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SIGNALS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY

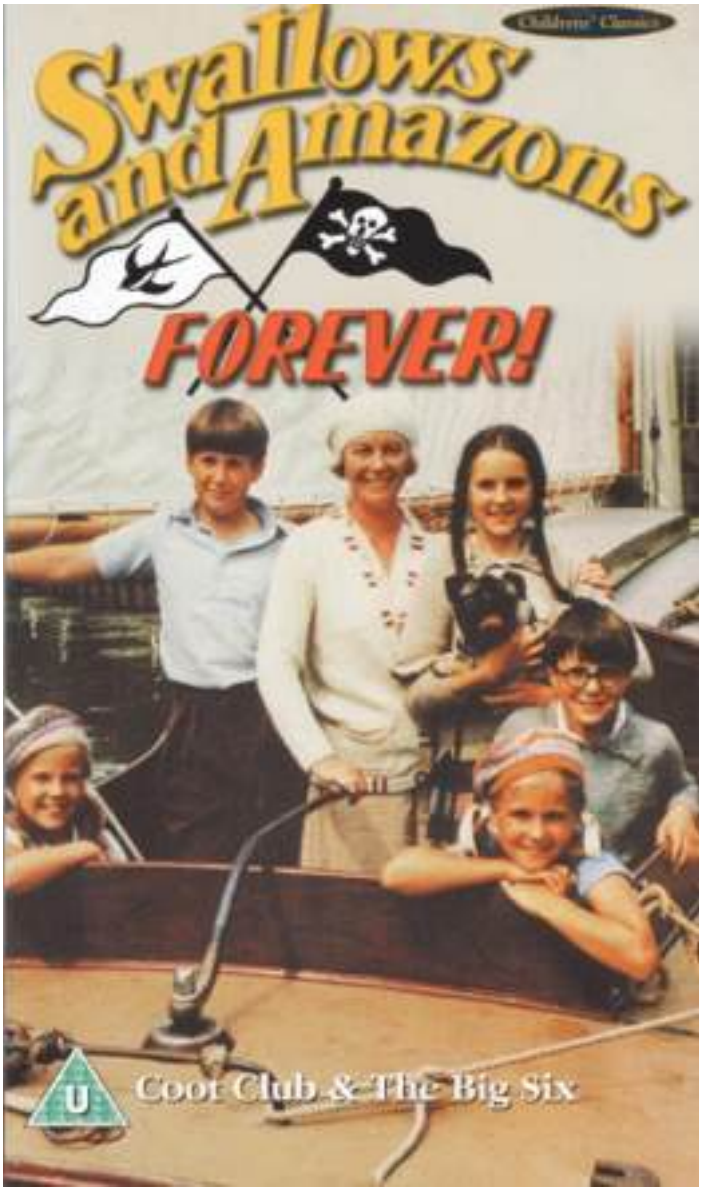
'Roaring Donkey' the last camp – and where next

A walk by Breydon

Murder in the 1930s

The library in the loft

Rusland repairs



JANUARY-APRIL 2026: WITH IAGM DESPATCHES

The Arthur Ransome Society

A Company Limited by Guarantee: No 03386251
Registered Office: Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kirkland, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5AL
Company Secretary: John Pearson, Mas d'en Clarimon, Route de Paloll à la Selva, F-66400 CERET, France
email: tarsinfo@arthur-ransome.org website: www.arthur-ransome.org

President: John Sergeant
Honorary Vice Presidents: Christina Hardyment, Ted Alexander, Ted Evans

TARS Board 2025/2026: Elected Trustees

Chair: Rachel Chalmers
chair@arthur-ransome.org

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

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

susan@ttars.co.uk

Peter Wright
0121 443 2910
peterwright180 @btinternet.com

Vice-chair & Membership Secretary: Krysia Clack
01904 642971
memsec@arthur-ransome.org

PeterWillis
07979 721901
peterwillis1144 @gmail.com

Dermot Stanley
07855 779060
dstanleyrd@ gmail.com

David Butters
01772 865840
davidbutters937 @hotmail.com

Regional Representative Trustees

South: Iain Khan-Gichrist
07760

North: Elizabeth Haworth
01539 442050

Scotland: Sandy Allan
07380 361486

East: Vacant

South-West: Barbara Flower
01963

Midland and Wales: Sarah Samuel
07952

Overseas co-ordinators:
USA: Mark Purtill
+1425-420-4391
usa@arthur-ransome.org.
Canada:
Ian Sacré
+1 250-871-269
canada@arthur-ransome.org
Australia: Jan Allen
<jp8fillyjonk @bigpond.com>
New Zealand: Neil & Barbara Robertson
+64 04 473 6383
newzealand@ arthur-ransome.org
Japan: Mikako Tarashima
+81 3 6421 5668
japan@arthur-ransome.org
Overseas Members' Representative: Krysia Clack +441904 642791

SIGNALS

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ARTHUR RANSOME SOCIETY
JANUARY-APRIL 2026

Editor Peter Willis

From the Chair

In these short, dark days of winter is has been fun to look back on the TARS events, activities and publications as 2025 was a busy year. The lovely summer was very kind to us for many (although not all) of the camps, as you'll read in this edition.

Back in October, I finally got round to changing my TARS membership payment from Standing Order to the online system via the website. If you haven't done this already, please do it before your next renewal / payment date as it really helps us manage membership and finances more efficiently. The instructions are re-published in this edition (page 4). Once I had worked through the steps, which took a couple minutes, the only thing left was to remember to cancel my previous Standing Order!

Talking of the website, we continue to update and streamline it, and this is paying dividends in terms of new members joining via this route – welcome to you all. If you have any suggestions for further improvements, do please let Ben our Webmaster or me know.

Finally, thank you to everyone who has organised, attended, written, compiled or contributed in any way to TARS. You are the life blood of the Society. *Rachel*

Our cover: *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*, celebrated in our 'Roaring Donkey' camp – see also Jack Blake!

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News from the Board

The TARS Board of Trustees held its 99th meeting on 8 November in Birmingham. All but one member attended, two by Zoom link. Our Chair Rachel gave a special welcome to Rosemary Beal, invited as the recently-appointed successor to Jules Blue as TARS Safeguarding Officer, to Board Member Dermot Stanley, on his return from illness, and to Marc Grimston who attended as Eastern region's representative. We had a crowded, varied agenda; Rachel, by firm chairship, took us through it in exactly the time planned.

Chair's opening remarks

Rachel drew the Board's special attention to a recent message from a new TARS member suggesting that the Society's founding documents (memorandum and articles of association and the Leading Lights Rules) might no longer fully respect applicable company law. The Board decided to seek as soon as possible legal advice to identify any necessary amendments to the documents, with a view to proposing their adoption at an IAGM.

Reports from committees

The Board was delighted to hear from the **Literary and Resources Committee** that TARS has a new **librarian** to take over from Christine Rae, who is standing down. Her successor is Amanda Kitchen, who can accommodate the extensive library at her home in Otley, Yorkshire.

Christine is also standing down from the post of manager of the **TARS stall**. A successor in this post has yet to be appointed, and the Board wishes in any case to review the range of items the stall should offer for sale in the future and what its payment and delivery procedures should be (including use of the TARS Stall website)

The Board decided to make an offer for a copy of Ransome's early collection of essays '*The Stone Lady*', which Peter Wright reported to be on sale.

Dermot, commenting on his report from the **'Sail Swallow and Amazon'** working group, noted that there could be opportunities for more use of the two vessels, by their public display in winter and presence and use in the Lake District.

TARS finances

TARS Treasurer Susan Gouldbourne presented details of income and expenditure during 2025 so far and a proposal for a budget for 2026. After some adjustments, the Board approved a budget envisaging a minor deficit unlikely to exceed £1,000.

Safeguarding and risk assessment

The Board discussed a number of topics with Rosemary Beal. It was agreed that the Society should from now on concern itself not only with child safeguarding but also with the security of all who come to our events, including vulnerable adults. Rosemary will propose amendments to the existing safeguarding policy document, as well as a number of risk assessment forms for various kinds of event, which organisers could download from the website.

Membership of the Board

The Board agreed that Rosemary should succeed Iain Khan-Gilchrist as Southern regional representative trustee when Iain steps down from the post, following his decision to retire from the region's committee at the year-end.

IAGMs and working party

The Board adopted a proposal from Sarah Samuel for the minimum requirements for an IAGM where an organising region prefers to organise a 'slimmed-down' type of meeting, and considered setting up a new, small, central working party to advise and help regions organise IAGMs – please get in touch if you are interested in joining it – and a possible geographical concentration of IAGM locations, to make more use of particularly suitable venues or areas with specific Ransome links.

Adventure Funds

TARS already has a Junior Adventure Fund, but the Board considered whether there should now be also a Senior Adventure Fund for adult members, as had been suggested in comments in the consultation on employment of the Stockwell/Cattley legacy. The Board considered that the best way forward might be the creation of a single adventure fund for Tars of any age. It will ask Paul Crisp to consider this option and suggest its basic rules.

Learning to sail

During the legacy consultation proposals were made for TARS to help especially its junior members to learn to sail. The Board read a note from Sarah on this subject, and thought that a reasonable basic aim for each region might be to organise at least one event yearly providing sailing tuition for TARS members of any age.

Regional reports

Reports on their activities had been received from the UK regions. In discussion of the Eastern region report the Board decided that the region should open negotiations with the owners of the vessel which played the '*Death and Glory*' in the films of the two Norfolk Broads novels, with a view to the boat's possible acquisition by TARS and installation and conservation at the Museum of the Broads, accompanied by information about Ransome and TARS.

TARS Australia

The Board had received news from Jan Allen, the TARS co-ordinator for Australia, about its intent to cease to be a registered company. However, AusTARS hopes that a number of activities will continue, including the magazine 'Furthest South'.

The Board expressed its strong support for AusTARS as it carries out this transition, and its readiness to help if possible with the continuation of the annual AusTARS Cup and the Cheryl Paget Memorial Award, and to maintain warm and productive relations with its Australasian members for the future.

Next Board meeting (the hundredth!)

Saturday 28 March 2026, 11am at Birmingham

John Pearson

‘The Homing Stone’ coming to Watchet

A rare opportunity to see storyteller **Hugh Lupton** performing his legendary adaptation of his great-uncle Arthur Ransome’s escape from Moscow with Evegenia Shelepina in 1919 is part of the programme at this year’s **Words in Watchet** literary festival**.**

The title, *The Homing Stone,* refers to a pebble from Peel Island, Coniston Water that Ransome kept constantly on his desk as a talisman. But would it be powerful enough to bring him home?

