove" from *Swallowdale*, coloured by Jim Watson) is part of a new series of greeting cards and postcards from the Arthur Ransome Trust, based on illustrations and the original book covers; for more details, visit [arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk/shop/](http://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk/shop/). They will be on sale at the IAGM, and eventually we hope through the TARS Stall.

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## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

from

# Peter Wright

One of the disadvantages of moving the IAGM weekend to the August bank holiday is that as I write this, the weekend is still 6-7 weeks away, yet by the time you read this it will be just about to happen! I'm very much looking forward to it but it's a bit late to be encouraging you to attend! I'll just say, I hope many of you are able to go and we'll all thoroughly enjoy it.

One of the great highlights for me at each IAGM is the Dick Callum Cup where teams compete against each other in what should be a light-hearted quiz about Arthur and his works. I say should be light-hearted, because in my experience it can be extremely competitive and there are four or five real enthusiasts who, if their passion was train spotting, might be called by another name similar to a rain garment. So seriously do they take it, I'm told they do revision before each quiz!

I shall merely call them experts and as the evening wears on and the scores become too close to call, it can become very tense, dare I say cut-throat, albeit in a friendly, light-hearted way. Likely as not, I won't be on the winning side (my knowledge of the books being merely average) but that's not important; for me it's the fun of taking part, "grabbing a chance" and having a go that I enjoy. I hope it is for you too, whether it be in the quiz or doing other Ransomeish activities either organised by TARS or just by yourself.

The highlight of my summer has been the Broads Camp organised by Marc Grimston and Eastern region. Apart from an afternoon trip during the Literary Weekend in Norwich in 2005 I had never before been to the Broads (how bad or sad is that for a chairman of TARS!). Needless to say, I thoroughly enjoyed visiting the *Coot Club* and *Big Six* locations on getting on the water in three different vessels. The latter included a classic 1930's wooden yacht from Hunters Yard and you can read about this and the yard elsewhere in this edition of *Signals*. I hope you too have had some

*Swallows and Amazons* type adventure of your own – if you have, why not write then up for *Signals*?

As you know, in the Arthur Ransome Trust we have a charitable sister organisation whose aim is to promote Ransome and his works through educational initiatives. Two recent examples are worthy of note. The first is a *Swallows and Amazons* App you can download onto your mobile phones. It's intended to help the general public discover and appreciate AR's life and works, especially when exploring the places that he knew and which inspired him.

It currently only covers the Lake District and thus the five Lakeland books, but if resources permit and take-up goes well it could expand to include the East Coast books and locations.

If you haven't already seen it, do download it and have a look at all that it offers – it's a very useful tool that I think you'll find most interesting.

Hot on the app's heels ART has now produced a new line of *Swallows and Amazons* merchandise for sale. These are in the form of attractive postcards and greetings cards. Do have a look at these on the ART web site although hopefully we'll soon be able to stock these on the TARS stall.

Finally, I've been saddened recently to hear that both The Blue Peter and Costa children's book awards are being scrapped. I've no doubt financial considerations are behind these decisions, but this cannot be good news either for writers or readers. Award schemes can be a springboard for authors to get their big break, and for those of us who still read children's books, the long-lists and eventual winners provide a happy hunting ground to aid us find books we might enjoy.

As you know Ransome was the first recipient of the Carnegie award and it's good to know that that award is still going strong, as is the Waterstone's Children's book award.

If you haven't read any children's books for some time (apart from Ransome) may I encourage you to do so. The TARS Book Group can point you in the right direction and of course we have all the Carnegie winners (and other children's books) in our excellent TARS Library. Happy Reading!



*'It can become very tense, dare I say cut-throat, in a friendly, lighthearted way'*

DATE	CALENDAR OF EVENTS	REGION
26-29 August	<b>International AGM</b> Shotley, Suffolk	East
9-11 September	Canoe Camping w/e Roadford Lake	South-West
17 September	Susan Cooking Day	Midland
1 October Saturday	Nene Valley Railway Peterborough	East
15 October Saturday	Bekonscot Model Village	Midland
15 October Saturday	Lunch and talk Teignmouth CYC	South-West
12 Nov'ber Saturday	Signalling to Mars Eastwood	Midland
December TBC	Inn-Formal Red Lion Lowick. (Helen Lewis)	Northern
21 January Saturday	Birthday Lunch & AGM Butt & Oyster, Pin Mill	East
21 January Saturday	Potteries Potter and AGM, Hanley, Stoke o/T	Midland
21 January Saturday	AGM on Zoom	South-West
18 February	WINTER HOLIDAY Group Matinee visit	Midland
<b>5-8 May 2023</b>	<b>TARS IAGM Dundee</b>	Scotland



## Winter comes around again...

Hard to think of winter in the height of this heat-wave summer (at least, it is as I write this at the start of August!) but the Events Calendar is already presaging the turn of the year, with three Ransome birthday-related AGM events (he'd have been 139 on the 18th of January) – one of them on Zoom.

There's also the traditional post-Christmas Northern get-together at the Lowick Red Lion – maybe. Please ring Helen Lewis to confirm the date.

### ... and on stage at last

Exactly a year late (thanks to Covid), the dramatised version of *Winter Holiday* will be blowing into the Theatre Severn at Shrewesbury, 16-18 February. Midland TARS are organising a group visit for the Saturday matinee, with a pre-show chat with its writer and director Chris Eldon Lee. More details, page 20, or to book your own tickets, phone 01743 281281 or on-line at [www.theatresevern.co.uk](http://www.theatresevern.co.uk). (Photo from the show.)

### At home with a good book (or several)

**November 13 (Sunday) at 6.30** is the provisional date for the next meeting of the **TARS Book Group** – for more details and the Zoom link, contact Elizabeth Williams (see Regional Gateway for details).

And Midland's **Zoom read-aloud** continues, about to start on *Pigeon Post* - and not just for Midland members, About twice a month, for about 90 minutes, early weekend evenings. Listen, or take a turn at reading. More details will be on the TARS website diary, or from Amanda Ardagh-Walter, [nickandamanda1558@gmail.com](mailto:nickandamanda1558@gmail.com)

## MIXED MOSS Needs You!

**CALLING ALL EDITORS AND WRITERS**  
Currently TARS has no editor for the  
**2023 Mixed Moss.**

**Can you help? Would you be prepared to join a small editorial team?**

We also need articles for the next edition. If you can help in either capacity, please get in touch with the Chairman, Peter Wright via email – [peterwright180@btinternet.com](mailto:peterwright180@btinternet.com), or telephone – 0121 443 2910

## NEWS: Future of the '74 film dinghies

# Swallow and Amazon reunion?

**Recent developments affecting the two boats used in the 1974 *Swallows and Amazons* film could see *Swallow* and *Amazon* sailing together to Wild Cat Island under the TARS flag.**

A few months ago, the two families that own *Amazon* contacted TARS to suggest lending her to the society if we would sail her and maintain her. In the last few weeks, this proposal has hardened into an offer to donate the wooden clinker dinghy to TARS.

Meanwhile, both the organisers of Sail Ransome, which manages *Swallow* following her purchase in 2010, are facing personal problems: Rob Boden is still recovering from cancer, while Magnus Smith has domestic issues. *Swallow* has not managed any sailing this summer, and both Rob and Magnus would like to hand her management on to someone else.

Following the 5<sup>th</sup> March Board Meeting, Diana Wright has been in contact with *Amazon*'s owners, whose original offer emerged from a need to find a new home for her, while, as 'part of the family' they didn't wish to entirely sever links with her.

For TARS, Diana has already made some progress with possible sailing arrangements, but came up against a brick wall over the issue of TARS insuring a boat that was not its property – hence the offer to donate *Amazon*. Before accepting, we need to be sure we can give her the good home she deserves, and ensure that she is sailed under appropriate supervision.

Offers of help or suggestions – with sailing (on Coniston), maintenance and general management would be most welcome – contact Diana at [webmaster@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:webmaster@arthur-ransome.org).



## Nancy Blackett survives a sinking

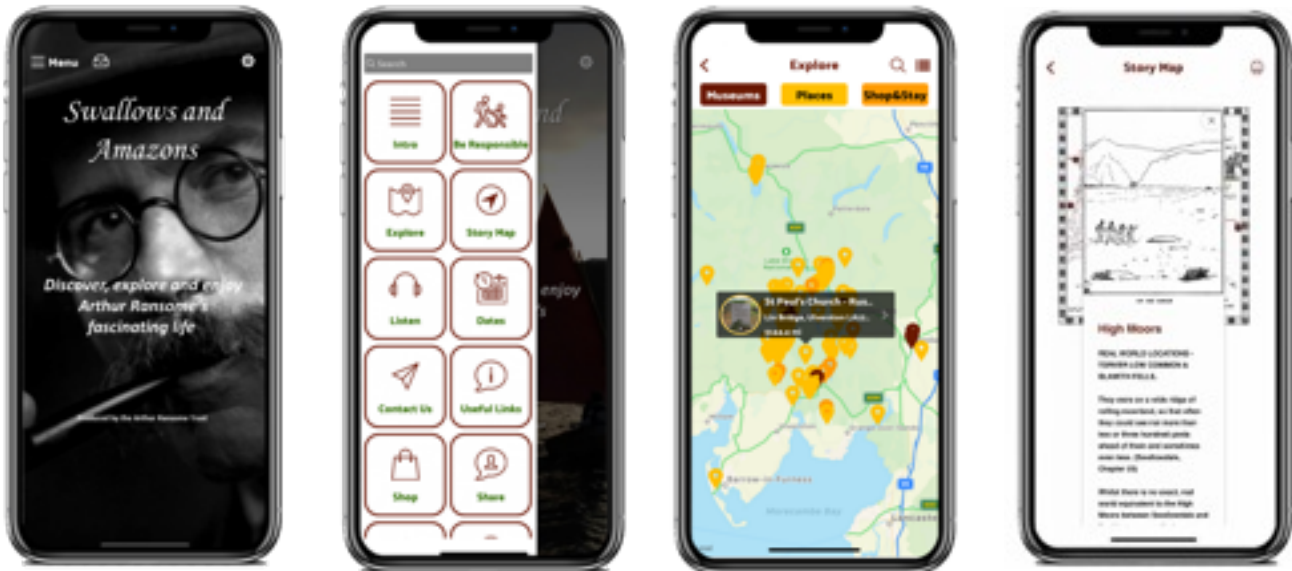
*Nancy Blackett* suffered a wet start to her new season when she sank at the her moorings immediately on being relaunched. The cause appears to have been a combination of her planking not being given sufficient time to 'take up' (swell and becomes watertight) after having dried out during her winter ashore, and the failure of an automatic pump.

She was immediately hauled out again and has remained ashore while damage was assessed, and a new engine installed. While the engine was out, maintenance on otherwise inaccessible areas of the hull was carried out.

Her owners, the Nancy Blackett Trust, had to put plans to celebrate their 25th anniversary on hold, but are confident that she will be ready to play her part in the TARS IAGM in her home region at the end of August - come and see her!



*Nancy* ashore, and shrouded in damp sails to keep her timbers moist in the hot weather



## ART's App puts the Lake District on your phone

This new 'Swallows and Amazons' App from the Arthur Ransome Trust provides an easy to use guide to Ransome-related sites in the Lake District. It's free to download, (look for Swallows and Amazons on Google Play or Apple's App Store), is advert-free and can be set to provide notification of Ransome-related events. It also offers a choice of two maps - one showing the real Lake District, and the other showing the location of places on Ransome's 'Lake in the North'. Together they provide information on, and directions to, nearly 100 Ransome-related locations. (more details at [arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk](http://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk))

Magnus Smith took it on a Lakes holiday:

**'the guide books stayed at the farmhouse, and the App went with me...'**

Fortuitously, this app was released just two weeks before I was due to visit Cumbria for the first time in 28 years. Whilst I had carefully packed my green Cape hardbacks, and all the Amazon publications I could lay my hands on, it was great to have a vast array of information in pocketable form too. My books stayed at the AirBnB farmhouse, and the app went with me up Kanchenjunga, around the edge of Coniston Water, and so on, providing me with reminders which made my obsessive journeys much easier.

I mainly used the 'Explore' feature, which displays a map with Ransome-related locations marked upon it. You can click to see a little pop-up with the name, and tap on that to get more information if desired. Sometimes I planned my journeys in advance, to look at several spots all within a few miles of each other, and the ability to get satnav directions with one click was handy. On other days I was out with my brother and his wife, being forced to suffer looking at places *not* related to Arthur Ransome (a terrible waste of time!) but was able to use the app to see what was nearby, and sometimes persuade my long-suffering companions to take a detour on the way home.

Seeing as it was free, there isn't really any complaint I can make about this handy source of information. I do have a few suggestions for the designers, because there can be a delay when viewing location information, which leads to a blank screen confusing you for longer than is acceptable. I relied on patience to see if my internet connection was responsible, but a simple message saying, "Please wait..." would have helped a lot.

All in all, the app is well worth downloading if you are visiting the Lake District, and still worth a try if you are not, since you can still enjoy having a nose around all the information it offers.





# Welcome to... CAMP COOT CLUB



“It was his idea” as it says somewhere in The Big Six. On this occasion ‘he’ was Marc Grimston, and his idea – a good one – was to find a fairly basic and cheap campsite on the Broads, fix a date – the Spring half-term week – advertise it to Tars, and leave it to whoever wanted to come to book themselves in for all or part of the period. No expectations about numbers...

In the event the numbers got into double figures, with Tars from at least four regions – North, Midlands, South-West and East. Here’s a composite report...

For TARS Chairman Peter Wright, getting there involved three trains (four if you count the London Underground), to possibly the smallest station in the country – Worstead. “But there to greet me was Marc Grimston and even better, when we arrived at the campsite three miles away, he had already erected the tent I was borrowing from him. The site was excellent: level, spacious, basic but with all one would need, plus other Tars, some I’d not met before.”

The following morning found him on yet another train - with other Tars (“some I’d not met before”) on a scenic steam train ride on the Bure Valley narrow gauge railway, which runs between Aylsham and Wroxham.

At Wroxham, home of Roys, which now hosts a McDonalds – so “not quite as Ransome would have known it”, and a pleasure cruise on the river “where I was to witness the magic and delight of the waterways, but was shocked at the sheer number and size of fibreglass *Margolettas*. Fortunately, it was not long before we spied an old Wherry (*Solace*) and a beautiful old wooden cruiser that Ransome would have recognised.”







Next day, Horning, and the delightful Post-Office, where Arthur (Herbertson) bought a Ransome pin badge and TARS leaflets were prominently on display. We were fortunate to book the last remaining vessel available for hire that day, a beautiful electric launch similar in style to a steam launch of a century or more ago.

Ten of us had a beautiful cruise down the river, joining at a point roughly where a photographic trap was once laid. Quite what the Deaths and Glories would make of all the new boatyards and cottages and lack of any wilderness is anyone's guess. The Ferry Inn is a rebuild; the one they would have known was flattened in the war.

We went as far as St Benets Abbey, then returned and tried the dyke to Ranworth,. At this point the sky was getting dark, and almost within sight of Malthouse Broad, a sensational hailstorm began. We turned back to the boatyard, – all passengers had almost dried out by the time we got there and the weather was fine again allowing us another trip to the Swan.

In the evening three of us decided a five-mile walk would do us good, exploring the redundant North Walsham and Dilham canal and returning via the intriguingly named Weavers' Way. Hot drinks and a fire crackling in the fire pit were enjoyed on our return.

Wednesday was the undoubted highlight of the stay, starting with exploring Hunter's Yard, which I don't think has changed since it was established in 1932 and was somewhat like stepping back in time. (more on the Yard overleaf) and then two sailing trips aboard the 1927 traditional wooden, gunter-rigged half decker, *Buff Tip* – pure delight. The highlight of this highlight was watching a Marsh Harrier glide alongside us for about 30 seconds.



Then to The Swan at Horning for an evening meal (in the company of the

pike) – something AR and Evgenia must also have enjoyed in their day.

Many thanks to Marc for organising such an enjoyable event and to Vikki Walker at Hunter's. (Compiled from reports and photos provided by Duncan Breckels, Arthur Herbertson, Diana Wright, and Peter Wright.)



# Coot Club, The Big Six, the BBC and the boats of Hunter's Yard

Peter Wright visits the Broads boatyard that supplied the star of the screen adaptations



In 1984, the BBC released an eight-part drama series based on *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*. Strangely, it went out under the generic title, *Swallows and Amazons Forever!* presumably to gain maximum publicity by piggy-backing off Arthur Ransome's most famous novel and the 1974 film of *Swallows and Amazons*.

As many Tars may already know, there is a direct link between the 1974 film and the TV series – Sophie Neville, our immediate past-President who played Titty in the '74 film had a key role ten years later in its making.

To ensure authenticity, the series had to be filmed in Norfolk – which meant finding period boats and a yard with an authentic 1930s look. This is where Hunter's Yard comes in. The yard was established in 1932 by Percy Hunter, and his two sons Cyril and Stanley.

The yard had changed very little since the 1930s and neither had its fleet of traditional 1930s wooden sailing yachts. So it is not surprising that it was selected by the BBC as both the source of boats for the TV series and

the location for some of the filming. The chief requirement was for an authentic 1930's style yacht to use as *Teasel*. *Lullaby* had just been stripped back to bare wood and was about to be revarnished. As a four-berth gaff sloop she was near identical in looks to *Teasel* as drawn by Ransome in *Coot Club*.

To change her name to *Teasel*, a new transom, bearing the name, was made and fitted, then removed at the end of filming. It can still be seen in



the shed To get as close as possible to the 1930s, hemp ropes replaced the more modern synthetic ones and the modern Terylene sails replaced by Durdon ones, which looked just like cotton ones. Hunter's told us that these actually proved too heavy for the spars as several cracks appeared during filming.

The yard also benefitted from the deal in other ways. The BBC props department had tried to convert a former lifeboat into the *Death and Glory*. Not being experts in boat construction their efforts resulted in an extremely unstable boat and so one of the yard's boatbuilders set to work rebuilding



the cabin using lighter wood. The yard was also asked to convert an 11ft dinghy in their fleet into *Titmouse* and clean up an old punt to become Tom Dudgeon's *Dreadnought*.

Not surprisingly, given its authenticity as a 1930's boatyard, Hunter's was given several small cameo roles in the actual filming. All that was needed was a new lick of creosote and replacing the name sign with one that read *Rodley and Co*.

Why *Rodley's* and not *Jonnatt's*? I suspect the reason is because the BBC chose to expand what is the very last sentence in the postscript to *Coot Club* into a two-and-a-half-minute major scene in which Death and Glories, in front of the boatsheds, are publicly thanked for salvaging the *Margoletta* and presented with their pocket money reward. The interior of Hunter's also features in the opening scenes of the *Big Six* episodes, in particular the famous scene where Pete's tooth is 'outed'. No attempt, however, is made to tell us this is Jonnatt's boatyard as the very next scene has Mr Rodley complaining to Constable Tedder that someone had been in his boatshed during the night leaving a mess – such is the artistic licence film makers take.

Copies of *Swallows and Amazons Forever* are freely available to watch on You Tube so you can see for yourself.

Hunter's told us that filming on board *Teasel* was quite difficult as there was barely enough room for the actors and a minimal film crew. Most of the production staff had to be on a support vessel whilst others had to keep other boats and holiday makers out of the shots. One of the hardest scenes to shoot was the grounding of *Teasel* in Breydon Water where she had to be moored each day with four anchors that would not be seen.

Clearly the involvement of the BBC was a major financial windfall for Hunter's Yard, but this proved to be the case in more ways than one. Apparently, the broadcast of the series created an enormous interest in the Hunter's fleet leading to increased hiring and it was quite common for parent to bring their children along to the yard to see *Rodley & Co*, *Teasel* and *Titmouse*. Hunters also recount the family who for many years would hire both *Teasel* and *Titmouse* with their son sleeping each night under an awning in *Titmouse*, to live out the stories.

Hunters have kept some of the BBC memorabilia and are still proud of their links with the film. *Teasel* has returned to being *Lullaby* but her transom has been kept and is on display, as are *Titmouse*, recently restored, and *Dreadnought*. Hunters are keen to continue the Ransome



Photos: *Opposite page, Teasel's transom, Hunter's yard with Titmouse. Above, Yard interior with Titmouse and Tars. Below, Lullaby, sailing under her own name*

link and have a set of the books in their lending library so any children who are on holiday on one of their boats can take *Coot Club*, *Big Six* or any of the other books out with them to read. They'll even put a TARS flier in for good measure. Find out more about Hunters Heritage fleet and the Yard by logging in to their website [www.huntersyard.co.uk](http://www.huntersyard.co.uk).

\* Factual information about Hunters Yard and their association with the BBC from the book *Hunter's Fleet* by Richard Johnstone-Bryden, Nighthawk Publishing.

\* Pictures by courtesy of Hunter's Yard, Sophie Neville, Duncan Breckles and Krysia Clack.



# Dot Dot Dot

“Nobody ever was angry with Dorothea”  
– except, apparently, **Lesley Wareing**, who posted her thoughts  
on Facebook, and awaited reactions...

I find Dorothea one of the most puzzling characters in the entire canon. When I think of her in the abstract it's with great fondness. She seems to be a delightful young girl: well-behaved, intelligent, sensitive, thoughtful and kind. There is no malice in her. She's very protective of Dick, especially in terms of mediating how (she thinks) he may appear to others. She is proud of his intelligence and abilities and generously wants others to appreciate them and not think Dick odd.

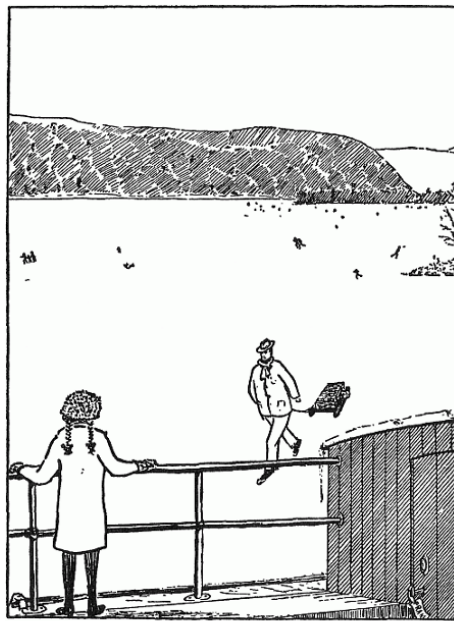
She has a vivid imagination, can readily empathise with others and is very dogged and determined.

At the end of *The Big Six*, she courageously and effectively presents the case for the defence to Mr Farland, in intimidating circumstances, facing an array of hostile, accusatory and supercilious males. She holds her own, acts with great dignity – and greatly impresses him.

So why, when I am actually reading the books in which she appears, does she irritate me so much? Even though I happily agreed with the authorial voice in *Winter Holiday* (surely AR's voice – it couldn't have been Captain Flint as he'd only met Dot minutes beforehand and nobody else was present): “Nobody ever was angry with Dorothea”. I agreed when I read it – but I do get cross with her! I feel I'm being inconsistent and therefore unfair.

In WH somebody says: “But what's SHE going to do?” I find myself asking a parallel question – what difference does Dorothea make in the scheme of things? It's easy to identify the contribution Dick makes but much more difficult (for me) to pin down anything specific for Dorothea.

When I was trying to think of her contribution to the collective effort in PP, other than her sacrificing pages from her precious notebook for messages (and the “claim” notice) and readily doing her share of boring old combing and scouting duties, I couldn't think of anything especially



“TALL DUTCHMAN”

significant that she did. Unlike the equally imaginative and inventive Titty, Dot doesn't have much in the way of useful practical outdoor skills.

And it's not just the absence of things – there are times when Dot's vivid imagination and her habit of seeing everything through the filter of a fictional narrative is a positive menace. In SA John dealt effectively with Roger's rising panic in the dark and tangled Octopus Lagoon: “In Roger's voice there were clear signs of panic in the forecastle. Captain John took command at once. ‘Rubbish Roger,’ he said, “they aren't octopuses. They're only flowers.”” He then picked one so Roger could see for himself.

In sharp contrast, it must have been truly terrifying in PP when the tunnel in the old copper mine collapses; panic on the part of Roger and Titty – who was already on the edge of hysteria – would have been entirely understandable. “‘Shut in,’ said Dorothea, ‘But we've got to get out,’ said Titty... ‘Buried alive,’ said Dorothea.” (Oh come on Dot!) Titty nearly loses it at that point; it's Dick's calmness and common sense that saves the day.

Dot comes out with similar dramatic and unhelpful comments in *Coot Club* and *The Big Six* – the book in which she plays a leading role. She's got a good brain and holds her own with all the Coot Club boys. She's steadfast in believing the Death and Glories innocent, passionate in their defence and amazingly organised, practical, and forensically logical in finding and assessing the evidence needed to clear them. Yet she still seems unable to resist revelling in the drama. It's almost as if the whole thing was a game to her – an opportunity to act out her fictional imaginings. What fun for Dorothea!