Described as a “Praise song for his great-uncle”, Hugh Lupton’s performance has long been a favourite of Tars, but less often seen these days.

Extraordinary adventure

His dramatisation brings to life Arthur Ransome’s own account in his Autobiography of how he and Evgenia escaped to Estonia– an extraordinary adventure in which they seemed to become characters from one of the folk tales Ransome had collected in ‘Old Peter’s Russian Tales’, surviving by a mixture of quick wit and good fortune.

The performance is in two acts with live musicians; it will also include some of the folk-tales collected by Ransome that prefigure his own adventures.

Words in Watchet is a literature festival held in the West Somerset harbour town of Watchet, over the weekend of 20-22 February 2026. The Homing Stone will be performed at the Backyard Theatre, TA23 0AZ on Friday 20 February, 7.30-10.00pm, £12.00. For more details, and to book tickets, visit wordsinwatchet.com.

DATE	CALENDAR OF EVENTS	REGION
17 January	AR's Birthday Lunch, AGM Wroxham	East
17 January	AR's Birthday Lunch, AGM Haslemere	South
17 January	AGM on Zoom	South-West
17 January	AR's Birthday Lunch, AGM Edinburgh	Scotland
24 January	AGM and Junior Parley Shrewesbury	Midland + Wales
21 February	Antarctic Adventure, Cheltenham	Midland + Wales
1 March	Zoom Talk	South-West
14 March	Daffodils and Poets walk Dymock	Midland + Wales
21 March	Fleet Air Arm Museum Yeovilton	South-West
11 April	Minsmere RSPB Reserve	East
18 April	Set sail on *Vilma* Port Dinorwic	Midland + Wales
25 April	South Devon Railway Buckfastleigh	South-West
16 May	Explore Stonewell (NT) Leicestershire	Midland + Wales
21 May	Walk and picnic Weymouth	South-West
13-14 June	Museum of the Broads weekend	East
25-30 July (note datechange)	**‘Secret Water’ Camp** Walton Backwaters, Essex	TARS/East
June/July (date TBA)	SeatonTramway trip	South-West
14-17 August	**TARS IAGM Weekend Rydal Hall, Cumbria**	TARS/North
16-18 October	**TARS Literary Weekend Winchester**	TARS

SUBSCRIPTIONS REMINDER

If you haven't yet switched to our **new, easier payment system**, please go to the **TARS website** **arthur-ransome.org** and follow these steps before your next renewal:

1. **Log in to the Members' Area**
   Use your username and password (sent in a previous email in May 2025).
   If you can't find them, email **webmaster@arthur-ransome.org** and ask for help.
   If this is your first time logging in, please change your password to something memorable and secure.

2. **Add your payment method**
   Go to: https://arthur-ransome.org/shop/my-account/payment-methods/
   Add your payment details. Once done, your membership will renew automatically on **January 1st, 2027**, and each year after. (You can cancel at any time.)

3. **Link your payment to your subscription**
   On the left-hand side, click **"My Subscription"**.
   Then select **"Add Payment"**, choose the payment method you just added, and click **"Add Payment Method"**.

4. **Cancel any old payments**
   To avoid being charged twice, please **cancel your existing standing order or direct debit** — but only after completing the steps above.

If you need help:

Technical help: webmaster@arthur-ransome.org

Membership queries: memsec@arthur-ransome.org

Thank you!

Ben Hambleton - *TARS Webmaster*

Have you reserved the date in Your Diary?

The 18th TARS Literary Weekend

16th-18th October 2026

Winchester

As outlined in the last *Signals*, the 2026 Literary Weekend will be held in the autumn in Winchester – we have chosen this date to give members some breathing space following the extensive programme of TARS activities during the summer.

Our Venue

Our home for the weekend will be the **Winchester Royal Hotel**, a high-class, medium-sized hotel in the very heart of Winchester, but with the added bonus of plenty of on-site car parking. It's just a five-minute walk from the rail station with direct trains from London, the north and the south.
All rooms are ensuite and the hotel has recently been refurbished to a high standard, including a comfortable lounge, separate bar, conference room and excellent restaurant.
There is also a beautiful walled garden which many of the bedrooms overlook. Why not view the facilities on their website: **www.winchesterroyalhotel.com**

We are hoping this venue will attract both our regular and new attendees. Despite the Literary Weekends themselves being hugely enjoyable, numbers have been steadily falling, putting a strain on viability. It is possible this may be the last weekend in this format unless more people can come. **If you've not been before, please give serious consideration to coming, you'd be warmly welcomed.**

Our Speakers

One reason you should come is the attractive variety of speakers who have said they will attend. At this early stage we have secured the following: **Jim Ring** (such a success last time in Harrogate), **Peter Hunt** (a world authority on children's literature and author of *Approaching Arthur Ransome*) and TARS members **Rachel Chalmers**, **Andrew Jones, Mary Pritchard**, **Margaret Ratcliffe** and **Peter Willis**. Our President **John Sergeant** may give a talk and a number of other outside speakers are being approached following recommendations from members.. A full list of speakers and their topics will be outlined in the May edition of *Signals*. If, however, you would like to give a talk, either a full paper or a shorter cameo, it's not too late. Please get in touch with **peterwright180@btinternet.com.**

TARS has a new librarian

Meet **Amanda Kitchen**, a relatively new member of TARS and, she says, excited to be taking over the role of TARS librarian She lives in Otley, Yorkshire and the job began in earnest for her one rainy night in mid-November when the books themselves arrived, in 39 hefty boxes. These have now been consigned to the attic (after checking its load-bearing capacity) and Amanda hopes to have the books sorted and ready for borrowing by the end of January.

Amanda writes: My interest in Ransome started at an early age when I received a copy of *Swallows and Amazons* (the 1974 film tie-in version with photographs on the front and back cover).
I went on to collect 'the twelve' and read them all more times than I remember.

Ransome had a significant impact on my childhood, life and career. A friend and I were inspired by S&A to re-create Wild Cat Island in the garden and imagined ourselves to be Amazons. We camped, built a stone fireplace with hanging kettle and added a sail to our go-cart which we pushed up and down the road.

Canoes and wild water

Sadly, I had no route into real sailing at the time so did the next best thing, joined a canoe club. This led me to wild-water racing (the kayaking equivalent of downhill skiing), international competition and studying at Nottingham (home of the National Watersports Centre).

My watery interests steered me towards a career in civil engineering and I've worked in hydraulic engineering and flood risk management on rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs throughout the UK and Ireland for 30 years.

In 2024, I attended the S&A film's 50th anniversary event at Windermere and subsequently joined TARS.

Re-reading 'the twelve' as an adult, it was interesting to recognise how much Ransome had provided a moral compass and shaped my personal values. I also had a greater appreciation for the quality of his writing, having written technical documents myself.

It will be a pleasure to take on the TARS library and help members learn more about Ransome and his work. There will be a period of 'setting up camp' immediately after the move but I anticipate that things will be reasonably shipshape by the time this edition of Signals reaches you.

The library is a fantastic resource and I encourage TARS members to make good use of it. I very much look forward to meeting and supporting you, whether by correspondence or face-to-face at events.

Attic Statistics: 1286 books, weighing over 700kg

Amanda reports: There are 39 boxes altogether – by 18 November I'd moved 27 into the attic, just 12 to go. I'm onto the heavier boxes now and partially unpack them in order to lighten the load (taking it slowly to avoid injury or worse!), so each one takes two to four trips. Thankfully I have stairs up to the attic, wouldn't fancy carrying this load up a loft ladder!

The average weight so far is 17kg per box and I estimate the total weight of the library to be just over 700kg – about half my pre-move estimate of 1440kg so I think the attic should take it comfortably. I will then start looking through each box and logging the location of each book.

I've copied the catalogue into a spreadsheet and the library has 1286 books! I'd recommend allowing a good month for logging so with Christmas I think the end of January would be a reasonable date to be open for business.

AusTARS decides to de-incorporate – closer ties with UK

(Report from Jan Allen, summarised by PW)
In order to avoid onerous state bureacracy, AusTARS has begun the process of winding itself up as an 'incorporated body'. (This also reflects the decrease in numbers and increase in the age of the members.)

One consequence of this move however is that all financial assets of AusTARS have to be wound up, and, Jan writes, "We have already had to nominate TARS UK as the body that would receive whatever amount may be left in our bank account here."

AusTARS has a long history of building and maintaining links with TARS in the UK, via the AusTARS Cup. More recently the Cheryl Paget Memorial Award was established. Though hitherto Australasian in scope, it could expand in scope as it perpetuates the memory of a much-loved former member of the UK's Eastern Region who emigrated to New Zealand in 2009 and died, of cancer, aged 49 in 2022. The Award has hitherto included a $100 monetary element.

Furthest South to continue

On a more positive note, Jan adds "Although, after de-incorporation, AusTARS would no longer exist as a structured body… in all other respects we plan to continue as before. Phoebe Palmieri and I will continue to produce our newsletter, *Furthest South*, which incurs no costs now. I will continue to offer informal gatherings to members here in Victoria. Members will be renewing their subscriptions individually via the website, but the Co-ordinator would be available for any assistance required and to facilitate contact between members… Visiting TARS from other states and countries will always be welcomed by members here. AusTARS will continue to foster their special link with TARSNZ.

This year's TARS Camp

Sail to Secret Water!

Come and join us for our Secret Water camp in East Anglia's Walton Backwaters, as explored by the Swallows, including Bridget. It will be a week of great adventure to include lots of time on the water including sailing, seal watching, and picnicking at Flint Island (Stone Point).

Note the date-change: we've had to bring it forward couple of days. Now 25-30 July.

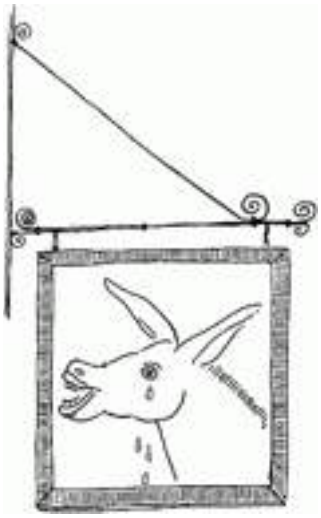
Excitingly there will be opportunities to sail *Nancy Blackett* and in the Drascombes owned by our hosts, the Birch Hall outdoor centre. Activities ashore will include a guided walk of the Arthur Ransome Trail between Pin Mill and Shotley, as well as geocaching along the Sea Wall around Hamford Water, and the inaugural crossing of the Red Sea (The Wade).