However, the false accusations made against Pete, Joe and Bill about casting off boats and stealing were extremely serious. Had they been charged, found guilty and punished, their young

lives would have been ruined. Dick and Dorothea on the other hand would have been able to toddle off home to resume their relatively privileged lives.

Maybe casting events into a third person narrative is Dot's way of coping psychologically but she seems unaware that when she goes into fictional narrator mode, she does something very similar to Dick when he disappears into his own world to ponder the things that currently occupy his mind. It's something about Dick's behaviour and personality that she often refers to – not exactly criticising but certainly suggesting it's something that needs explanation or justification: "Dorothea looked anxiously at Tom. People didn't always understand the way Dick's mind wandered off." ... Yet she seems to lack self-awareness about her own behaviour and personality.

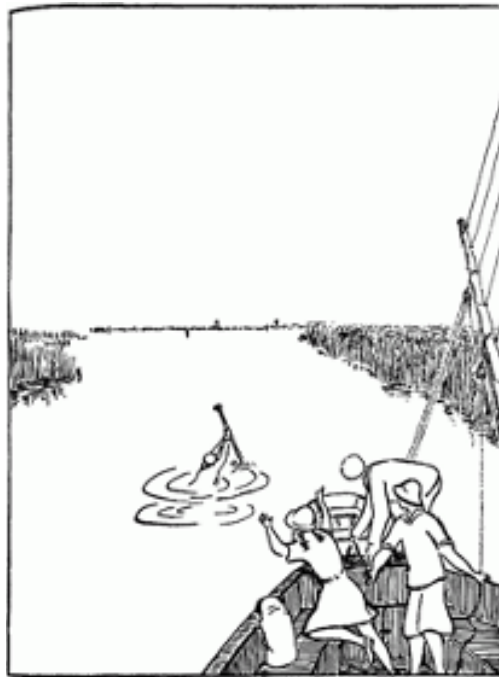
Dorothea also worries incessantly about what other people will think and imagines what they will be thinking. In BS, when she's imagining what the villain's next move will be: "'Do you know him?' said Joe wonderingly. 'I'm thinking his thoughts,' said Dorothea. 'But it isn't a book, Dot,' said Dick. 'It's the same thing,' said Dorothea."

The other children (and adults) seem to like and respect her so she's definitely got something about her other than just being 'nice'. "'You'd never think that Dot got such a head on her,'" said Bill.'

Someone said elsewhere on the Facebook group that they thought Dorothea was probably Ransome's favourite character.

At that point, I turned the whole question over to the Facebook group: "What makes her so special?" I asked. "What am I missing? I'd be interested to hear what other people think."

Well, I learned a great deal about Dorothea and also about Ransome's writing and how readers respond to it. I was struck by the wide range of views about Dot. At one extreme, someone thought she exists only to help explain Dick; another thought that she's just there "to make up the numbers". Others see her as having empathy and the ability to see other people's points of view. One person describes her as "curious, intelligent,



DICK OVERBOARD

impractical, observational, logistical, and melodramatic – with narrative skills *par excellence*, and a secret power that nobody can be angry with her!"

One response – from a writer – pointed out something I would never have thought of for myself, that, like many writers, Dorothea has a narrative running along in her head all the time and often she can't stop herself from speaking it out loud, sometimes at inappropriate moments.

I was surprised (though I'm not sure why) that so many folk thought that both Dorothea and Dick are autistic as I'd never thought of either of them in this way.

Several people suggested that Ransome wrote them into his books because they represent twin aspects of his own personality – "the bespectacled scientist and the romantic storyteller".

Another really valuable (for me) insight was the

suggestion that in creating the Ds, Ransome introduced two children – "just like us" – that is "outsiders gazing through a sort of window at our envied S and As, wishing we could join in but not knowing how". But then the Ds are allowed in! There is hope for us all!

Dorothea seems to provoke strong responses one way or another. I think it's a mark of Ransome's quality that we readers can become so invested in his characters. The Facebook discussion helped me see many things I hadn't noticed for myself and made me rethink my ideas about Dorothea, her relationship with Dick and with the other characters. I was also reminded of something I have known for years but often fail to remember – that there are as many interpretations as there are readers – and all are valid.

If you like reading, reflecting upon, and discussing the SA books then the Arthur Ransome Facebook Group is an excellent place to go in order to do so. I have learned so much from other group members who are generally very willing to share their thoughts and insights in a generous and thoughtful way.

[For more on Facebook and the 94 replies Lesley's article generated, see page 33 - Ed]

# Hound trails to Swallowdale

Jill Goulder revisits a Lakeland tradition that Ransome celebrates in *Swallowdale*



*The starting-line of a hound-trail near Skiddaw 1996 – many more women and children visible than in the 1930s; photo by JG*

I was tempted to call this 'The Hounds of the Miterdales', as it is a Sherlockian quest. I'm *not* aiming to solve the location(s) of Swallowdale (the lake shore, the route up/waterfall, the valley itself, cave, Trout Tarn), as I believe with others that it's an aggregate place formed via AR's avowed habit of playing jigsaws with the Lakeland landscape. I would like to offer, though, a new tool for ardent detectives.

A chance e-discussion with US Tar Molly McGinnis generated my idea that the vivid, lyrical description in SD of the hound-trail coming through Swallowdale might help to target speculation on a couple of the valley's 'locations'. I had witnessed a hound-trail, near Skiddaw, back in 1996 (photo above), but now I started e-searching for more information.

This is a Lake District speciality which became popular 200 years ago though is sadly in decline now – please take in a hound-trail, Tars, on your next visit. The dogs were related to fox-hounds but are bred solely for hound-trailing; they're owned by families, and they want nothing better than to race

on the trails – it's a joy to see their eager faces. Look at <https://houndtrailing.org.uk/> (HTA).

The description in *Swallowdale*, Chapter XVII, starts with the trail-laying man trotting breathlessly through their camp with his sack, and the children tracking the racing hounds from the watch-tower and then rushing back to the valley to witness the hounds coming through. They clearly hear from way down the valley the noise as the hounds start, and then the great racket at the end as the owners urge their hounds in. This 1942 film clip shows the scale of the old Lake District events, and notably the trail-layer with his sack: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hsx9D3IPwU>.

Now AR of course fictionalised the description – notably dropping in mentions that pin the trail to the SW of his fictional lake, and changing the names: I can't find a 'Longfell Wood' or a 'Brockenstones'. 'Low End' is the fictional name of the trail start/end point, and I searched for present-day hound-trails in the areas of two of the Swallowdale suspects – Miterdale near Wastwater and below Beacon Tarn W of Coniston.

Miterdale? Low Place is (and very probably was 100 years ago) a busy hound-trail centre halfway down Miterdale (see map opposite). I made contact through the HTA with the farmer, who described to me on the phone a common route N up Whin Rigg, NE along the top of the scree that descend to Wastwater, to Illgill Head and round the top of Burnmoor Tarn (potential 'Trout Tarn') before dropping into the secluded valley at the





Map showing Low Place hound-trail centre and the hidden valley at the head of Miterdale

head of Miterdale (strikingly like AR's own drawing) and home down Miterdale. Another common route runs E of Miterdale and again back down through the little valley. From Boat How's 'watch-tower' outcrop on the SE of the secluded valley the Ss and As would have had a fine view both ways. I would think that the racket from Low End, echoing up the fell as sounds do in the great lake valleys, would have been clearly heard two miles away at the top of Miterdale. Here's a lovely recent video of the finish at Low Place: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PK2MrGeNpnM>.

Beacon Tarn? The Arthur Ransome Trust Facebook page reports in 2020 the sighting of a hound-trail on adjacent Blawith Common. Alison Langhorn of the Hound Trailing Association tells me that the closest centre now would be Lowick (a later Ransome haunt, of course), a couple of miles to the S, though in the past there were others – Woodland, Gawthwaite. The hounds would have to cross a couple of lanes between the trail centres and the little 'Swallowdale' valley; this deviates from the SD description, but they may not have been visible from the watch-tower.

Did AR witness a trail-layer and hound-trail in a little valley, and rush up to a viewpoint to see the hounds racing across the fells? The vivid description gives force to that – 'half a dozen more hounds came pouring down the rocks like the white water when the beck is in spate after rain'. Was it in one of his Swallowdale valleys? Or is this an amalgam of many sightings over time? He certainly fished and walked in both areas, and Burnmoor is a famous fishing tarn near his other fishing haunts.

For me, what's needed next is a longer piece (for *Mixed Moss*?) on the Lakeland hound trails of the period – and also the guides' races recounted by Nancy in the same episode, 'where the young men row in boats across the lake, race up to the top of a big hill and down again each to his boat, and so back.' With on-the-ground research, which I was unable to do this time!

Many thanks to Margaret Baxter of the Hound Trailing Association, Mr Steele of Low Place and Alison Langhorn, and Molly McGinnis for the original inspiration.

Nancy grabbed the telescope. "Yes. There they are. Still together. Quick, quick! They'll be here in a minute. Let's go down and see them come over by the waterfall."

"And put the parrot out of the way," said Titty. "He'd never understand them."

They hurried down from the rock and back to the camp, and for the second time that day, the ship's parrot was banished into Peter Duck's. They were only just in time.

"Look, look!" said Nancy.

A lean white hound with patches of yellow and black on his shoulders and flanks showed on the skyline at the side of the waterfall, and came leaping down over the rocks.

"Well done! Well done!" shouted Peggy.

"Be quiet! Be quiet!" said Nancy. "Don't talk to him."

The hound stopped by the bathing-pool, looked about him, and lapped the cool water.

"He ought not to have done that," said Nancy.

He had hardly moved forward again before half a dozen more hounds came pouring down the rocks like the white water when the beck is in spate after rain. The leading hound was not more than a dozen yards ahead of them. "He must have lost forty or fifty yards by taking that drink," said Peggy.

All these hounds took no notice whatever of the camp, but ran straight through it, down Swallowdale, and over the waterfall at the low end. It was only the later comers who stopped to look about them and hardly seemed to be taking the race seriously.

"You're no good," said Nancy to them. "Go on."

"The others are miles ahead," said Titty.

"You'll never catch them if you don't hurry."

These hounds, too, went on after the others and disappeared.

And then, suddenly, from far away below the moor, from the foot of the lake, came a new noise, a noise of yells and rattles and shrill whistles and screams and howls.

"It's like parrots and monkeys all yelling together," said Titty.

"Worse," said Roger.

"That's the owners of the hounds," said Nancy. "They must have seen the first one in the distance. Listen! Oh, I wish we could see the finish."

The noise rose higher and higher. There was a burst of cheering and then the shouts died away into silence.

"It's over. Now all the owners are patting their hounds and giving them lumps of sugar and telling them how good they are."

From *Swallowdale*, ch XVII

## THE SIGNALS PROFILE

# Alan Hakim

A TARS mainstay, by Peter Willis

Alan Hakim, who has just retired as administrator/editor at Amazon Publications, is probably best-known to Tars as the man who routinely stands up at Members' Forums, after the AGM, to complain, firstly about it being held on a Bank Holiday, again, when he would prefer to be doing something else, and secondly, that Amazon Publications has, again, been ignored in the AGM proper.

A quiet-spoken man, he is somehow reminiscent of a John le Carré character with a cultivated air of inconspicuousness concealing hidden dimensions. For instance, his varied unpublicised interests include audio-books and newsletters for the blind.

He was one of the early 'intake' of TARS who helped shape its future growth and character, says Paul Crisp, who recalls their first meeting.

"Alan was one of the group of Southern TARS who met at Roger Wardale's school soon after the Society was founded; others included Diana Sparkes and Ted Alexander. Roger had us sitting in a circle on junior-sized chairs while he put forward his ideas and then, like the excellent teacher he was, sat back and waited for us to discuss them, think of what we could do... and then volunteer!

### 'Dry humour, good experience'

"My first impressions of Alan were of someone with a dry sense of humour and a good level of experience which would be of great benefit to any organisation. He could produce pertinent anecdotes ranging from his time doing National Service with the Army, in Cyprus, through his business career."

After National Service, Alan joined Thomas Cook and had an AR-worthy international life, in charge of their foreign exchange dept in India and Ceylon. He met his wife Elene in the latter, and they married in 1968; they have two children, Tim and Frances. (Elene passed away in 1989). From Cooks, Alan moved to IBM in Havant in 1969 (so was an early computer nerd) and worked there until his retirement about 25 years ago.

Within TARS he served as Treasurer, and on the Southern Region committee, a role which entailed taking part in amateur dramatics at the Winter Gatherings. However, according to Paul, Alan really found his twin niches and what he preferred in the Literary Weekends and, later, Amazon Publications.

Paul first worked with him on the 1999 weekend at St. John's College, Cambridge, and gained an insight into Alan's dry and devious sense of



Alan in Turkey, 1994  
Photo by Jill Goulder

humour. "Alan had been a student five minutes by punt along the Cam at King's, a friendly rival college; asked to say Grace before our formal dinner, he did so in Latin – but giving that of his own college rather than John's." Who knew?

In 1994, Jill Goulder, following a chat with Taqui Altounyan, decided to mount an expedition to search for the small lake in Syria where she and her family had sailed with Ransome in the little dinghy *Peter Duck*, brought out by AR when he and Evgenia visited them in Aleppo in 1932. She advertised in Signals for a companion for this "slightly mad" expedition, and Alan, whom she'd briefly met at a Southern TARS event, responded. "Good! When shall we go?" I asked; 'Soon as you like,' he replied. So a fortnight later we flew to Antalya in Turkey, hired a car and headed for the Hatay, a former Syrian region now part of Turkey. In brief, after many setbacks and difficulties we found the lake, sparkling blue amid the reeds, and also located the site of the Altounyans' summer house high in the nearby mountains. Alan proved to be an ideal travelling companion – adaptable, unfazed, drily witty."

At Amazon Publications, taking over from Roger Wardale, Alan established a good working relationship with printers and subscribers. He trimmed the size of the print order, but ensured that the deposit libraries such as the British Library got their copies, and made about a score available for purchase through the TARS Stall.

The most recent title, *Ransome Centre Stage*, actually features Alan taking part in several of Brian Hopton's Southern Region plays, notably as the Doctor in WH and PM.

Later, as Paul worked with him on the various aspects of TARS, he realised how valuable Alan was for the Society. "Not least, Alan has always been a good ambassador for the Society, meeting up with fellow TARS on his travels to Japan, Australia and New Zealand".

Now, as he approaches his ninth decade, Alan is ready to shed the shackles of responsibilities and is certainly owed an opportunity to potter in his garden. We all wish him well.



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# THE GULCH

## NEWS FROM MIDLAND REGION



### SHOOTING ARROWS

“I wonder if Robin Hood ever shot an arrow from this spot?” I pondered as we wandered through woodland at Aston-on-Trent, bows in one hand and arrows in the other. Well, whether he did or not, I expect his targets moved a bit quicker than a clay beaver or paper badger. In fairness, our method is much less messy.

It was a wonderful day out with the Centaura Field Bowmen. There’s a truly satisfying feeling that comes with the “twang-thud” of an arrow being released and burying itself in a target, and a truly frustrating feeling that comes with the “twang” of an arrow being released and not burying itself in the target. At this point you’ll probably resign yourself to spending the next few minutes foraging through the woodland undergrowth in search of it.

Vanessa and her team were as welcoming and accommodating as always, as they guided us through the steps of shooting an arrow straight, which was something that we all got significantly better at throughout the day. For me, it was the small paper badger target at 30 yards which proved to be the most difficult challenge, although with my last arrow of the day I finally managed to hit it, even if it was only the tail which I secured.

The day began at the range where we were walked through the steps of nocking the arrow, drawing the bow, and releasing in the (vague) direction of the targets. As somebody who is much bigger than the last time they shot, I found the whole thing substantially easier than before and was pleasantly surprised with how far my arrows were flying now that I was onto an adult-sized bow. After we’d made enough holes in the targets, we stopped for lunch, after which we moved into the woods.

Dotted around the woods at Aston-on-Trent are various animal-shaped targets, with different coloured stumps indicating where to shoot. This is a brilliant bit of fun, allowing for shots to be taken from all sorts of elevations and angles. Maybe you’ll be firing downhill at a wild boar. Perhaps you’ll be standing barely a metre from small woodpecker yet struggling to hit it as the arrow is still rising sharply from your bow at that range, making judging where it’s actually going fiendishly difficult.

My personal favourite moment of the day was when Vanessa’s son Josh gave us each a turn on his crossbow: a great beast of a machine with many scopes and gadgets adding to its aura of formidableness. Shooting a bolt from the crossbow felt more like firing a gun than any bow I’ve shot; there is absolutely no time at all between pulling the trigger and the bolt being stuck fast in the target.

We’ve been to the Centaura Field Bowmen several times before with TARS, however this is the only visit (of the ones I remember) that the has sun blessed us with its presence, and we were able to enjoy our archery in a warm, dry wood as opposed to a grey, soggy one. While shooting is always fantastic fun, it was very much rounded off by some pleasant weather, and by Tilly, the dog.



Aidan Fyfe

Over the last two years we have been reading our way through the 12. We will start on *Pigeon Post* in October. We take turns to read aloud in a Zoom session, usually once a fortnight. It is also fine to come along and just listen. Dates will appear on the TARS website diary. For further details and the Zoom link, please contact Amanda Ardagh-Walter on 01453 791056 or e-mail [nickandamanda1558@gmail.com](mailto:nickandamanda1558@gmail.com)

# COOTS IN THE NORTH MIDLANDS

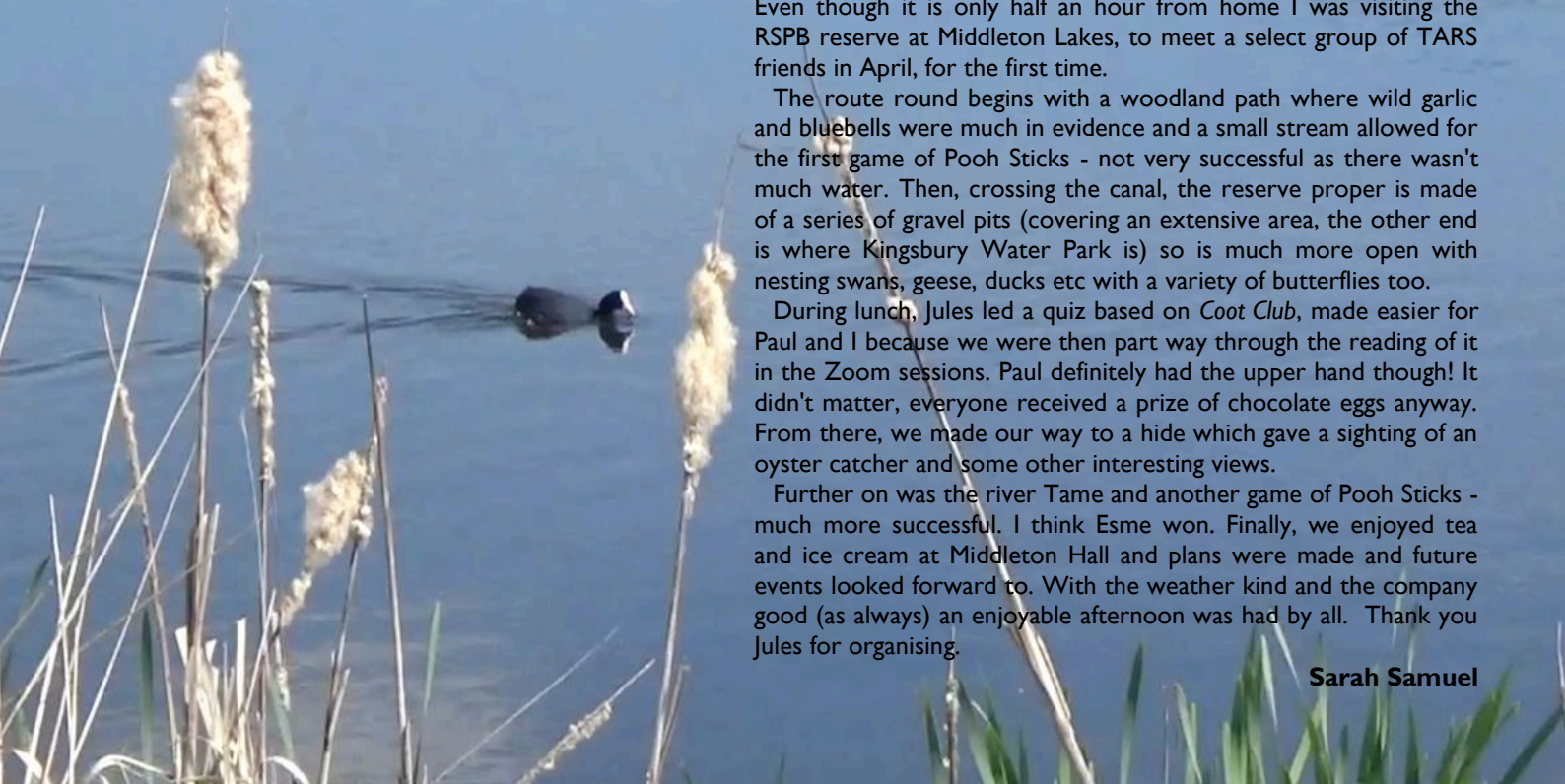
Even though it is only half an hour from home I was visiting the RSPB reserve at Middleton Lakes, to meet a select group of TARS friends in April, for the first time.

The route round begins with a woodland path where wild garlic and bluebells were much in evidence and a small stream allowed for the first game of Pooh Sticks - not very successful as there wasn't much water. Then, crossing the canal, the reserve proper is made of a series of gravel pits (covering an extensive area, the other end is where Kingsbury Water Park is) so is much more open with nesting swans, geese, ducks etc with a variety of butterflies too.

During lunch, Jules led a quiz based on *Coot Club*, made easier for Paul and I because we were then part way through the reading of it in the Zoom sessions. Paul definitely had the upper hand though! It didn't matter, everyone received a prize of chocolate eggs anyway. From there, we made our way to a hide which gave a sighting of an oyster catcher and some other interesting views.

Further on was the river Tame and another game of Pooh Sticks - much more successful. I think Esme won. Finally, we enjoyed tea and ice cream at Middleton Hall and plans were made and future events looked forward to. With the weather kind and the company good (as always) an enjoyable afternoon was had by all. Thank you Jules for organising.

**Sarah Samuel**



## WHEN TARS MET SEAFAIR HAVEN

TARS had planned to lead a S&A themed explore up a creek or two of the Daugleddau on Saturday 18 June, but the weather had other ideas! The heavy rain and stong northerly wind with a high tide in the forecast made this decision inevitable. The TARS who had arrived on Friday evening took to an evening sail up the mouth of Coshaston Pill in the appropriately named *Peggy* before the retreating tide and darkening sky forced us off the water.

Saturday morning we compensated ourselves by visiting a local chandlery where every possible thing could be found for the inside and outside of boats and sailors; and followed this with a drive to Llangwm where Huw, erstwhile leader of our aborted sail, was staying with his mother, reliving their past family holiday histories of paddling, rowing and sailing from the village. As soon as we walked out from the sheltered pill we could feel the wind coursing down the Daugleddau; but we found a pop-up camp site near the Blacktar Point launching site which could make a stunning venue for TARS camping and sailing in friendlier weather. Saturday evening's compensation was sailing on the tall ship *Johanna Lucretia*, there as part of Seafair Haven; (sailing in the loose sense of the word - there were sails up, after a lot of organised heaving and belaying, but the engine was running) and we explored Pembroke Dock and down to Milford Haven, including with a TAR at the helm.

Sunday's Seafair 'Parade of Sail' was also cancelled because of the strong winds although many boats went out in an exciting wind. We were joined by another TARS family and their dinghy (whisper it quietly, it had no sails only an outboard, but fortunately was more of a *Come Along* than a *Hullabaloo*). Both our TARS dinghies got in some good sailing before the out-pouring tide told us to get off the water or stuck on mud banks.

For the TARS members who stayed on, the Seafair Monday planned sail against the incoming tide and return against an outgoing tide to get to Pembroke Castle would be more of a tow each way with a bit of 'follow my leader' through the Pembroke River channel; so we sailed with the incoming tide north up the Daugleddau and returned when the tide turned, stopping at Lawrenny Quay for lunch. Tuesday was a Seafair free sail day so other boats, like us, followed the morning tide inland. This time we made Llangwm itself - a sense of achievement to reach by water where we'd previously only been to by car. With a tide just reaching its peak, the post office was visited for postcards and lemonade - 'to aid foreign trade'. Having sailed back to Llanion Cove, I had a leisurely departure including tea and charts with TARS member David Grainger overlooking Hobbs Point. You can find David's (along with his co-author granddaughter) ending of 'Coots in the North' on the TARS website ([https://members.arthur\\_ransome.org/downloads/view/stowaways\\_tars](https://members.arthur_ransome.org/downloads/view/stowaways_tars)). So when TARS met Seafair Haven the weather dictated our careful plans were swept away but we grabbed what chances we had, we also found a great possible tarry location, and Nancy, we found a use for tides!

**Paul Green**



# FORTHCOMING EVENTS IN MIDLAND REGION

We hope that these events will be able to take place as programmed, but do keep an eye on the TARS website and contact the event organiser in case changes have had to be made.