Our base will be Birch Hall Adventures, with camping, or a bunkhouse, as well as a basic kitchen, and an indoor seating area if it rains. And bring your own boats of course.

For more details, email Rachael Hurst at *rachaelhurst@hotmail.co.uk*. Fees for the week are still being finalised, and booking links will be available soon.

The TARS Stall needs a manager

A volunteer is still required to take over the TARS Stall. The role involves managing the stock, finances and responding to orders. There is normally a TARS stall at the IAGM and at the Literary Weekend but the running of this can be shared with other volunteers. The stock includes Amazon Publications and other books, CDs, burgees, badges and a few other items as advertised in 'Signals' and on the website. The online shop is in development and your input would be welcomed. Orders can be sporadic but more frequent in the run up to Christmas. Essential requirements are internet access, some space at home for stock and somewhere to bank cash.
All expenses incurred in shipping, transport and stationery are reimbursed.
If you think you can take on this role or would like more information, please email Krysia Clack at steve@ksclack.plus.com



‘Roaring Donkey’, *Swallow* and *Amazon* together – Best Camp ever?

That was the view of many campers at the end of last summer’s Broads-based TARS camp – though isn't it always when things come together? This one had lots of plus-points though. Fabulous weather and a welcoming Broad to sail on – and the very special opportunity to see – and sail – *Swallow* and *Amazon* together. *Swallow* arrived, newly-restored from Hunter’s yard, and *Amazon* was enjoying the season before getting ready to take her turn in the shed. Junior Tars were all over them.

For SW Tar Naomi Hemingway it was all new and amazing – here’s her log…

I headed to the Roaring Donkey Camp with great excitement. I had never been to the Broads before and was particularly looking forward to discovering the locations of the books.

I approached Martham via Beccles, the Admiral’s home town. It was rather magical to be there, even with all the modern shopboards that would have changed it so much.

Journeying on, I stopped to photograph St Olaves bridge, then crossed the Yare, marvelling at my first sight of Breydon Water. Gazing in awe at the huge expanse of water, like a marshland to the right but so industrial within a quarter of a mile, it was immediately obvious why bringing a boat down there under sail was such a risky business.

And so, on to Martham. and the camp, where TARS campers had a corner of the small campsite, said to be on the site of the Roaring Donkey pub, which appears in *The Big Six*. In fact, some old foundations by the loo block put paid to the belief that there never was a pub at all. The first evening set the pattern for the week, a lovely fire blazed which we all sat around, sharing plans for the next day, discussing the one just past.

We were very lucky to have the boats from the films on loan for the whole week. First thing on the agenda the first day was to capsize *Swallow* to make sure she wouldn’t sink and was rightable. Ian Stewart prepared by donning a wetsuit and over she went, amid much cheering from the packed jetty. She was righted very easily and then Juno and Christopher enjoyed baling her out again.

I then looked for a location within reach by bike. I headed off to discover Thurne Dyke, which is mentioned in *Coot Club*. There is a lovely little shop there, selling everything from ice creams to original paintings, both of which I purchased.

Capsizing and bailing *Swalllow.*

On the Monday lovers of the TV series spent the day on the train, going from Wroxham to Holt and on to Sheringham by steam train, and visiting Weybourne station which was "Wroxham" for the BBC series of *Coot Club*.

Being more of the books fan myself, I spent the morning rearranging my tent and waiting for afternoon sailing activities.

This was "that heatwave" week and there was very little wind. We were very lucky that with Ian's connections through his job on the Broads, we were able to tow the boats up Heigham Sound and then tie up to the marker posts. We took turns to sail under the excellent tutelage of Dermot.

I wish I could say I loved sailing *Swallow* but this would be untrue – she was actually a rowing boat adapted for the film with a very small keel attached to her hull. (She has many other fans, especially Juno, so that's okay.) Later in the week, I had my chance to sail *Amazon*, and always imagining myself to be Nancy anyway – I loved her!

On the Tuesday, I set out in the car to visit St Benet's Abbey (right). It's an astonishing place. I'd always imagined the windmill was built in the courtyard but it's actually integrated into the walls!

Walking by the river, I saw a coot swimming with just its head above water. It dived and I never saw it come up.

Next stop was Horning, which I was very excited to visit. My first impression was how much smaller the staithe was than I'd expected. But just right too. In the picture, below, the Swan Inn is on the left, with the staithe beside it. They'd have come from the right. That bend in the river is mentioned in the books. I never managed to find Pug Street!

On the Wednesday several of us went to visit two gardens, Hoveton Hall Estate, and East Ruston Old Vicarage. Both were very lovely and very different.

That evening, a TARS-only tour was planned of Happisburgh (pronounced Hays-borough?!) Lighthouse. We met up at the beach before for picnic tea and a cold water swim for some (yes, I was one!).

The Lighthouse is the oldest working light in East Anglia, and the only independently run lighthouse in Great Britain. It was built in 1790; the tower is 85ft tall and the lantern is 134ft above sea

lighthouse was passed by Trinity House to the local community in 1990 and it is now operated and maintained by volunteers.

On the Thursday, there was more messing about in boats which was lovely. That evening, Ian took most people out in his boat to see if they could hear a bittern boom. It was a privilege to do this as you're supposed to be moored up by nightfall, again thanks to his job on the Broads. The people who went had a lovely time,. although they didn't get lucky, the bitterns also being settled for the night.

Martham to Horning, 'the river as the D's would have seen it'

On the last day, I hired a motor boat, with the sole purpose of travelling from Martham all the way to Horning, to see the river as the Admiral and the D's would have seen it in their journeys. Unfortunately, Mate Diana fell and couldn't contemplate coming aboard so I was joined by Elizabeth and Nina.

It was magical doing this trip. The first location was Potter Heigham 'New' Bridge (above) at which we'd had strict instructions to sound the horn before proceeding. It was so tiny and low, it seemed feat enough even in our small boat! It must be a truly amazing sight to see a boat shooting it.

Past Thurne Dyke, glad of the signposts as mentioned by Dorothea (not to mention the OS maps app on my phone) and next past St Benet's Abbey. So glad I'd had had a proper look at it.

Which was the exact spot where *Teasel* was moored when Tom borrowed their mud anchor? Hard to tell.

Then of course, we wanted to go into Ranworth Broad to see where the Death and Glories hid and where the D's learned to sail so we headed down the dyke. Unbelievably the entrance to the Broad is now privately owned and you can't get through! So we moored up at Ranworth and found more ice creams. Fortunately, Ranworth is no bigger than it ever was, as we were in a hurry, not really being expected to reach Horning and get back against the tide in the allotted time. So we soon got back in the boat and continued our journey west.

We were now on the lookout for No 7 nest and possible houses for Dr Dudgeon and Mr Farland, with a little staithe up between. However, of course, why wouldn't everyone living there want the same – they do! It was impossible to guess. We carried on into Horning and were very lucky to find a space to moor right by the Swan.

We had time only for a quick excursion (involving more ice cream) before feeling that we should head back. And so we did. Our journey was enlightened by rushing to the rescue of someone who had fallen OB, however this turned out to be "for fun" and we wondered if they realised how hard it is to get back into a boat. We had no time to wait and see. At the end of the day, we all agreed we'd had a marvellous time, sometimes at the expense of observing Hullaballoos, otherwise just relaxing on the water, enjoying seeing beautiful gardens, boats and birds.

The last evening, we had a lovely meal at The King's Head pub in Wroxham. The food was great and it was very convivial.

The next morning, we presented Holly, who owns the Ferrygate Campsite, with our flag, which she was very pleased to receive.

We then returned to our tents to strike camp, everyone else managing it a lot quicker than me!

Lessons learnt: book boat months in advance in order to leave last afternoon free for starting to pack up. Plan meals exactly to save space. Buy a bigger car when I win the Lottery.

And so it was that the camp ended. You turned round and realised people had gone, it was all a bit surreal. How people managed to also bring boats and use EV cars which required recharging for excursions was beyond me.

However, Diana was still there, staying another night, coffee at the ready to enjoy before setting off on the long drive home.

I'm not totally aware of who did what to help organise such a wonderful week but I extend thanks to Dermot, Diana, Ian and Marc. The fact that we had a corner of the campsite, permission to borrow *Swallow* and *Amazon,* which are run by Hunter's boatyard, and a p*r*ivate room in the pub – all are down to the effort of these hardworking and generous people.

'Better than Disneyland!'

Rachel Chalmers' best bits:

The best bits for me were:

The magic of visiting Ransome-related sites. As one junior's mum put it: "This is better than Disneyland for her!"

Seeing *Swallow* and *Amazon* being sailed and enjoyed by TARS of all ages and abilities, as well as the other lovely dinghies brought by fellow TARS.

Relaxing at camp, or doing my own thing, or joining in. No pressure!

Shooting the bridge at Potter Heigham – twice. OK, I was on a sit-on-top… (a kayak to some of us – see page 1 – *Ed).* Said sit-on-top was a perfect vessel for wildlife and people watching on the Broads!

Quote of the week "There's too much washing up going on at this camp" (ship's doctor).

Rachael Hurst:

We only had a very brief visit to the Roaring Donkey Camp as we had to whiz back to Essex for another sailing week. It was a fun couple of days where we were able to have a few tiny adventures on our 18ft canoe, and make some new TARS associated friends.

An unexpected highlight was the opportunity to sail in *Amazon*; we were expecting both boats to be present, but we had been warned that perhaps they would still be "taking up!" and that the capsize drill might not have happened before we were to leave.

Dermot very kindly took us both for a sail in Amazon; and very quickly handed the reins over to us. This was a challenge in the headwind and the narrow Broads channels, but we did make some headway on each tack (which was better than going backwards!). Once on course we were able to track quite nicely due to her centreboard.

Later that day I found myself named as skipper and took some other lovely TARS friends for their inaugural sail! We managed to go a bit further but very much becalmed on our return journey.

"*Amazon* is a very strong boat, nicely varnished, her boom came across very fast. I enjoyed helming such an old boat." – Micah aged 9.

(Rachael will be helping organise this year's camp at 'Secret Water' , see page 7.)

Berney Arms and Breydon

A walk in the world of Coot Club with Clare Newitt

The more adventurous half of our family (myself and 13-year-old Son No. 2) borrowed a tent from some friends and made the journey to Norfolk for the TARS Broads Camp.

What a fantastic week! Others have written about most of the activities on offer - suffice it to say that our first five days included canoeing, kayaking and sailing both *Swallow* and *Amazon* (just for the record: having learnt to sail in Broads lugsail dinghies I found they felt very familiar and got on well with both - though *Swallow* definitely needs a decent breeze and sufficient space to tack; the River Thurne required the paddle to bring her round whereas Hickling Broad was quite manageable).

There was also an evening trip to Horsey Mere in the tug to hear the water birds at sunset, geocaching round lots of the main CC and TBS locations (one of these Marc described as 'a real pig'. Yes, thanks Marc, it was), a steam train - and modern train - ride, a lighthouse visit, evenings round the camp fire and, of course, The Quiz.

Photos from top: Berney Arms is Britain's least-used station; the not-much-onward-travel noticeboard; the Berney Arms windmill

Afternoon opt-out

On the final afternoon the two of us opted to do our own thing and headed off towards the Berney Arms. We took the train from Great Yarmouth to Berney Arms and then walked back beside Breydon Water.

Berney Arms station is about a quarter of a mile away from the river and qualifies as one of the most remote stations in Britain, being two miles from the nearest public road. Only two trains from Great Yarmouth stop there each day, and only the doors of the first carriage are opened as the platform is so short.

We were the only people to get off our train and once it had continued on towards Reedham we were left alone on the platform surrounded by the marshes. The phrase 'middle of nowhere' sprang to mind.

As we crossed the railway and set off along the footpath towards the windmill we were delighted to find a large Onward Travel noticeboard (which mainly told us that there wasn't any).

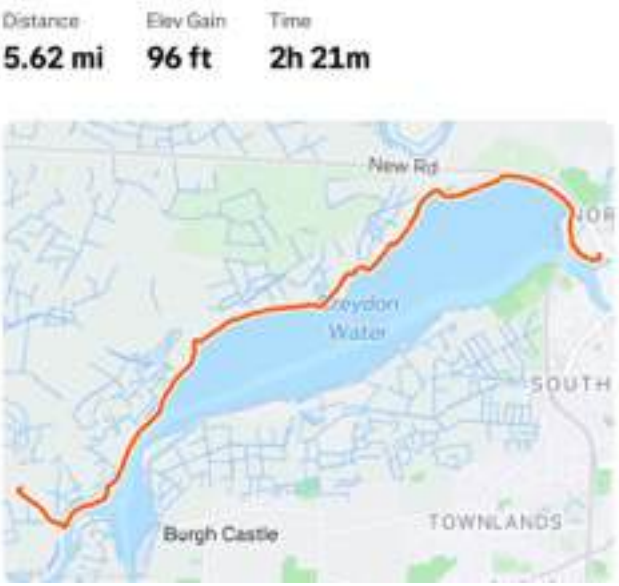
Readers of Coot Club will remember this as the place on the River Yare where Tom took the Titmouse ashore to procure much-needed provisions, leaving the twins, the Ds and the Admiral sailing the Teasel round to moor at the Breydon pilot and wait for the tide to get nearer to low water before setting off across Breydon Water.

Except, of course, the 'rashness of the Admiral' led to the Teasel sailing 'just a little further' down Breydon and eventually running aground on the mudflats in the fog.

The Berney Arms

The Berney Arms itself is a pub, now no longer in operation, and a few hundred yards away stands the Berney Arms windmill: originally built to grind cement, later converted to a wind pump and now owned by English Heritage and awaiting restoration work. It is a landmark that can be seen from miles around.

On reaching the river Yare we turned left on to the footpath; both the Wherryman's Way and the Weaver's Way long-distance paths go along the north side of Breydon Water and into Great Yarmouth, following a built up bank which runs right beside the edge of the water for most of the route.



The sights and sounds around us were mostly what Ransome would have known: the Berney Arms mill; the Berney Arms inn (clearly the same house as in Ransome's illustration, *above)* overlooking the mouth of the River Waveney with the Roman fort of Burgh Castle on the far bank; the expanse of Breydon Water with its green and red posts marking the channel; the marshes with grazing cattle stretching away towards the lower reaches of the River Bure.

The only real difference today is the Breydon Bridge: in Ransome's day a railway swing-bridge carried trains between Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft - today a road draw-bridge carries the traffic of the A47 along the old railway alignment.

'A sheet of blue'

We started our walk about an hour after high tide, so instead of the mud-flats showing either side of the channel Breydon Water was a sheet of blue.

There were plenty of birds around at the edges and on the marshes: mostly black-backed gulls and oystercatchers, and cows were grazing in between the drainage dykes.

The walk from Berney Arms station to Great Yarmouth station is over five and a half miles so by the time we were nearing the Breydon Bridge the tide was well on its way out and the mud flats were starting to show.

Using the full 30x zoom on my camera I took some photos of what I thought was an egret, only to discover when I saw it later on the computer screen that it was in fact clearly a spoonbill (*left*) – Dick would have been delighted!

We passed only two or three other walkers on our route and - being well before slack water - there were very few boats crossing Breydon, so it felt as though we had the place to ourselves.

'Icing on the cake'

The icing on the cake towards the end of a lovely walk was when the path went right next to the railway for a few yards and a passing train driver gave us a hoot and a wave!

Walking under the Breydon Bridge we found ourselves quite suddenly in the Asda carpark behind Great Yarmouth station, and back in the real world.

We finished off our day – and a wonderful week – by driving to Ranworth where we had pizza from the outdoor pizza oven at The Maltsters (highly recommended), watched the sun go down over the broad, and FINALLY found Marc's 'pig' of a geocache.

Are you ready for The Three Great Norns?

Perhaps you had to look that up: 'A trio of goddesses'. Ransome explains: *Miss [Josephine] Bell, I think, has established herself as the third of the Three Great Norns (the other two being Miss Sayers and Miss Christie)* We will hear more about the Misses Bell and Christie.

Let's introduce our ***With a Blunt Instrument*** cover-stars – with a snippet from AR himself on each author and book.(from top left):

E. Phillips Oppenheim – ***And still I cheat the gallows***.
"Mr. Oppenheim does without death in several of his beautifully told stories, but even in them he is careful to keep Death close in the wings, waiting for his cue…"

Ngaio Marsh – ***Overture to Death.*** *"Miss Marsh, knowing very well that in detective stories death is the essential…whereas in most such stories the single problem is to find the way from the corpse to the murderer, a no less interesting problem is to find in a group of ordinary people the predestined murderee."*

Ellery Queen – *The Four of Hearts.* *"Mr. Ellery Queen has made a delightful discovery for the benefit of criminals and those who write about them. If you can make a man shout with laughter you can at that moment put a clue fairly and squarely under his eyes and he will not see it for mirth."*

Gertrude Minnie Robins (Mrs. Baillie Reynolds) – *It is not Safe to Know.* *"Mrs. Baillie Reynolds challenges the rules of detective fiction by lavish use of the occult… At the same time there is plenty of plain human stuff in it to prove that if Mrs. Reynolds chose to do without the occult she could manage very well with the conventional blunt instrument."*

Frances Shelley Wees – *Lost House.* *"…throwing light, now here, now there, upon a chess board on which the author fairly sets out all her pieces, guests in the house, and keep the reader uncertain to the end as to which of the pieces is the villain to be checkmated and which the detective sent from Scotland Yard to deal with him."*

Miles Burton – *Mr. Babbacombe Dies.* *"the death certificate is signed, and all seems set for his six impecunious nephews and nieces to enter into their inheritance… The fat is in the fire… Not one of the nephews and nieces seems to have enough initiative to kill a rat, (this, I think, is a pity, though it explains their uncle's contempt for them)."*

Agatha Christie – *Murder is Easy.* *"I should hate to have to state on oath which I thought was Agatha Christie's best story, but I do think I can say that this is well up in the first six."*

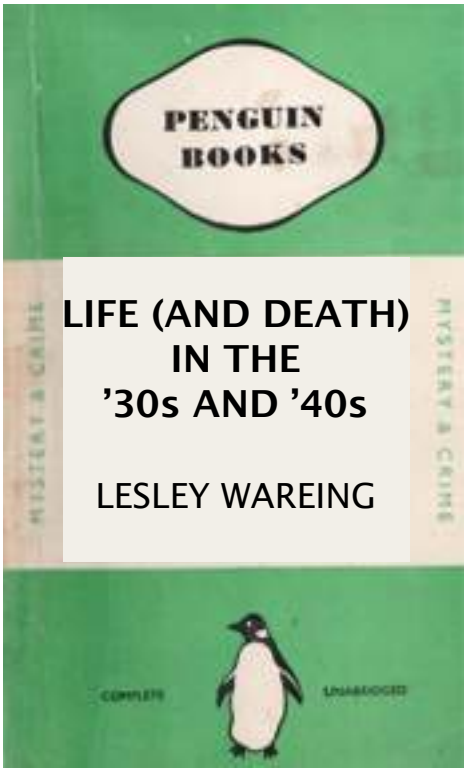
Arthur Upfield – *Winds of Evil.* *"The dialogue is just a little stilted, not quite supple enough to match its gait to the minds of the characters… the Australia behind it can be smelt and felt and heard, the solution does not let the reader down."*

Henry Christopher Bailey – *The Veron Mystery*. *"'The Veron Mystery' is not the first story to be written about the results of a will by which a dying man leaves the bulk of his money out of the family. Mr. Bailey makes it something altogether new… I am inclined to think that 'The Veron Mystery' comes very near to being Mr. Bailey's best book."*

Georgette Heyer – *No wind of Blame*. *"In 'No wind of Blame' there is a better motive for murder than any of the several that leap to the eye, and a likelier murderer than any of the natural suspects, but Miss Heyer's delightful entertainment does not depend on ignorance of her plot.*

Erle Stanley Gardner – *The DA Holds a Candle*. *"Mr. Gardner is the author of the long series of cases solved by Perry Mason and the faithful Delia… In deserting Perry Mason, Mr. Gardner has found his way into an even more promising field."*

The Subscription Form for *With a Blunt Instrument* will be included with the Spring edition of *Signals* and the book will be launched at the Rydal Hall IAGM in August, 2026.



Over this past summer whilst recovering from hip surgery, I've read about 40 classic 'Golden Age' detective fiction books, the majority of which were set in the 1930s. Although very different in terms of subject matter and characters, I found them to be a fascinating corollary to Ransome-world. Not surprising really given that the same decade (and a bit) was the back-drop to both.

One educational benefit of reading fiction is that, assuming the setting is contemporaneous – rather than historical, futuristic or fantasy-based – you can learn a great deal about the time in which the books were written. Most works of fiction contain all sorts of interesting information about the world in which they are set, some of it integral to the plot, but most of it just background colour or even purely incidental.