## COOK WITH MATE SUSAN Saturday 17 September

Come to Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, and try your hand at cooking some of Susan's favourite dishes over a fire. Cost £5 per head, but the region will pay the fees for Midland Juniors. For more information and to book please telephone Jane on 01933 223672 or send her an e-mail using the address [jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com](mailto:jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com). Hopefully blackberry and banana mash will be on the menu at this time of year, but Jane would be pleased to hear your ideas for any other dishes, so get reading!



## A MINIATURE WORLD Saturday 15 October

Pay a visit to Bekonscot Model Village in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. The oldest and original model village, it was opened in 1929 and remains in a 1930s time warp. This is the era of the S&A books and there are many items and details which will feel familiar from the books. There will be a quiz to spot some of them.

There is a tearoom for drinks, sandwiches and hot rolls. No picnics unless requiring a special diet.

Adults £13, Child 2-15 years £8.30 (Midland TARS will pay this for Midland Junior members). Tickets need to be booked online in advance at [www.bekonscot.co.uk](http://www.bekonscot.co.uk) Please let Amanda Ardagh-Walter ([nickandamanda1558@gmail.com](mailto:nickandamanda1558@gmail.com) or 01453 791056) know that you are coming so we can look out for you.



## SIGNALLING TO MARS Saturday 12 November

Come and brush up your signalling of all sorts until Captain Nancy would be proud of you. The day will start outdoors with a patteran trail, then we will move indoors to eat our packed lunches and try out a variety of signalling activities and crafts.

Meet at Earlswood Methodist Church at 11.30am for the trail or 13.00 for just the indoor activities.

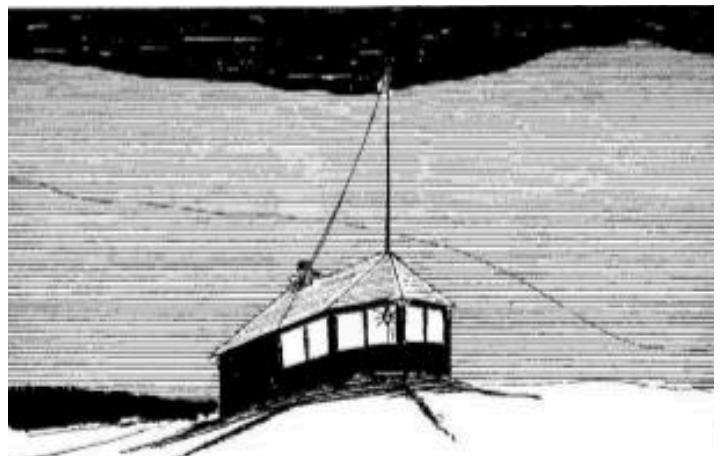
For further information and to book please contact Jane by e-mailing [jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com](mailto:jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com) or phoning her on 01933 223672.

## AGM & POTTER ABOUT THE POTTERIES Saturday 21 January

The AGM and Junior Parley will be held in the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in Hanley, Stoke on Trent. Meet in the museum entrance at 11.15 for a prompt start at 11.30. Afterwards have lunch in the museum café or bring your own.

Beforehand is the opportunity to have a tour of the Emma Bridgewater factory, starting at 10am, cost £5 a head - under 18s discount with proof of age. After lunch you could book individually to paint an item of pottery for a cost of £2.95 + the price of the item, starting at £7, + £5 postage. Alternatively you can do a Galleries Quiz around the museum - don't miss the stuffed pike!

For further information and to book please contact Jules Blue on [julesbluerachel@btinternet.com](mailto:julesbluerachel@btinternet.com)



## WINTER HOLIDAY ON STAGE Saturday 18 February

TARS member Chris Eldon Lee has adapted AR's book into a play. It runs from 15-18 February at the Severn Theatre in Shrewsbury ([www.theatresevern.co.uk](http://www.theatresevern.co.uk)). Some tickets have been booked for the matinee on Saturday 18 February - please contact Paul Green by 28 November at the latest on [paulmidtars@gmx.co.uk](mailto:paulmidtars@gmx.co.uk) / 01654 791256 / 075639624961 to see if there are any left and for more information about the day. The prices are £15 for adults and £5 for children. Midland Juniors will be paid for by the region. If you had paid for tickets last year these have been saved for you.

Meet up for lunch and a walk from 12 noon in Shrewsbury and for a pre-show gathering with Chris Eldon Lee and cast at the theatre at 2.15pm before the matinee begins at 3pm.

Please send copy for the next issue of *The Gulch* to [jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com](mailto:jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com) by 1 October

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



Adventure Event



Nautical Event



Discovery Event



Titty's Challenge  
(Able Seaman Log Book)



Susan's Challenge  
(Mate Log Book)



John's Challenge  
(Captain Log Book)

## NEWS FROM THE GAELS

## TARS Scotland



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

### Back to school with Arthur Ransome

Last winter, a friend of ours who teaches in a small rural school not far from Dumfries told us that, at a time when several of the children in her class were off with Covid, instead of going on with the curriculum and leaving them to catch up later, she devised other activities for those who were still standing. One of those was tidying up the school library. Rosemary teaches the top three classes in the school together, and one of the oldest girls took a particular interest in the library, making a proper list of titles, and even suggesting sending some of the duplicate copies to the nearest school for their collection.



This made me think – a school which cares so much about books might like to have a set of the 12 books in the Swallows and Amazons series. And so on the last Monday morning of term – at the end of June in Scotland – Paul and I set off for the wee school with two boxes full of pristine hardback books, supplied by the TARS Stall Manager, Christine. We designed bookplates saying that that they were the gift of TARS Scotland, and also took along various supporting items, such as maps showing the hills and mountains on either side of the Solway Firth. Cummertrees Primary School is very close to the Scottish side of the Firth, and from a short distance down the road one has a good view of Skiddaw and other hills on the far side. Paul stood on a chair to see if he could

see Skiddaw over the top of the small hill in front of the school, and was kindly told by one girl to mind his head, as there was a projector suspended just above him! He couldn't see Skiddaw of course, but many of the children live in places from which they can.

After a short explanation as to why we were there, we told them a bit about AR and the books, and then Paul gave two short readings of excerpts from *Swallowdale* – the view from Kanchenjunga looking north –

“You can see right into Scotland,” said Nancy.

“Those hills over there are the other side of the Solway Firth.”

– in other words, Criffel, the nearest hill of any size to Dumfries and Cummertrees, and many other bigger ones going north. This provoked a discussion about the Lake District – which really looks more like the Mountain District from here – and maps. We then explained how, *Swallowdale* being the second book in the series, Ransome, encouraged by his young friend Desmond Kelsall, decided that the competent John should make a big mistake, and Paul read the first part of the shipwreck, to such dramatic effect that one girl exclaimed 'Oh, you're such a good storyteller, Mr Wilson!' It turned out that another girl has started learning to sail, so at least one person understood the technicalities of jibing.



School librarian with Winifred & Paul Wilson



Later, I asked to be shown the school library, which was indeed impressive. The girl who had taken responsibility for it moves on to secondary school next term, after a happy time at this small friendly school in the countryside, where the local farmer had given a field to be made into a football pitch, such is the community spirit in a small village.

*Winifred Wilson*

Photos: Cummertrees Primary School

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## Malcolm Porteous

6th March 1936 – 12th May 2022



TARS Scotland has lost her original bird expert. Having been brought up on Ransome, Malcolm was an early and active member of TARS.

Throughout the years he held various posts in Scotland, including Junior Co-ordinator and Chairman. But his commitment went much deeper: he gave talks and led expeditions, notably at the Ullapool IAGM in 1998. He identified birds on the early Lewis trip; and he even sourced a (legitimate) Great Northern (no question mark) for the Edinburgh Museum of Childhood exhibition.

Three other passions absorbed him – ornithology, music ... and teaching, which last informed all the other interests, Malcolm wanted others (especially young people) to enjoy his interests too. He went

from George Watson's College, through Edinburgh University into teaching – first in Jamaica, then in the ex-mining communities of Midlothian. Malcolm ended his academic career as Headmaster of Bonnyrigg Primary School; but he never ceased educating others about his passions.

As a leader of Young Ornithologists, he could be found with groups of teenagers in the Hermitage of Braid or East Anglia, or – on one memorable occasion – awaiting low tide on Cramond Island with a stranded fashion photographer and two scantily-clad models. Luckily he had a reputation of unflappability.

Malcolm started by selling programmes at concerts to fund his music listening. He went on to become an 'inspired and inspiring conductor' for several orchestras, especially the Dalkeith Symphony Orchestra, where he introduced players and audiences alike not just to standard favourites but also the obscure and the new.

That someone so kind, knowledgeable and enthusiastic should be lost to dementia before the last few months of declining health was a tragedy. Jim Lonie and I were able to attend the Memorial Service at Edinburgh's Greyfriars Kirk where Malcolm had been involved – including singing in the choir – for over 50 years. The Music for Reflection was a highly appropriate and heartfelt 'cello performance of a beautiful Catalan piece, *Song of the Birds*. Malcolm would have appreciated that.

*Kirstie Taylor*

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## James Henderson, 1948–2021

Jim Henderson, another long-standing member of TARS Scotland, has died. Jim was a keen sailor, collector of paintings, and books including rare AR items, and a member of the Old Edinburgh Club, which studies the history of the city. He served on the Scottish committee for a short time, and those who attended a meeting in his tall Edinburgh house remember that every inch of wall was covered in fine paintings, even on the steep staircase.

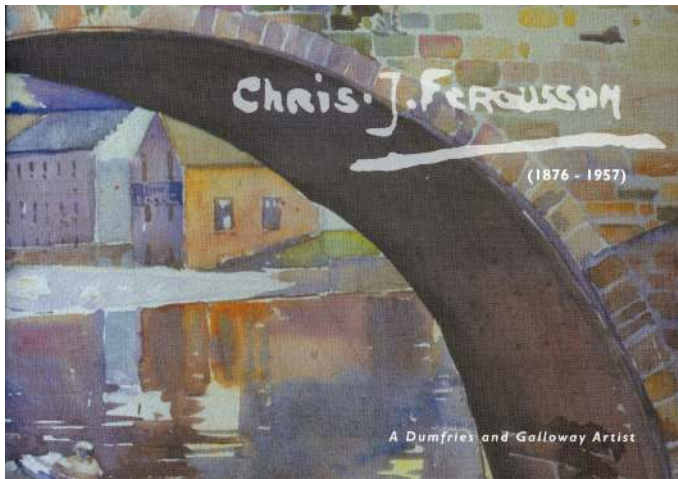
Jim's family donated his entire book collection to the local Christian Aid group for their huge annual book

sale, which takes place in a large church in Edinburgh in May every year. The following is from the back page of this year's sale catalogue, kindly provided by Mary Pritchard, and is entitled 'James Henderson Bequest'.

'Educated at George Heriot's School and the University of Edinburgh, Jim was a bibliophile and aesthete with a love of all the arts, travel and literature. His books, and the ephemera he kept with them, reflect his wide interests and his friendships with people all over the world.

'This benefaction includes countless books on a wide array of subjects – including travel, world cultures, history, natural history, biography, geography, photography – reflecting a lifetime of study and exploration. Many are first editions.

'Outstanding are the Fine Art books, particularly those on Scottish Art, with the finest monographs, catalogues, reference books and art history of the last 100 years. Though predominantly an Edinburgh man and lawyer, Jim had a special affinity with the legendary community of Kirkcudbright artists, through his grandmother Christian Fergusson (1876–1957). She was a noted Galloway artist and one of the Glasgow Girls.'



Some years ago Jim gave me for TARS Library a copy of a booklet he had compiled about the life and work of his famous grandmother, with reproductions of some of her paintings, many of which are held in museums and art galleries in Dumfries and Galloway. On the day of that TARS Scotland committee meeting in Jim's house, I happened to mention a Junior member who lives in Torthorwald, and that I could see the village from my back garden. Jim said

'Yes, and there it is on the wall,' pointing to Chris Fergusson's painting of Torthorwald! To hear the correct pronunciation, you'll have to ask me next time we meet – it's not what you might expect!

*Winifred Wilson & Kirstie Taylor*

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## Joyce Green

Yet another member of TARS Scotland died in November 2021. Joyce was a great supporter of our and many other organisations. She and her late husband, Michael, were stalwarts of the committee for many years, and their house was always a favourite meeting-place due to the lavish lunches Joyce provided, and the glorious artwork surrounding us. As hard-working volunteers at the Linlithgow Union Canal Society, they introduced TARS to the joys of canal voyages on the *Saint Magdalene*. Joyce's interests and knowledge ranged over so many subjects that it would be easier to state what she *wasn't* involved with. For several years infirmity had kept Joyce from actively joining us, but her cheerful and enthusiastic presence is still missed by her TARS friends.