In detective fiction a lot of information essential to the plots is scattered through the narrative, for the reader to detect – or not. However, as is the case with the SA books, a lot of incidental information about everyday life at that time is also included. I was struck by how many things resonated with the world portrayed by Arthur Ransome in his SA books, published between 1930 and 1947 and all set within a four-year time span in the early 1930s. Nothing world-shattering but interesting nevertheless.

Well-to-do upper-middle class families had a lot of domestic help: gardeners, cooks, maids, nannies and chauffeurs - even housekeepers and butlers. Even those of quite modest means often had at least a cook and/or a maid and, like Mrs Walker, mothers often had help with their babies and young children (which must have been a godsend in the days before disposable nappies and automatic washing machines).

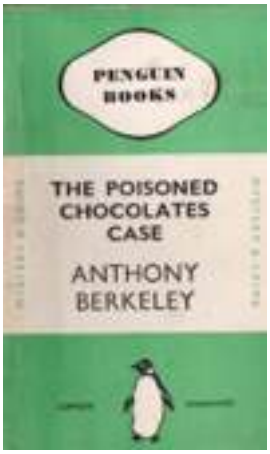
Children were expected to defer to and respect adults. They participated in the same entertainments and social events as adults. There was no separate 'youth culture'.

Some private houses had telephones but it wasn't unusual to be without. For urgent business, people might resort to telegrams but most correspondence was by post with at least two deliveries a day and often same-day deliveries for local letters.

Men and women dressed more formally than today. People still dressed for dinner. During the day dresses and skirts were the norm for women, suits (or at least jackets and trousers) with shirts and ties were the norm for men. Roger and John wore ordinary shirts and not T-shirts and Roger even mentioned his collar studs. When out in public, people wore hats and gloves as a matter of course – think of poor Nancy and Peggy – or Ruth and Margaret – in *Swallowdale.* The Great-Aunt's expectations would have been perfectly normal. Young women were chaperoned, >>>

A selection of Lesley's 'Golden Age' reading matter. The books illustrating this article were not Blunt-reviewed, but all were of the relevant era. Modern reprints of many titles are available from British Library Crime Classics and others

>>>and far from the social equality with men – or boys – that was the norm for the Swallows and the Amazons.



Family doctors made house visits and people were treated at home, often for quite serious ailments, only going to hospital for major surgery or for something that could actually be fixed; if they were going to die in any case, then they stayed at home to die. Better-off people were able to employ live-in nurses; the poor had to make shift as best they could. Mrs Blackett would have had to pay for all those visits the doctor made to mumpy Nancy.

Every village had its own bobby; towns and cities had policemen walking their beats around the streets. The police and policemen were respected and trusted. In many ways the world depicted seems a lot less complicated, more structured and more hierarchical and deferential.

But it was also much more uncertain and dangerous – for instance childbirth, minor accidents and infectious diseases could have far more serious consequences given that modern treatments weren't available. There were lots of families without fathers or mothers. There was no safety net for unexpected or sudden economic hardship.

For the well-off, life seemed very comfortable but the less fortunate often endured real hardships (as did the well-off too if things went pear-shaped for any reason).

In Ransome's SA books his (relatively privileged) children are very much seen and very much heard. They occupy centre stage. The action is all about them. They are allowed to have adventures without direct adult supervision.

I'm not sure how usual this was for the period but Ransome does give plausible reasons why adults are absent and all the other things I have mentioned are present in the background and anchor his children and their adventures very much in their time and give us a very strong sense of the period.

I'm not suggesting that there is any particular link between detective fiction and the SA books. Most of the crime books I read were written and set in the same period as the Swallows and Amazons books and also – even though the majority of crime fiction books involve murder, evil, avarice, jealousy and many other less commendable types of human behaviour – both sets of books strongly assert the importance of ordered society, the rule of law, justice, decency and fairness. Of course, the strongest connection was a purely personal one – I happen to love reading both.

I was delighted to learn that both Arthur and Evgenia also very much enjoyed reading detective fiction. And in 1939, Ransome started thinking about writing his own work of detective fiction.

On New Year's Day 1940 he started work in earnest and the book was published as *The Big Six* later that year. It's not one of my favourites – for a variety of reasons not connected with it being detective fiction, I find it uncomfortable reading – but it was a very creditable attempt at the genre. And it's clear that Dorothea, like her creator, was a voracious reader of detective books.

It was a project he had had in mind for some time. Interestingly it was whilst *The Big Six* was gestating in Ransome's mind that he wrote the twenty-one articles, published in *The Observer* under the pen name of William Blunt during the spring and summer of 1939, each of which reviewed several newly published crime novels. The average for each weekly article was five – which means that in just a few months, Ransome read around 120 crime fiction books and also found time to write the reviews!

Some of the books were by authors who are still household names today and whose books are still in print but others – authors and books – have passed into obscurity.

I am very much looking forward to the 2026 Amazon Publications' *With a Blunt Instrument* by Paul Crisp who has researched as many of the named writers and their titles as possible. I'm delighted to say that I have managed to read works by a couple of the lesser-known writers, in one case the actual book reviewed by Ransome.

TARS IAGM 2026

TARS Northern Region is delighted to have secured the exceptional venue of Rydal Hall for the IAGM weekend from 14th to 17th of August.

Long term members may well have stayed here before, for a Literary Weekend or more informal AR related events.

What makes Rydal Hall such an outstanding place to have our IAGM? Well, first of all it is in the heart of Ransome Lake Country, set on a hill above Rydal Water with beautiful extensive grounds. The house itself has 30 well appointed, mostly ensuite, rooms and, because it is set up as a Retreat House as well as for conferences, there are several peaceful rooms where guests can sit and socialise or just enjoy the atmosphere.

Rydal Hall will provide refreshments throughout the day for all TARS delegates. The menu looks really good too. There is a recently refurbished barn for our IAGM, stalls and general meetings, which is an excellent space. The gardens are stunning, with lovely views, a waterfall and resident red squirrels.




We have also obtained options on Rydal Hall's two self-catering cottages, cabins and eco-pods. These are suitable for families or close-knit groups of tars.



If you want to embrace the whole Ransome Camping and Tramping experience there is a really good campsite in the grounds which is particularly good value for the Lake District in August! Sadly there is no facility for campervans as Rydal does not hold a licence for them.

It is easy to get to Windermere, *Rio*, and the lake by public transport from Rydal's gate. TARS has negotiated access to the lake-shore launching site at the Windermere Jetty Museum for people wanting to bring their own boats.
Of course we have organised trips and activities on and off the lake and within the venue. There are lovely circular walks from the Hall and it is quite a short walk into Ambleside.

We would love to see you here but if you want to stay in the Hall or self-catering accommodation, cabins or pods you need to **decide soon** as **we only retain this booking option until April… after that booking is open to the public.**

The Lake District in August is very expensive and very busy. It may be very difficult to find somewhere to stay if you leave it until later, particularly for a reasonable price. However there is an opportunity for members to extend their stay within the Hall or camping and make it a Ransome Week – please enquire with Rydal Hall direct if you wish to do this: 015394 32050 or email mail@rydalhall.org quoting TARS IAGM 2026.

The proposed programme

On **Saturday** there is an opportunity to pay a visit to the renowned Windermere Jetty Museum in Bowness, home to a collection of historic boats originally gathered together by the late George Pattinson including the magnificent Victorian steam launch *Branksome*; *Dolly*, the world's oldest mechanically propelled boat; and *Esperance*, one of the models for Captain Flint's houseboat. Among the sailing boats are *Swallow* and *Amazon* from the 2016 film, which may be available for sailing.

We have arranged for organised visits to be made either in the morning or afternoon. During your visit you can explore the museum's docks and exhibition galleries; attend a fascinating talk on boat restoration and conservation by a conservator; and take a half-hour cruise on an historic craft such as S.L. *Osprey*. Lunch/tea/coffee/refreshments are always available in the museum café which boasts one of the best lake views ever!




Rydal Hall on-site events throughout Saturday and Sunday

- Swallows and Amazons trail in the grounds – follow the signs and find the answers!
- Art in the Barn – try your hand at illustrating the stories or drawing your own map. Juniors *and* seniors. Basic art materials to be provided.
- AR related jigsaws
- Chess
- The Rydal Hall sculpture trail

On **Sunday** after the IAGM proper we hope to offer members a chance to cruise the lake in style on one of the Lake Steamers *Teal*, *Tern*, *Swan* or *Swift*. This is an opportunity to go down the lake and see the Haverthwaite and Lakeside Steam railway – famously used during the making of the 1974 film of *Swallows and Amazons.* .

Alternative attractions could be – find the *North Pole* in Borrans park, Ambleside; explore Ransome's own childhood history, his school in Windermere and Aunt Susan's house; climb to the top of Orrest Head which AR first saw while he was at school, and was also the catalyst of Alfred Wainwright's career as a fell walker and Pictorial Guide writer when he first climbed it in 1930.

Off-site activities further afield – it you have time

Kanchenjunga, Octopus Lagoon, the Dog's Home, *Wild Cat Island, Holly Howe,* possible *Swallowdales*, possible *Horseshoe Coves*…the list goes on.

Coniston village has a Ransome display in the Ruskin Museum: explore High Yewdale and find the Walna Scar road; Ulpha in the Duddon Valley has links to the wider Ransome family; Nibthwaite where AR spent his childhood holidays; the Winster valley where AR lived for 12 years and wrote the first 6 of his novels.

Other places of interest

The Lakeland Motor Museum (with a *Rattletrap* from *Pigeon Post* display), Fell Foot Country Park (NT), Townend farmhouse in Troutbeck (NT), the remains of Galava Roman Fort at the lake-head in Ambleside; the Armitt Museum in Ambleside; Holehird gardens near Windermere, the Beatrix Potter Experience in Bowness; the Wordsworth Museum and Dove Cottage (right) at nearby Grasmere.

Walking opportunities

For those who fancy stretching their legs there are easy and moderate low-level walks around Rydal Water and Grasmere on the doorstep of Rydal Hall. Fit and experienced walkers who want to do something more strenuous can choose their own walks a bit further afield and maybe "Bag a Wainwright"?

Other suggestions of places to visit plus information and directions will be provided at the event. Many of the sites associated with Arthur Ransome are now private residences (and the owners' privacy obviously needs be respected) and Lake District roads are narrow, with heavy traffic and limited parking places so travelling by bus wherever possible is recommended.

Booking for paid activities will be in the next edition of Signals – We just need you to register for the IAGM and book Rydal Hall accommodation as soon as possible please.

IAGM 2026 BOOKING FORM

Name and address of main contact

Membership No	
Contact No	
Email	
Vehicle Reg	

Other members of your group (with DoB for Juniors)

Free Activities (indication only)	**Number**
Music/singing Group	
Art in the Barn participant	
Dick Callum Cup (quiz)	
Self-guided Walks	
On-site activities; chess jigsaw game	
Literary Memories	
Friday Talk	
Sunday Talk	

Send your completed form by post or email to

Helen Lewis
The Hayloft
Broughton-in-Furness
Cumbria LA20 6BP
h.m.lewis55@btinternet.com

Registration for IAGM; includes all admin costs and onsite activities

	Price	Number		Total
Adult	£42			
Junior U12	Free			
Fri only	£6			
Sat only	£15			
Sunday only	£15			
Monday only	£6			
				£

Accommodation (details below)				
Room				
Self-catering				
Camping				
Total c/f				**£**

House meals totals (details below)				
Lunches				
Dinners				
				£

Self-catering/off-site meals totals (details below)				
				£

Late booking fee (after 31/5/2026)	**£20**	**£**

Payments by BACS to TARS.

Account Name:
The Arthur Ransome Society Ltd

Sort Code: **40-26-02**

Account Number: **61245775**

or by cheque to the above address;
Ref: IAGM26 (and your surname)

GRAND Total Payable	

Rydal Hall Accommodation **NB: please note there are no ground floor bedrooms, no lifts or stair-lifts in the Hall**				
Room	**Price per night B&B**	Number of people	Number of nights	**Total**
Single room	£100	x		
2 adults in a shared room	£160			
U 12 years	£30			
Self-catering				
Coach house 2xT, D, King. Max 8 people	£425			
Stable cottage D, T, = 4 max	£295			
Cabins sleep 4				
Nab Scar King + sofa bed	£360			
Loughrigg King + 2 singles	£360			
Fairfield King + Sofa bed	£360			
Camping	£22.50 per person			
Under 15	£12.50			
Number of tents	X	X		X
Ship's Dogs	£10			
Eco Pods	£55	X		

Meals in the house (Breakfast is included if staying in the house)

	Price	Number	Total
Packed lunch	£10		
Dinner	£23.00		
U12 packed lunch	£5.00		
U12 Dinner	£12.00		
Total			
Please let us know of any dietary needs:			

Offsite, self-catering (if required) and campers' meals;

Breakfast	£25		
Packed :Lunch	£10		
Dinner	£23.00		
U12 Breakfast	£12.00		
U12 packed lunch	£5.00		
U12 Dinner	£12.00		
		Total to be carried to main form	

TARS Regional Gateway

Scotland All North of the Border

Chair	Vacant		
Secretary	Eric Gotts		ericgotts47@gmail.com
Treasurer	Sandy Allan	07380 361486	sandy.allan35@btinternet.com
Editor	Andrew Jones *(outwith Committee)*		mugbyjunction@outlook.com
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Northern South of the Border to Cheshire, Gt Manchester, Yorks, IoM, N Ireland

Chair	Elizabeth Williams	0191 384 4759	finnsarah1990@aol.com
Secretary/Editor	Helen Lewis	01229 716685	h.m.lewis55@btinternet.com
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Secretary	Kathryn Hambleton	01865 390124	kathrynhambleton7@gmail.com
Treasurer	Peter Wright	0121 443 2910	peterwright180@btinternet.com
Editor	Jane Wilson	01933 223672	jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com
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Sou'westers and Seaboots

News from the South-West Region

Throw-line training, Exmouth RNLI, July 16th

It was a grey day for summer as some dozen or so TARS gathered on the long, dramatic beach at Exmouth for a tour and throw-line training with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). A couple of stalwart swimmers hit the chilly briny before we all headed off to the beach cafe for a good feed of cheese pasties and chocolate muffins.

But we are here for some lifesaving training with a throwline, a small sack with a handle and a very long cord. If in trouble in the water an on shore or boat helper takes the sack with the rope curled inside and hurls it at the person who is in trouble. They grab hold of the handle, lie on their back with the line going over the shoulder and get pulled ashore. We were schooled in the correct approach - giving our name and reassuring the person in the water so the procedure may be as stress free as possible. We all had a great time hurling the sack at some obliging person squirming on the sand as if in trouble.

This role fell most often, with great success, to new junior TARS member Juno Mesner Lyons (right) on her first visit to a SW TARS event.

First up though was a tour of the snazzy modern Exmouth lifeboat station and the two lifeboats, led by crew member Jason. The big, all-weather Shannon Class *R&J Wellborn* 13-03 had been pulled out for us to view. She is used for incidents at sea and with larger vessels getting into difficulties. We gathered around the smaller vessel, an inshore D class 805, the *George Bearman II*. This boat is a zippy number that is used along the coast to rescue swimmers, paddleboarders, inflatables and similar beach-based activities gone awry. There is a three-person crew headed up by the skipper or helmsman aided by the second in command, usually navigating, and deck hand or general slave. The rib is small enough to negotiate rivers.

The RNLI is largely manned by volunteers. And they are visibly and ardently passionate about their work with the RNLI. When a "shout" goes out (a shout is instructions from the coast guard to attend an incident) the crew members on call get to the lifeboat station as soon as possible. We were shown the dressing room with the line of bright yellow rubber onesies with welly boots attached hanging on a dress rail line like dancers in *Chorus Line*. Over this

goes a red lifejacket and a special helmet that leaves the ears free to hear commands. Jason invited Juno to model them.

"Enjoy the sea trouble free" is the RNLI motto. And to this end they not only rescue people in trouble on the waves but also engage in education, encouraging people to be safe and responsible in the water.

Simon from the local water safety team had some good tips for us including the "float to live" mantra. If in trouble in the water flip on to your back with arms and legs out like a starfish and float.

The RNLI welcome group tours and individuals with an interest. Get in touch with your nearest station to see what is available for a TARS session or their opening hours for a more casual visit. It makes sense to pack a throwline for TARS water-based activities. TARS SW were gifted two throw lines from the RNLI. If landlocked, put a visit to the RNLI on your "to do" list next time you go to the seaside. And remember to bring a donation. We had a fun, active and informative time and were grateful to Naomi for organizing our exciting day out.

Diana Dicker

Tavistock Canal, September 17th

We had a very interesting zoom talk from Simon Dell two years ago about the canal, so decided we would like to see it. We met Simon outside the Bedford Hotel, where we learnt all about the Duke of Bedford, who owned the mines, the land and most of the town in 1803.

The canal starts at Abbey Weir, with water taken from the River Tavy, in Tavistock and finishes at Morwellham Quay, where it meets the River Tamar. It has a slight downhill slope, unusual in a canal, causing a greater than usual flow of water, this helps run a hydro-electric power plant at Morwellham. The canal carried slate, silver lead ore and copper ore downstream on special iron barges that were 30ft long, 4.5ft wide and 2.5ft deep, the barges returned loaded with limestone, coal, iron and timber. The canal was designed by local engineer John Taylor, who was only 19 when he became manager of the Wheal Friendship mine. It took 14 years to build as they kept finding new deposits of copper along the route.

At Abbey Weir an automatic leaf remover has been installed but it takes the leaves out and then puts them back in, upstream of the weir!

We had an enjoyable walk and learnt many interesting facts along the route. We talked and asked many questions, which meant we didn't get to the end before it was time to turn back. After the walk we had a lovely lunch in Tavistock, before going our separate ways.

Susan Gouldbourne

Bring & Scoff Literary Day, October 11th

Creech St. Michael is a Somerset village and parish, three miles east of Taunton, and straddling the M5. The Bridgewater and Taunton Canal flows gently through the village with an attractive bridge and riparian houses. There is absolutely no current evidence that Arthur Ransome ever visited the place… which is why, yet again for the *n*th year running, members of the South West region decided to hold their autumnal Bring and Scoff Literary Day in its village hall.

The usual suspects were all present, and enjoyed a good time. We were slightly apprehensive when a small van arrived to deliver an inflatable bouncy castle. Visions of us all ricocheting around were somewhat alarming, but luckily it was for the group of young children in the other half of the hall. We were there for more creative themes and, using the variety of art and craft material provided by Barbara and Susan, were tasked with having to design and make some greetings cards. This we did before enjoying an ample indoor picnic lunch. Afterwards, people read out extracts from a favourite AR book, occasionally introducing something new to others – remember, he did not just write those about the SAs! Altogether, a pleasant and relaxing day, enjoyed by all.

Of course, we now have to consider whether or not next year we make it the *n*+1 visit, or boldly strike out to somewhere else within the region that Arthur also did not visit. Wait and see, or better still, come and join us!
Paul Crisp (PS Guess who's in his box on the table)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS IN THE SOUTH WEST

Members from other regions are always welcome to join us – email Barbara on souwesters@gmail.com for further information.

SW TARS AGM Zoom Meeting – Saturday 17th January, 2026 at 4.00 pm Join Zoom Meeting:
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85758571829?pwd=1p8JVEBMR2FECcRVHqekCjNRsiR4hV.1
Meeting ID: 857 5857 1829 Passcode: 883109

1st March – by Simon Dell: Carved Stones of Dartmoor Zoom Talk
Time: Mar 1, 2026 03:45 PM London Join Zoom Meeting
https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83257962708?pwd=9CoalwNhBuaC4newVkR86UxxfEEmDr.1
Meeting ID: 832 5796 2708 Passcode: 961750

Saturday 21st March – 10.45 for 11.00 am – visit to the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton, Somerset. The museum has the largest collection of Naval aircraft in Europe as well as the first British Concorde, and if you're lucky you may also see aircraft flying in and out. Plenty of parking, café etc.

Saturday 25th April – visit to the South Devon Railway, starting from Buckfastleigh Station for a picturesque steam train ride through the beautiful Devon hills. Times to be confirmed when they publish their timetable for 2026. There is also a gift and model shop, museum, gardens, café and next door you can visit Dartmoor Otters & Buckfast Butterflies.

Thursday 21st May – walk and seaside picnic at Weymouth.

June/July – Seaton Tramway – a scenic ride on one of their trams along the estuary doing a bit of birdwatching. We have done this before, but it was a bone-chilling winter's day – we're being a bit more sensible this time!