*Kirstie Taylor*

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## Provisional events programme 2022

### Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 September

Tarbat Discovery Centre, Portmahomack; and Groam House Museum and Pictish Centre, Rosemarkie.

Contact Chris Birt for details:

[christopher.birt75@gmail.com](mailto:christopher.birt75@gmail.com)

### Saturday 15 October

Literary Day, Moat Brae, Dumfries and TARS Library.

Contact Winifred Wilson for details:

[winwilson2004@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:winwilson2004@yahoo.co.uk)

### ***Both events are subject to confirmation:***

please check TARS website and with the organisers if you plan to attend.

# Southern Region



## Spring Camp at Warnford

A small group gathered for this camp, 27-29 May which was blessed with the good weather that marked the Jubilee Week as a whole.

Many thanks to Helena and Corin for the following report:

After a couple of years' hiatus, it was pure joy to be back at Warnford Lake for the TARS Southern Region spring camp. Situated in Hampshire's lovely Meon Valley, the camp is generously hosted by the Sellick family, long-time TARS stalwarts, and the owners of the beautiful lake and meadow where, for three days, we camp and sail, swim and row, walk and sit and chat.



The lake, fed by the River Meon, is surrounded by woodland and meadow, with an island and a sometimes octopus-infested Amazon River. The lakeside meadow offers plenty of space for tents and a campfire, and the nearby church provides a loo and hot water.

An expedition up the Amazon in war canoes - including portage round bridges and weirs - went as far as the rapids of an old water mill, where much fun was had by shooting them repeatedly. Thankfully nobody had to rush home to change into pretties and attend upon a Great Aunt

Naturalists can find plenty to interest them here. Tom and Dick would be delighted with the sightings of many birds, including tufted ducks, coots, moorhens, mallards, swans, and a red kite that swooped so low over the lake that it touched the water, maybe hunting. They would also be ecstatic at the three sightings of water voles, carefully reintroduced into the river and lake in recent years, but very rarely sighted. Meanwhile the Deaths and Glories would be impressed by a huge eel, carp the size of young porpoises, and flickering shoals of rudd.



For some footage of the lake, the camp, and the two coracle skipper learning to paddle, check out the video at this link: <http://tiny.cc/Coracles> The home-made coracles are very impressive and it is well worth following the link and watching the video.

### Next time: reports of the August Cobnor Camp

We are still hoping for suggestions of your secret venues around the region that you would like to share with others. Don't be shy, please get in touch.



# EBB & FLOW

## *The Eastern Pages*



### **EASTERN REGION PROGRAMME**

**October 1<sup>st</sup>: Nene Valley Railway.** Meet at Wansford Station (parking) PE8 6LR, Peterborough for 10 am train. Last train back from Peterborough 1455. Intervening stations include Orton Mere. Booking advisable but not essential. Prices and bookings at [nvr.org.uk](http://nvr.org.uk).

**January 21<sup>st</sup> 2023: AR's Birthday Lunch and AGM.** Butt & Oyster, Pin Mill.

*CAMPING on the BROADS  
Dilham, Norfolk.  
28<sup>th</sup> May-4<sup>th</sup> June.*

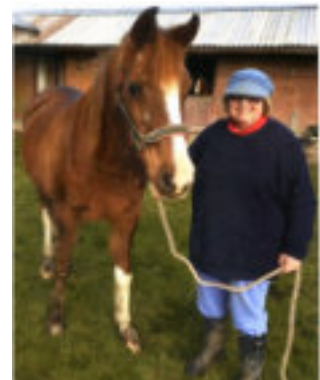
Eastern Region's Marc Grimston arranged our first Camping Event at Dilham on the Norfolk Broads (see other feature in this issue). Other regions have held camps but I believe this is our first, and the Broads with its many reed fringed rivers and open waters, and wildlife as the ideal place to start. Hopefully this new venture will be ongoing as the event proved successful.



A Memorial Service was held for Rosemary Garfitt at St Andrews Church, Soham on 5<sup>th</sup> March, some two years (owing to Corvid) after her passing in 2020. Many friends and family plus twelve TARS attended the service. With Rosemary's life-long love of horses, she had arranged for her ashes to be brought to the service by a coach and pair, whose attendants and horses waited

patiently in the rain until the service was over.

After the service the congregation were invited for refreshments at the Maltings, close to Ely Cathedral and the banks of the River Ouse. A fitting venue as Rosemary had several links to the building, including her son having a wedding reception there.



### RIK BUTCHER - 1940 -2022

Rik Butcher, member and one-time Secretary for the Eastern Region, died peacefully surrounded by his family on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2022 following a long illness.

Having joined shortly after its founding, Rik was a proud and committed member of the Society. It provided the perfect outlet for two life-long passions, reading and sailing.

It had been Ransome's stories which first inspired Rik's interest in sailing when as a boy he joined the Sea Scouts in Surrey. For Rik, the *Swallows* and *Amazons* books were so much more than tales of high adventure, they articulated and captured a philosophy of childhood experience and living. A philosophy which allowed and encouraged daring adventures as a crucial part of growing-up and gaining confidence. For someone who never in all his life lost touch with his inner child, the books spoke to Rik of Ransome's respect for children and the journey to adulthood.

Rik completed the ascent of Kanchenjunga, Ransome's sobriquet for the Old Man of Coniston, in August 1991, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the climb that featured in *Swallowdale*. He joined the annual birthday lunches at Pin Mill and completed the Wade Walk. He would undoubtedly have continued his association with the Society and office of Secretary had his illness not prevented him from doing so.

After years of dinghy sailing and cross-channel yacht voyages, Rik finally realised a long life dream of having his own boat when in 2004, after retirement, he bought a 1934 Hillyard gaff-rigged cutter named *Winsome Lady*. Moored in the Solent, *Winsome Lady* made many a trip to the Isle of Wight and bore an uncanny resemblance to *Nancy Blackett*.

In April we held a Celebration of the Life of Rik. His granddaughter, Emma, who has inherited his love of books and who has read much of the series, recited the opening paragraphs from *Swallows and Amazons*.

Fitting that a man so inspired by Ransome and literature should have his words feature at his send-off spoken by the next generation of children



Nick Butcher.

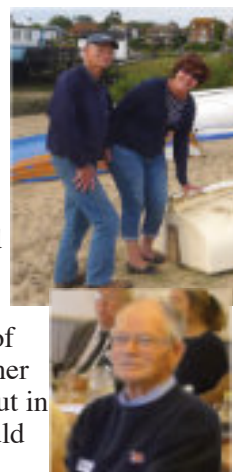
### MIKE SHEPHERD - 1936-2022

Mike Shepherd passed away on the 1<sup>st</sup> May this year. A keen member of TARS and a personal friend, Mike with his late wife Mary held many events in their Mersea Island home; knot-tying, dowsing, kite flying, model boat sailing and other Ransome inspired activities.

A keen sailor, only selling his latest boat, *Dawn Treader*, in 2018, he and Mary (and in the early days his daughter Melanie) often sailed with the Colne Yacht Club and the Snapdragon Association and explored the shallow muddy creeks and swatchways around the East Coast. There were trips to the Norfolk Broads and up the Thames to London, as well as trips to France, hunting for submarines off the the Kent coast, and on one occasion, with a friend, settled on a sand bank and found a WWII mine. A cricket match was played on the Buxey sandbank, exposed at low water, some five miles south of Mersea Island. These and many other tales are laid out in the many log books and charts Mike has left behind.

As well as sailing boats, Mike also built and repaired (including mine) a series of small dinghies from his own design. He was also a keen model boat builder, together with steam engines and in recent years model railways, building an extensive layout in his large garden shed. He actually built a small shed inside the larger one as it would be warmer to use in winter. His train layout, as with every thing he did, was well designed and landscaped. He introduced a sound systems that allowed for screeching wheels, the sound of the shovelling of coal and real smoke from All typical of Mike's meticulous working style.

Mike's family, his sailing, modeller friends and TARS, attended Mike's funeral at the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul then made their way to Mike's house for refreshments and a last look at his many books and models.



Robert Welham.



## Northern Despatches

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

### Northern region AGM

Our AGM was held during a late surge of the Omicron Wave so it was felt it was better to meet via ZOOM. Because of that members who cannot normally attend because of the distance involved could in fact take part.

**Elizabeth Williams** chaired the meeting.

The Northern Report for 2021 was received and thanks were offered for all the hard work of the committee keeping the Region operating during the Pandemic.

Treasurer **Liz Haworth** proposed to the meeting that the stipend for 2022 was not really needed and should not be accepted in Northern Region this year due to a lack of activity and TARS may be glad of it in this time of rising costs and falling revenue. The proposal was accepted.

**Events** for the next year were discussed and it was decided to try and do events around the region to offset travelling costs and encourage members to get together more easily.

**Events in York, Northumberland, Cumbria and Preston are planned.**

Most of the committee are happy to continue in post but Veronica Priest has asked to stand down after some years of very happy volunteering.

We welcomed **David Butters** to the Committee and already he has provided a new venue for a Birthday Party near his home area of Preston.

After the Meeting members held a mutual book review:

**Kryisia Clack** recommended *The Cyclist Who Went Out in the Cold (adventures along the iron curtain trail)* by **Tom Moore**. Yellow Jersey Press 9780224100212 Pub. 2016.

“Tom Moore's book is a 9,000km cycle journey on an East German mass-produced two-g geared shopper bike, MIFA 900, popular in Communist times. He cycles through 20 countries starting in Finland and ending in Bulgaria along the line of the old Iron Curtain taking in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on the way. There is no connection with Ransome other than I associate him with the Baltic countries. Tom Moore observations on the friendliness or wariness of people he meets and the different national traits are very perceptive. His concerns for the future of Eastern Europe, made in 2016, are very timely in the present circumstances.”

Her other books were:

Jakob Wegelius: *The Murderer's Ape*

Helen Macdonald *Vesper Flights*: new and collected essays

Three books from **Tony Hill**, Northern Ireland  
**Barbara Hepworth, Art and Life**. Eleanor Clayton, Thames and Hudson. I think that what is interesting for me is that it was her drawing skills that began her career, securing her a place at Leeds School of Art and then at the Royal College of Art. As I understand it Arthur Ransome was extremely careful with his illustrations and how they would reproduce and sit alongside the text. She is known as a Sculptor but drawing was always critical to her and she supported explorations with very carefully written texts and commentaries. There are beautiful examples at the Hepworth Gallery in Wakefield. The book brings out her determination and struggle to survive and succeed as a young artist during and after the war years and how important it was for her to meet with European artists, such as the Constructivist Naum Gabo, as they came to London as refugees. Her passion put emotion in her vision of landscape also links across.



**Downing Street Diary with Harold Wilson in No.10** by Bernard Donoghue. The diary format makes for fascinating reading as does the matching of a biographer to the personality. Wilson a northern boy on the national stage. Coping with crises and the politics of the Cold War, feeling he was being checked out by the secret service, and loving and needing the retreat of the Isles of Scilly.

My third book is a coincidence with the shocking violence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. **Mud and Stars, Travels in Russia** by Sara Wheeler, Penguin Vintage Travel. Sara travels in the footsteps of the great writers of Russia, Puskin, Tolstoy, Gogol etc and looks at how they represent the daily struggles and humanity of the country today.

My **hobby** referred to sailing a dinghy on Strangford Lough. I have been doing this for the past thirty years after coming to sailing late. As children we might have dabbled with model boats or tried to make rafts on small ponds and generally get wet and covered in mud. So, after the suspension of sailing for the Covid year it has added satisfaction.

Alongside this I have started the restoration an old 1960s wooden Wayfarer dinghy of uncertain origin with the aid of a specialist traditional Boatbuilder, Alastair Duffin of Duffin Marine, Belfast. I hope to find out more of the boats history and with luck where it was made and first sailed. Fingers crossed it will look good and will give me some enjoyment sailing on the Lough and who knows further afield.



Photos:  
Wayfarer under restoration at Duffin Marine, Redwing at anchor in Strangford Loch





## **Southwesters and Seaboats News from the SW Region**

### **SW TARS Archery event**

A beautiful June day and surprisingly little traffic on the A303, so time to go and look at the sea and pick up fish and chips before heading to

Exmouth Archers, our hosts for this event, where we were kitted out and taken to the long barn with a number of different targets at one end. We were shown how to hold the bow, insert the arrow and retrieve the arrows after everyone had finished shooting.

I don't think that AR would have got away with the passage in S & A about the Amazon's arrow hitting the saucepan while surrounded by the Swallows if he had been writing in these days of Health and Safety!