THE GULCH

from Midland and Wales Region

Are You Receiving Me? Over

Are you receiving the Midland and Wales Region TARS newsletter by e-mail? As the regional secretary, every month I send out a TARS newsletter to all the members in the region who have given their e-mail addresses as part of their membership details. I find that quite a few e-mails bounce and are not delivered. If you have not been receiving these e-mails and would like to, or if you would like to sign up, please e-mail me at kathrynhambleton7@gmail.com and I will add you to the e-mail list.

Kathryn Hambleton

Antidote to Heat

How did Midland and Wales Region beat the July heatwave (remember that)? We went sailing, of course! The opportunity was provided by Combs Sailing Club at Combs Reservoir in Derbyshire, which on first sight seemed impossibly low but the apparent lack of water didn't stop us having great fun and some good sailing. Nick, Huw and Paul brought their dinghies *Brock, Peggy, Serendipity* and *Baby Bridgie* and were happy to give us incompetent crew two days of informal instruction; thank you for your patience. The Blue sisters showed impressive handling of *Baby Bridgie*, and Cameron enriched the sailing vocabulary with novel (but completely understandable) phrases: 'Jigger about!' 'Turn ho!'

Paul and Andrew also brought rather more experimental craft including a sailing canoe. A Saturday evening walk round the reservoir provided us campers with an adventurous route to the Beehive Inn on the Saturday evening where excellent grog was available on tap.

Sailing at Combs was a super way to spend a weekend, that TARS members of a wide range of ages were able to enjoy.

Rachel Chalmers

Wild, Wet and Windy!

An interesting start to our Llyn Tegid Camp; we (Mum and I) arrived on the Friday as the light was fading, and the rain pounding down on us. Pitching the tent was a slight struggle, but with the use of handy headtorches, wellies, helpful Tars and rain coats we got it up. We spent the remainder of that evening hiding in our tent, and were then rained on the whole night, something which was a reoccurring theme throughout the weekend. However, a 'little' rain never stopped any of us. There was a communal gazebo that we spent much of the weekend in, sheltering from the rain, reading, mending Jackie's kayak and sharing life stories with one another. Some brave Tars (Nick, Paul and Jane) managed to get out on the lake in Nick's dinghy *Brock*. Later on, Mum, Jane and Jackie deliberately went for a swim in the lake despite the weather. I suppose they were getting wet anyway, so the rain didn't bother them. Mum and I took the Rheilffordd Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake Railway) from the Llangower stop to Bala, a lovely little steam train with an impressive engine and an interesting history. Rain was coming through the window, but we were prepared with waterproofs. Amazingly, the sun came out for a few moments when we got off the train. We mooched around Bala for a few hours, getting coffee and visiting the amazing butchers on Diana's recommendation to stock up on steak for our homecoming. Saturday night we all had wood fired pizzas from the campsite's pop-up pizzeria; extras were available because sadly Sue and Nia had been unable to join us. Stories were told, guitars were played, and good times were had. Overall, a very wet, yet pleasant, weekend.

James Christie

Taking a Shot

We had an excellent visit to the Centaura Field Bowmen site at Aston on Trent. It was a beautiful autumn day – perfect for being in the woods. We were given some very helpful tuition at the butts, before heading into the woods to shoot at a series of targets comprising paintings of animals. It's a challenge because the targets are different sizes (from a stoat to a deer) different distances away, and at different angles. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and got some good shots in – if the animals had been real, we'd have feasted well afterwards!

Fiona Fyfe

Midland and Wales Region Forthcoming Events

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.

AGM and Junior Parley

Saturday 24 January

Join us at Flaxmill Maltings, Shrewsbury for our regional AGM and Junior Parley, followed by lunch (bring your own or use the café ('delicious vegetarian and plant-based food'). There will be time to explore the Flaxmill itself – the grandparent of the modern skyscraper – and its exhibition space. Junior activities: following in the tradition of Mrs Swainson, who covered every surface with hand-made doilies, make a woven mat for your own home. There are also junior trails to explore the site.

Exhibition Cost:: English Heritage members free, Adults £10.50, Juniors 50p (with the usual Midland and Wales Junior subsidy). For further information please contact Sarah Samuel on sarah@sarahsamuel.plus.com or 07952 587273.

Antarctic Adventure

Saturday 21 February

Join the Swallows and Amazons and Ds for their long-awaited Antarctica Expedition. Find out about the famous polar explorer, ornithologist, natural historian, physician and artist, Edward Wilson at The Wilson – Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum. It holds a unique collection of watercolours and drawings made by Wilson, who accompanied Scott on two Antarctic expeditions, plus collections about his life and the heroic age of Antarctic exploration.

We will look round The Wilson in the morning and after lunch we will have a go at painting our own watercolours of illustrations from *Winter Holiday*.

Meet at 11am at the entrance to The Wilson, 51 Clarence Street, Cheltenham GL50 3JT. Bring a packed lunch or visit the café on site. Admission is free, with a suggested donation of £5. Art materials will be available to use but you are welcome to bring your own. Please contact Kathryn Hambleton (kathrynhambleton7@gmail.com or 07879 832318) for more information and to let us know you are coming.

Please send copy for the next issue of *The Gulch* to jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com by 28 February

Daffodils and Poets Walk

Saturday 14 March

Dymock is famous for the huge quantity of wild daffodils that bloom in the fields and woods around the village, and also for the group of young poets who lived there in the years leading up WW1 – many friends of Ransome. We will walk a variant of the Poets Path Walk No 1, about 7 miles. If growing conditions have been good, this will allow us to see thousands of daffodils. We will intersperse some poetry and facts along the way. Dymock church, where we will finish about 3pm, serves tea and home-made cakes, and has an excellent Dymock poets display. If you don't want to walk, an alternative car-ride activity will be provided. Please let Peter Wright know if you would like to come (peterwright180@btintenet.com) as further details will be circulated nearer the date. Assemble at Dymock church at 10:45am for a prompt 11am start.

Set sail on *Vilma*

Saturday 18 April

Join us at Port Dinorwic for a morning sail on *Vilma*. Originally built in Vejle, Denmark in 1934 for gillnet fishing, *Vilma* is now restored and re-rigged as a topsail schooner. Arrive dressed for the weather and ready to board by 10:30 am. Depending on numbers we will have one sail of 2½ hours or two shorter sails in that time. Please note there is a short ladder to board the boat. Full facilities are available on board, with life jackets provided. The cost will depend on numbers but should be less than £30. In the afternoon there will be a visit Waterfront Marine, wooden boat builders at Port Penrhyn which is also open to non-sailors. Please book with Rachel Chalmers by e-mailing chair@arthur-ransome.org by the end of January

This event is subsidised in part from funds donated in memory of Stephen Benham, former member of the Midland and Wales committee and of the Board, and in part by the generous offer from Vilma *and Waterfront Marine's owner Scott Metcalf.*

Explore Stoneywell

Saturday 16 May

Visit the Leicestershire cottage designed by Ernest Gimson who, like Ransome, was inspired by William Morris. Discover the Swallows and Amazons style adventures had by the family who lived there and take part in a treasure hunt.

You will need to book yourselves to visit on the National Trust website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/leicestershire-northamptonshire/stoneywell which can be done up to four weeks beforehand. Try to get a booking time of 10.45 at the car park, but if you can't, let Jane Wilson know what time you will arrive and we will arrange a rendezvous. You can contact her on 07877 587353 or jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com

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)*

TARS SCOTLAND

NEWS FROM THE GAELS

Our Day Out in Old Govan

Professor Callum would surely have joined the archaeologists at work in the grounds of Govan Parish Church. This was where the 'Govan Sarcophagus' had been found. With intricate patterns carved into the sandstone and a stag hunting scene, the sarcophagus is thought to date from the ninth century and may have held the remains of a ruler of the Picts. No doubt further excavations will lead to more discoveries. We joined a 'doors open weekend' visit to discover more then looked at the Viking 'hogback stones' and beautifully carved crosses in the church, which is now the centre for discovering Glasgow's Celtic and Viking past.

The Govan Sarcophagus

This was part of an action-packed day that started with a visit to the Riverside Museum, with its collection of Glasgow's transport exhibits. Next to the museum, is the *Glenlee* sailing ship, the only surviving ocean going sailing ship in Scotland, which travelled around the world exporting coal in exchange for copper ore, fertiliser, timber, wool, tea and grain.

The Glenlee berthed by the Riverside Museum

Rachel Chalmers joined us with her son, who is studying archaeology amongst other subjects at Glasgow University (so maybe he will follow in Professor Callum's footsteps!), for the afternoon visit to the Fairfield Heritage Centre housed in the former office headquarters of the Fairfield Shipbuilding and Engineering Company, 'the site where shipbuilding history was made'. What history it was too, for this was the undisputed centre of shipbuilding in the world. There was so much to discover, and, thanks to an enthusiastic guide, we learnt so much. It was all enhanced with films and maps as well as amazing photographs.

The TARS explorers in Fairfield's boardroom

Thanks to all in the TARS Scotland team for such an inspiring day out. For me it was a chance to explore a corner of Glasgow that I had never previously visited and as ever it was good fun in the company of folk from TARS Scotland.

Mary Pritchard

Literary Day, Perth

This year's Scottish Literary Day was held at the Dewar Centre, Perth, and was attended by over 20 Tars, including two Juniors. There were three speakers: two well-known Scottish Tars and a guest, Ian Stephen, from the Isle of Lewis with its *GN?* connections.

The speakers: Andrew, Elsie and Ian

The first speaker was Andrew Jones, with: *Pieces of Eight' – foreign money in the '12'*. This followed on from his presentation – *Money in the 12* – that he was to have made at the 2022 Literary Weekend in Oxford, had he not contracted Covid; it appeared in the 2022 *Mixed Moss* instead. Andrew is a coin collector, as well as knowing the '12' inside-out, so, not only was his talk illustrated on PowerPoint, but he also had a selection of coins about his person for later examination!

Andrew told us that 3 of the '12' refer to foreign money: *PD*, *WD* and *ML*: pirate treasure, including pieces of eight, comes into *PD* and *ML*, and the Swallows encountered Dutch money in *WD* thanks to Commander Walker's fortuitous appearance. Andrew then focused on the piratical books, *PD* and its sequel *ML*, and pieces of eight. This was a Spanish *silver* coin worth 8 reals or rios; a gold ducat was a Venetian coin worth 2 pieces of eight and a British guinea 5 pieces of eight. The American dollar, British 5 shilling piece, the Spanish 5 pesetas and French 5 francs were all of similar size and weight, effectively based on pieces of eight and accepted in exchange across borders. The value of a silver (or gold) coin is based on its weight of metal, hence the prevalence of clipping metal off the edge of coins, and the introduction of 'milling' – wording round the edge – by Isaac Newton to prevent this.