We were very fortunate to have a club member each to assist us when we started - one of our SW members is a member of Exmouth Archers so perhaps we were privileged.

We each had four arrows at a time and after a few rounds were moved further away from the targets, so had to get our eye in again. Following a welcome tea break it was back to the barn and a longer distance to the targets, but some of us even managed to burst a balloon. We then went outside with feathered arrows with a rubber on the pointed end and tried to shoot them into a largish bin. This was more of a challenge as it was fairly windy, and a different technique - aiming at a 45-degree angle rather than straight, and I have to report that no-one got an arrow in the bin.

This was great fun and we hope to do it again another year.

*Barbara Flower*



#### **Forthcoming events in the South West**

Members from other regions are always welcome to join us – email Barbara for information.

**Camping weekend 9th-11th September at Roadford Lake**, just off the A30 between Launceston and Okehampton.

Pitches are £21 per tent per night for 2 adults, plus £5 extra per person per night for an adult and £2 pppn for a child. There are also pitches for caravans and motorhomes. All the information you need to book is on the website - [swlakestrust.org.uk](http://swlakestrust.org.uk),

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October –Teignmouth Corinthian Yacht Club:** lunch and talk by popular local speaker Viv Wilson MBE, on 'Teignmouth Waterside Tales', a film show embracing the significance of the resort's coastal location during the past century.

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2023 – SW TARS AGM** will be via Zoom.



## Blackdown Hills walk

On Saturday 21st May a number of TARS gathered at the Catherine Wheel pub in Hemyock for a walk in the Blackdown Hills. We were given a choice of three options; 'energetic', 'shorter, easier' or 'just come for lunch'; the majority opted for 'easier, shorter'! This was ably led by Barbara who took us by footpaths, lanes and country roads in a 'circular' track back to the Catherine Wheel. There we had a great time together, most of us attempting to put away massive 'pub lunches'.

For me it was a special time. Not long ago I returned to England after 35 years in Queensland, Australia and this is the first complete English spring I have experienced for so long, it is such a special season that one doesn't experience in the tropics.

Also, this was my second TARS outing in over ten years! For all the time I have been in TARS the nearest meetings were about 2000 miles away!

Thank you Barbara for leading us that day and for keeping us informed of the various activities. *Paul Rodwell*

## Amazons on the River Dart! – April 2022

Due to Covid only three intrepid SW TARS (Judy Snook, Paul Rodwell - pictured afloat - and I) set out on the Round Robin trip from Paignton to Totnes, by bus, on to Dartmouth, by boat, Kingswear by river taxi and back to Paignton by steam train. I expected the bus ride, to be the most boring leg but as we came into Totnes the driver took us through "Totnes Zoo" – some streets where animals, created by sculptor Malcolm Curley, can be found in gardens, on houses and peering through fences. Penguins, leopards, lions, lizard, butterflies, meerkats, zebras and giraffes to name but a few – it was great fun trying to spot them all.

During the boat trip from Totnes to Dartmouth, we spotted Canada geese, buzzards, egrets, shell ducks and cormorants – and a seal's head popping out of the water. We learnt the word dart is the Celtic word for oak. And the Amazons on the River Dart? *The Onedin Line* TV show filmed their River Amazon scenes on the River Dart.

When we reached Dartmouth we crossed to Kingswear on the river taxi and finished our final leg on the steam train, which was wonderful. *Susan Gouldbourne*



# TARS Library

## Winifred Wilson

### Welcome visitors to TARS Library

Visitors to the Library are always welcome, and we have had three so far this year. First of all, in February Andrew Thackrey came down from Edinburgh to Dumfries on the express bus to return the German translations of Ransome's books, which he wrote about in the Library Update. He didn't actually need to come to the Library on this occasion, but I still count his visit in my list, and we had an interesting time visiting a church building which is not normally open to the public, ending with Andrew waxing lyrical in the Austrian/German language with one of the staff there.

If I thought that was a long way to come to return Library books, Linda Phillips from Perth, Western Australia capped that by a long way! Linda was on a visit to her brother in Glasgow, who drove her down to Dumfries in May, and they both spent some time in the Library, and seeing Moat Brae for the first time. Linda took this selfie of herself (on the right) and me to prove it.



Then at the end of June we had a serious research visit from Kirsty Nichol Findlay, who booked herself into the Premier Inn and spent a day going through back numbers of *Mixed Moss* and the Literary Weekend transcripts. No doubt you will read the results of her work in due course. Here she is in the Library.

**Note to all prospective researchers** – TARS Library is one of the best resources you will find outside of the Brotherton Library in Leeds for material relating to Arthur Ransome, so why not apply for a Red Slipper Fund grant for travel, accommodation or printing costs, and find your way to Dumfries?



"I found Volgoda a little, simple country town, white with snow" Arthur Ransome Feb. 1918. A/B

### Seasons Greetings

Photo – Feb. 1997 Ted & Jenny Alexander  
1997

[Found in *Signalling*, donated by John Sanders]



## OTHER AR ENTITIES 6

# Facebook and The Arthur Ransome Group

by Peter Willis

This short series on ‘complementary’ Ransome-related phenomena, or entities (‘organisations’ might fit some, but not all) began with “Signalling to Mars”, an early attempt at using the internet to share ideas and discussions about Ransome. That evolved into ‘allthingsransome.net’ which in due course absorbed TarBoard, an electronic discussion forum. All of these are now, in effect, museum pieces, having been supplanted by The Arthur Ransome Group, which uses the ubiquitous Facebook platform.

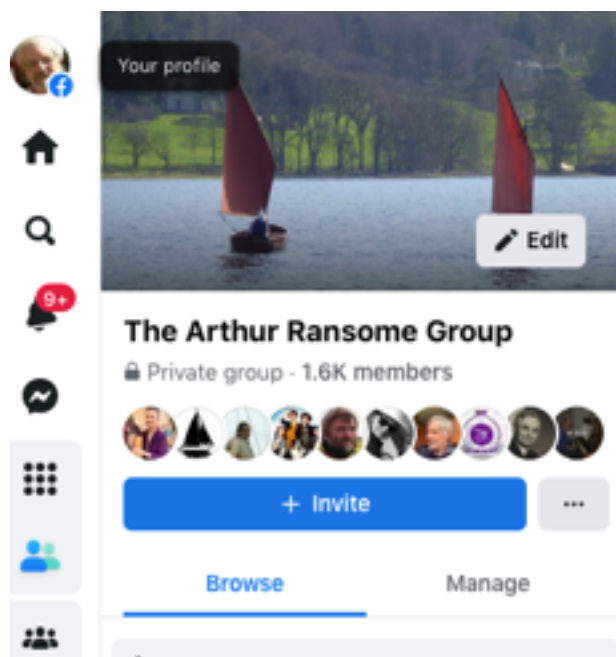
Quite a lot of people dislike Facebook, or are fearful of it, or perhaps simply don’t understand – or have never bothered to work out – how to use it. But it’s here, and has been for about 15 years and has become part of many peoples’ daily, or even hourly, lives. We – I am one – put ‘posts’ (little messages or photographs) on it, or comment on other people’s posts, or with a single click ‘like’ something we see.

The Arthur Ransome Group was started by Duncan Hall in 2007, about three years after Facebook itself was launched. Duncan, a teacher (then) and musician who lives in North Yorkshire, noticed other groups forming around various interests – but not Arthur Ransome. It became a Private Group a little later on, following some changes at Facebook itself. “That way, you can have some control over it, and avoid problems with spammers and adverts,” he explains. Would-be members have to answer a not-very-difficult question to show they are a) a real person and b) a bona fide Ransome fan.

### 1,600 members

The group has a rather impressive 1,600-plus members, which is about twice the number of TARS memberships. From this, it’s easy to deduce that not all ARG members are also Tars.

A small number of moderators (also, it appears, known as administrators) watch over proceedings and vet applicants and posts. As well as Duncan himself, they include Janet Mearns, Marc



Grimston, Sophie Neville – and, it seems, myself, though I’ve never been called on to moderate anything yet, and am not sure I’d know how to.

Not all the members are active contributors, but the range of expertise and the thoughtfulness of comments is impressive, as is the range of topics. Anything and everything Ransome gets an airing – his books, obviously: their plots, characters, locations; his life history, his hobbies, sailing, fishing and more. Then there are the films – if you want to stir things up a bit, just say something favourable about the 2016 film and wait for Roger Barnes to respond. Or even something not sufficiently unfavourable.

### The debates

To my mind, the best parts are the debates – someone will make an observation or ask a question, usually related in some way to a particular book or the books in general and in no time at all, 80 or 90 responses – to the original post or to each other – have appeared. It’s like an online seminar, thought-provoking, often exhilarating. Sometimes posters drift off topic and start sub-discussions of their own, which is fine, as – generally – Facebook conventions can be used to enable new posts to be linked to the ones they’re replying to.

A recent good example, posted by Judith Lewis on 25 May, asked whether *Great Northern?* was in need of an additional final chapter. It elicited a relatively modest 29 comments, with a few red herrings, but managed to examine the case for leaving things as they are (“Even the final phrase, ‘pulled for the shore’ evokes a sense of completeness”) alongside varied suggestions as to what a post-script chapter might include - what happened next, how did they all get home, etc. Some people seem to need that sort of thing, others



***‘An absolute joy and a vibrant source of new ideas, information and stimulating discussion’***

subscribe to the ‘less is more’ school of thought. One of the more attractive follow-ups takes the form of a link to a delightfully droll fanfic short story by Janet Mearns, set in the Callum household.

Lesley Wareing is a relatively recent recruit to both TARS and TARG (her choice of abbreviation), with a profile as close to that of a ‘typical Tar’ as I can imagine. An active retired professional, she lives in the Lake District, loves Ransome, likes writing (and is very good at it.) She first came to my attention with a few thoughts on Marmalade which I scooped up for the last Signals.

“During Covid19 restrictions,” she says, “like many people, I started using social media a bit more and I joined a small number of special interest groups - The Arthur Ransome Group being one. I think TARG is a little gem, an absolute joy, and a vibrant source of new ideas, new information and stimulating discussion. I don't want to tempt fate by saying this but as online discussion groups go, it is an amazingly pleasant community. Apart from one or two occasional blips, most people conduct themselves in a courteous and and respectful way.

“Also the amazing appeal of Arthur Ransome's life and writings to a wide range of people with different interests and specialisms is a positive virtue in my opinion. The variety of post topics is wonderful and people seem willing to engage both in light-hearted comic stuff and serious discussion. I've learned such a lot about Ransome and his work from other posters and have modified or expanded my own ideas and opinions as a result. It's a remarkable learning forum.”

Mostly, ARG Facebook topics are introduced in the form of a question or a brief proposition in a single paragraph, and responses are likewise quite short. Lesley has broken this mould recently with a few longer, article-length essays. These seem to have had no problem in inviting discussion, and it makes one wonder whether some Mixed Moss articles might enjoy an additional life as jumping-off points for Facebook debate.

*(One of Lesley's recent essays, on Dorothea, is included in this issue, on pp 12-13, along with some of the ARG responses.)*

NB There is also a Tars-only FB group, ‘**The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook Group**’ which appears to date from 2016, run by Chris Rosindale. It has just 195 members, with an emphasis on material about TARS, for other Tars. There's some duplication of postings, but the group is worth keeping an eye on. You'll need your TARS membership number to join.)

**Some of the ARG topics posted over the last few months (in date order, most recent first)**

**‘The Barbican Children’s Library Map’  
Authors arranged in categories on a replica London Tube map... where’s Ransome? (check the Northern Line)**

*YouTube link to a school production of the Swallows and Amazons musical*

**Rules of salvage discussed**

*Possible location(s) of the Pict House in GN?*

**Lowick Hall (Arthur and Evgenia’s home between 1948 and 1950 (Estate Agent’s ad, with plenty of photographs)**

*The Dogs Home - where it is and how to find it.*

**The Igloo – ditto**

*What size was Racundra?*

**The importance of food in the AR books, 44 posts, including the significance of the pork pie in WD (and the diet of the Famous Five)**

*An extraordinary little clip from “Why Didn't the Ask Evans?”, 2022 TV mini-series from Agatha Christie novel*

**‘ "Roger, aged seven, and no longer the youngest in the family..." Opening sentences matter and authors give a lot of thought to them. I wonder why AR writes "no longer the youngest in the family". It's not a particularly significant detail or is it?' - posted by John Lanyon, 28 June, 81 comments**

*Bunloaf and other Ransomeish recipes, source of.*

## BOOK REVIEW

# Evgenia unabashed

Jill Goulder reviews **No Holds Barred**,

Evgenia Ransome's Diaries 1927-1933, ed. Margaret Ratcliffe,  
Amazon Publications 2022) £14.00

Margaret Ratcliffe has achieved a labour of love in this engaging collection of Evgenia's diary entries. TARS will know the series of events which led to Trotsky's personal secretary finding a future as an English author's wife in the Lake District and the Broads; imagine – bearing in mind her forthright style – if she'd followed Trotsky into exile, becoming his amanuensis in Mexico....

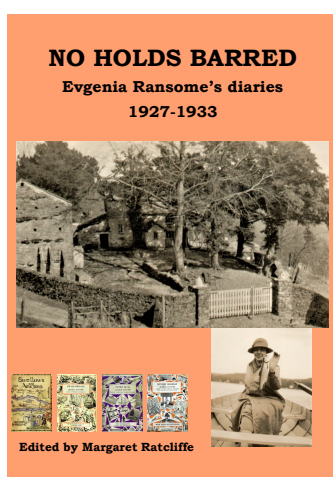
As it is, her accounts paint in a lively background to AR's life, which is otherwise conveyed only sparsely by his own monosyllabic diary entries and sometimes slightly devious autobiographical texts.

The order of the book takes a little getting used to, being arranged by themed chapters rather than straight chronology, which indeed makes for a livelier narrative. Genia's detailed accounts of two Broads cruises make up admirably for AR's total lack of diary entries – and how would we have known of their 1929 visit to Ireland without Genia's travelogue? Or their range of experiences in Syria in 1932? (Typical AR Syria diary entry (4 Feb): “Began Peter Duck.”)

Margaret notes that Genia initially wrote in AR's own diary (in 1927), and suggests that “Arthur told her to get her own diary” – fortunately, as AR left for Russia in 1928. She writes in English, and legibly without shorthand elements, so evidently was writing for an audience – AR himself, but perhaps for others. Genia's diary years peter out by 1934; did she feel that she no longer had an audience? Or had living life become more interesting than commenting on it? Or did she weary of recording the daily round?

And the daily round it is – fishing, the weather, birds, gardening, ailments (of themselves and the car); an obsession with the arrival time of the postman; tedious visitors:

“[13 Oct 1929] Lady Mackay from Ambleside booming all day long with a very loud and grating



*“How else would we have known of their 1929 visit to Ireland?”*

voice about herself and her husband and how many “guineas” she spent on this, that and another.”

Clifford Webb, the original illustrator, visits in 1931 and leaves the Ransomes united in loathing of him: “[14 Apr 1931] I never yet met a man duller or more conceited.”

It's not all bile – Genia has warm regard for some people:

“[28 Nov 1932] I don't know of anybody who makes their visitors more comfortable physically and spiritually than Margaret and

Charles Renold.”

The Appendices give biographies of a few individuals encountered in the diaries – the Ransomes' hosts in

Ireland, and the exotic-sounding Aida Borchgrevink.

Do Genia's diary entries shed light on any of the characters found in the S&A books? We already know of the antecedents of e.g. Peter Duck and Mrs Barrable, but what about minor characters? A recurring theme in Ransome life is visits to doctors – certainly AR vies with the GA in his need of medical monitoring: “[9 Mar 1931] Arthur back from London. His doctor quite pleased with his progress but says he ought to go on with bismuth and diet for a very long time yet.” Perhaps one of them sparked the character in the books – busy, gruff but with firm underlying neighbourly supportiveness. And we might mention Squashy Hat – the Ransomes' old friend Oscar Gnosspelius, reluctant star of *Pigeon Post*. In an easily-missed entry on 5 July 1929: “O.G. has found copper on the Old Man.” Gold!!

There has been useful picture research, with photos of various key individuals. A possible addition would have been an example of Genia's determined, clear handwriting. The illustration captions are sometimes shaky: as the photographer in some cases, I take issue with most of the captions pp85-91! Amazon Publications, though, has once more produced an enlightening and readable addition to our AR bookshelves.

AusTar **Catherine Lamont** was awarded the **Red Slipper Grant** in 2019 to conduct further research into the Australian references in the *Swallows and Amazons* books. Catherine lives only 60km from the sheep station near Walcha, NSW, belonging to AR's grandfather (and the archive where she found a copy of the grandparents' letters). These notes supplement her article 'Swallow Down Under' in the 2022 *Mixed Moss*.



## Ransome's Australasian references (and their errors) - a quick check-list

Questions like 'Why did Ransome give the Swallows' mother an Australian childhood?' or 'Why so many references to Australia and New Zealand?' and 'Are they accurate?' are often raised in AR-related online discussion forums. Many come directly from the stories Ransome was told in childhood. (The *Mixed Moss* article 'Swallow Down Under' explores the primary sources for these stories - AR's *Autobiography* and the letters of the grandfather who lived in Australia for most of his life and the grandmother who visited there for a year in 1890.)

Curiously, the only 'really questionable' references (marked \* in the grid below) both relate to a confusion between Australia and New Zealand. Wikipedia tells us that Pelorus Jack was not a fish looking after ships in Sydney Harbour, as mentioned in *Peter Duck*, but a *dolphin* who 'piloted' them through the perilous waters of Cook Strait in *New Zealand* (where a law was, indeed, enacted to protect him).

Similarly, the only references I can find to natives rubbing noses in the Antipodes were to NZ Maoris, not Australian Aborigines. 'Koala Bear' and 'Opossum' were both terms used in a 1928 publication 'The Australian Bush,' edited by Ransome's best man (Ashley Gibson).

*The Red Slipper Grant* was awarded for developing a 'Mary Walker Tour Guide', for people wanting to visit 'actual locations' that could have inspired the stories. A 'Ransome Down Under' booklet with map and illustrations is now in the Online Supplement on the TARS website. I hope you'll find these useful - CL

SA	Ch 2 – Mrs Walker growing up on Sydney Harbour – see MM article Ch 16 – Rubbing noses like 'natives' in Australia* Ch 18 – Drought, little brown bears licking honey, opossums, 'cannibalism' – see MM article Ch 28 – 'Melbourne' label on Captain Flint's Trunk – see MM article
SD	Ch 2 – Quotes a saying of old nanny in <u>Australia</u> - cannot find this quote anywhere Ch 8 – Capsizing cousin's dinghy in Sydney Harbour – see MM article Ch 15 – Trout, fishing, camping, snakes worse than adders – see MM article Ch 36 – ... smell from the sailing ships in Australian harbours – see MM article
PD	Ch 1 – Australia mentioned on the first page – see MM article Ch 17 – Pelorus Jack helping ships in Sydney Harbour*
PP	Ch 4 – <u>She'd</u> tell us about gold-mining in Australia – see MM article Ch 16 – Sheep dying in great drought – see MM article Ch 25 – Children call 'Cooee' – common Australian phrase
WD	Ch 2 – Falling asleep on horseback riding home after dance - see <i>Mates at Billabong, 1912</i> Ch 24 – Reference to ships coming from Australia – any maritime history book
SW	Ch 28 – Corroboree, cannibalism - see any Encyclopaedia and 'Some notes on cannibalism among Queensland Aborigines, 1824-1900', E.G. Heap in Queensland Heritage
GN	Ch 12 – Roger mentions cockatoos – looking out the window in Armidale, I can see lots [Ch 21 – Discussion of the death of the first Englishman to chart NZ and the East Coast of Australia, Captain Cook - a biography of Cook was in AR's library]
Auto-biography	Ch 1 - Stories of grandfather, uncles, grandmother Ch 4 – Mentions EBB's proximity to bushrangers, <i>Robbery under Arms</i>
Bohemia	He mentions visiting wombats at the zoo – so he probably wouldn't have described them as bears
Other	A 1962 letter to a cousin in Australia; diaries mention when he got fan mail from Australia

**NO HOLDS BARRED**

Evgenia Ransome's diaries  
1927-1933



Edited by Margaret Ratcliffe

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**No Holds Barred**

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**Fair Cops and Glowworms,** ed Paul Crisp An  
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# The TARS Stall

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The TARS Journal since 1990  
Most previous issues available. £4 (+£1.50)

## BOOKS ABOUT ARTHUR RANSOME

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Phone +44 (0)1794 388897, preferably 6-8pm  
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or SAE: The Manor House, Church Lane,  
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## BOOKS BY ARTHUR RANSOME



**Racundra's First Cruise**  
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**The 12 Swallows and Amazons books**  
Vintage Classics paperback edition. Set of 12 £75 (+ £17) Single copies £7 each (+ £3.50)

### Audio CDs of 'the 12'

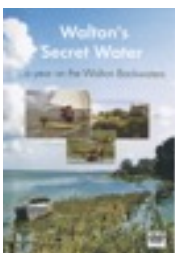
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All 12 titles available. £14 (+ £3.50) each.

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

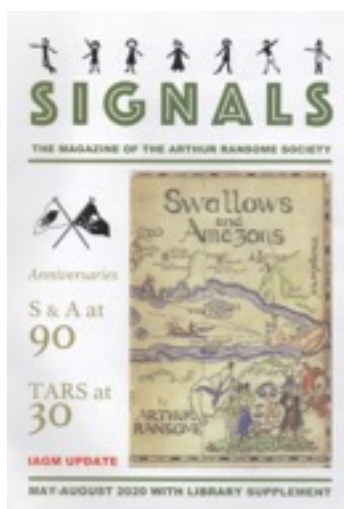
Polyester burgees, 50x30cm, including halyard and toggle.

Three designs:  
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Skull and crossbones, Swallow, £18 (+ £2.50)



**TARS Enamel pin badge** (Swallow + Skull and Crossbones) approx 2x3cm £3 (+£1.50)

## TARS PUBLICATIONS etc



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

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

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

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

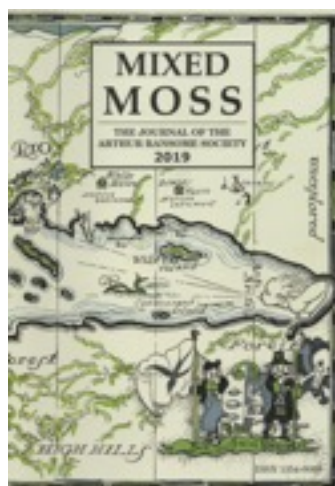
Some overseas material is included; overseas TARS groups also have their own newsletters – see below.

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

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

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

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



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

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

**Mixed Moss 2023 issue  
Editor vacancy (Acting  
Editor (2022) Julian  
Lovelock)**

[julianlovelock@outlook.com](mailto:julianlovelock@outlook.com)  
**Back issues: most in stock at  
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### LITERARY WEEKENDS

**Transcripts of Talks from  
the Edinburgh 2017 event  
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**Amazon Publications**  
produces a Ransome-linked book yearly on a subscription basis. Next title (2022) *No Holds Barred* Some back issues on TARS Stall.  
Enquires to Alan Hakim:  
[awhakim@btinternet.com](mailto:awhakim@btinternet.com)



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

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

## RANSOME ONLINE

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

## OTHER WEBSITES

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

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

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

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

## FACEBOOK GROUPS

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

**The Arthur Ransome Society  
(TARS) Facebook Group**  
(monitored TARS-only group)



## The TARS Library

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

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

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

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

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

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## TARS Committees

### Literary & Resources:

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### Publications:

Marc Grimston (Chair), Mike Glover (Secretary), The Blue Family, Catherine Lamont, David Middleton, Peter Willis

### Contribute!

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

### Advertise!

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

## TARS Subscriptions

### 2022 rates

(renewals due 1st January)

**Adult** (now including Seniors) £25

**Family/Group** £35

**Junior or Student** £15

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

**Corporate rate** £60

## RED SLIPPER FUND

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

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

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

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

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

## *Junior Adventure Fund*

### Calling all young TARS aged 13 to 19

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

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

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

# Discover Dundee in '23

## TARS IAGM

5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> May



The IAGM will be based in the Malmaison hotel which is wonderfully located overlooking the River Tay waterfront, opposite the rail station and just a minute from both the stunning new V&A Museum and Scott's Antarctic ship *RRS Discovery*.



Accommodation is available in the hotel or you may prefer to use a local B&B or guest house. The choice will be yours. Camping options are available, the closest being at Monteith 3 miles away. Full details and the programme of events will be given in the December *Signals*.



In addition to the IAGM and all the usual attractions of talks, the Dick Callum Cup, Library and Stalls; Dundee hosts any number of visitor attractions. These include *HMS Unicorn*, the Verdant Works Jute Mill Museum, the McManus Art Gallery & Museum, Dundee Science Centre, Camperdown Wildlife Park, The Mills Observatory, statues of Desperate Dan and Oor Wullie and much more. Your problem will be fitting them all in. *See you there!*