Andrew ended with Nancy's quote in *Pigeon Post*: 'Gold or copper, it's all the same if you have enough. Two hundred and forty pennies make a pound.' [240d = 5 pieces of eight = £1]

After a short break, Elsie Miller introduced her subject: *Literature on postage stamps, Part 2*'. Elsie had given us Part 1 at the 2018 Literary Day. She is well recognised in Scottish philatelic circles so eminently qualified for this subject. While the previous talk had been focused on children's books illustrated on postage stamps, this time the range widened to include adult literature. Elsie began with Dickens' characters on stamps, then extended her definition of children's 'literature' to UK children's-television characters, from Andy Pandy onwards; then *The Gruffalo* and *The tiger who came to tea*! However, the PowerPoint illustrations included not only UK stamps, but those of the Channel Islands and many overseas territories too. Elsie also included special postmarks illustrating her theme. Centenaries and other anniversaries of famous authors also featured. Elsie bewailed the fact that stamps produced as miniature sheets are hardly ever seen on posted items, and the trend for commemorative stamps becoming increasingly difficult to obtain at local Post Offices.

It was a truly comprehensive coverage of this subject and deserves wider dissemination. Thank you, Elsie.

Paul Wilson

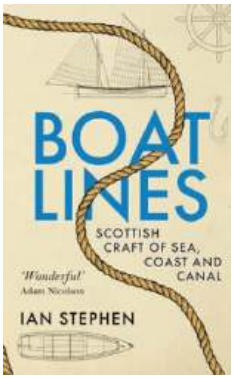
Our third speaker of the day, Ian Stephen, 'knows' Arthur Ransome well and, as a sailor, author, poet, ex-coastguard, reader, has much in common with AR. Ian's first question was 'Who taught him to sail?' The book which prompted him to ask this was *Racundra's first cruise*, because as he said, here was the Foreign Correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* during the Russian Revolution sailing around the Baltic Sea with Trotsky's secretary as Cook. How was that possible?

Ian's talk was entitled 'Anchorage to open sea – where the stories lie', an accurate description of the wide-ranging life he leads. Wide-ranging in terms of the kinds of writing and performing he does, from fiction to non-fiction and poetry, but also serious sailing. Ian's sea stories were illustrated for us by graphic pictures of real 'blue water sailing', as Peter Duck would describe it, most recently from Stornoway north to and around Iceland, with his adult son as crew. There were also extracts from Ian's newest book, yet to be published, and also from his *Waypoints: seascapes and stories of Scotland's west coast* (Adlard Coles/Bloomsbury, 2018).

Some of the attendees

Inevitably, the subject of the 'real places' referred to and illustrated by AR in *Great Northern?* made for a lively discussion with those who have explored the possible locations and have their own theories, as has Ian himself. Of course, the next excursion to the Isle of Lewis is already planned, so sign up now and see if you agree with the experts!

Ian had brought a selection of his published books with him, and these were rapidly snapped up. At first glance *Boatlines: Scottish craft of sea, coast and canal* (Birlinn, 2023) seemed to be rather technical, but, like Ransome, Ian has the knack of using the written word to teach his readers how things work on board ship. I found particularly enlightening and moving his description of the conditions of boats, harbour and weather in the chapter headed 'Craft of the Eyemouth disaster'. The book is beautifully illustrated with line drawings by Christine Morrison, and is a work of art in itself. My copy *might* find its way into our relocated TARS Library, but don't bank on it.



Winifred Wilson

[All photos, except book cover, from **Sandy Allan**]

Scottish AGM and Birthday Lunch 2026

Once again, we will be at the Charwood (formerly the Tusitalia), 47 Buckstone Terrace, Fairmilehead, Edinburgh EH10 6QJ on **Saturday 17 January** at 11.30am for 12 noon. The AGM will commence at 2pm, or after lunch, if later.

Our Secretary, Eric Gotts, will email full details, including menu, to Scottish members. Members from other parts of the country are welcome to come along and should contact Eric at ericgotts47@gmail.com for details. Pre-booking for the lunch is essential, with menu choices and payment sent to our Treasurer, Sandy Allan (sandy.allan35@btinternet.com).

Swallows and Amazons for ever!

Gòbhlanan-gaoithe 's Bana-gaisgich gu sìorraidh!

EBB & FLOW

The Eastern Pages

A VISIT to the MUSEUM of the BROADS

One fine day towards the end of October, Wendy and I visited the Museum of the Broads. It must be over a quarter of a century since we were last there, during a TARS camp, and I couldn't remember a thing about it (except for the pike).

Our initial impression was of a huge open shed, rather like an aircraft hanger but actually a former boatbuilder's. The admission desk was a wooden table, manned by two elderly ladies who provided us with tea and coffee and eccles cakes and effortlessly sold us up to a boat trip later on. There's a pleasingly enthusiast-driven air about it.

The big shed was a glorious sight, full of gorgeous varnished clinker dinghies with their sails hoisted. At the back end, a door leads to a grassy picnic area where some retired boats are resting. Round the corner, more sheds, more fascinating boats (including a splendid display of a wartime "Airborne Lifeboat").

We had to interrupt this part of the visit for our scheduled boat trip — the museum runs two launches — we chose the electric *Marsh Harrier,* partly because it has a canopy but also to enjoy the fine views of the other boat, the steam powered Victorian *Falcon,* (we also spotted Marc Grimston's houseboat, the *Outlaw,* and for me, the first kingfisher I've ever managed to see).

Back on dry land, we eventually found the stuffed pike, beneath which is a small notice saying it was donated by TARS. Otherwise, sadly no reference anywhere to Ransome, *Coot Club* or *The Big Six*. I did have a chat later with one of the trustees who agreed this is an omission to be rectified. Hopefully this might happen soon.

Peter Willis.

EASTERN REGION PROGRAMME 2026

17th January: (Saturday) **Arthur's Birthday Lunch & AGM.** The King's Head, Wroxham, Station Road, Hoveton, Norfolk. NR12 8 UR. 12 noon. followed by a talk by Neville Khambatta (preceded by Committee meeting at 10am).

11th April: (Saturday). **Dick's Bird Watching Day, RSBP, Minsmere,** Suffolk. Meet at the visitor centre, 10.30am. Entry £10. Bring binoculars if you have them (or rent at £5) and a picnic, or eat at cafe (very good, says Nick Hancox), and wear sensible clothing and footwear. For details contact Jackie Snowman 07584 813110.

16th May: (Saturday). **Harry Bangate Day at How Hill.** Ludham, Norfolk. Meet in the car park10.30am. *Harrier* (the 'Egyptian' wherry)is free, Toad Hole Cottage minimal or free, parking free and boat trip bookable on the day, takes 6 people at a time, £11 adult £9 child. Again, bring binoculars if possible. Picnic or takeaway van. For details contact Jackie Snowman 07584 813110.

13th -14th June: (Saturday Sunday) **Museum of the Broads Open Weekend** event. More details in next *Signals*. Marc Grimston.

July: Secret Water Camp. Walton Backwaters. Essex. Details in next *Signals.*

12th September: (Saturday) **The Cork Lightship (LV18).** More information in next *Signals*.Marc Grimston.

September: (Date to be confirmed) **Classic Dinghies racing on Wroxham Broad.** Organised by the Norfolk Broads Yacht Club. Those interested contact nicholashancox.co.uk.

4th October: Shanty Workshop. Midland and Wales and Eastern Region joint sing-song at Shanty Workshop, Wellingborough..For details contact Jane Wilson jane.pippinfort@googlemail.com.

November: (Saturday. Date to be confirmed) **Scott Polar Museum.** Cambridge. More information in next *Signals*.Contact Nicholas Hinde on nhinde@btinternet.com..

Greater London, Berkshire, Kent, Hampshire, Surrey, East and West Sussex, Isle of Wight, Channel Islands

Southern Region

Cobnor Camp August Bank Holiday weekend

Very surprisingly for a Bank Holiday, the weather continued to be as warm and dry as it had been for most of the summer with the wind varying between light and fresh giving a variety of conditions on the water. We had a new pitch in a more secluded area (behind the house for those of you familiar with the site) which had plenty of shading trees and a bare patch for a campfire. It was also a shorter hike to the toilets, a big plus.

Ted Alexander brought one of his vintage tents (the orange one) and he has recently been interviewed for the Camping and Caravanning Club magazine as part of the build up to their 125 year celebrations in 2026. Ted's interview can be found at YouTube,com/@CampAndCaravanning.

On the Friday evening, we had a visit from the Safety Officer from Selsey Lifeboat Station who gave us some interesting background to the RNLI's work in training people in the use of **throw bags**. Much of their work is with security staff in riverside or harbourside hostelries as the bags are more suited to throwing from land to water, rather than throwing from a boat. The bag is easy to carry and easy to throw – for some, others needed a bit more practice. The rope can be washed and repacked in a very straightforward way for its next use. The star pupil in action, the bag landed at the feet of the photographer!
Talk then turned to lifejackets and the checking and servicing of them – more of this elsewhere in the magazine..

Saturday morning was bright and sunny and various craft were taken down to the water. Chichester Harbour was busy, it being a holiday weekend. The campers were joined by several visitors during the day and the evening ended with a barbeque and campfire.

Sunday was deemed to be a good day for sailing, with clear skies and a good breeze. It was also good for a leisurely stroll along the coastal path round Chichester Harbour. We are very lucky to have this area on our doorstep.

AUTUMN GATHERING at Redhill on Saturday 25th October.

This was obviously a busy weekend for TARS members in the south as the number of apologies from people off doing other things was as long as those accepting the invitation to meet up at Redhill. So, a modest group met in the chosen venue and settled down with drinks and home-made cake to listen to a harrowing tale of unbelievable hardship and determination. Our speaker, Nada, has a passionate interest in the Age of Exploration and in Antarctica in particular, and she gave a fascinating illustrated talk on the heroic efforts of the depo-laying component of Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914-1917. Marooned on the Ross Sea Ice after their ship broke its moorings the party struggled on to complete their tasks, not knowing that the disaster that had befallen Shackleton's part of the Expedition meant that their work was not needed.
The afternoon concluded with questions and discussions about the talk whilst the cake was 'tidied up.'

COMING EVENTSng at heart, exploring the adventure trail. Meeting in the National Trust car-park at the top at 10am, lifts can be arrange

Birthday lunch on Saturday 17th January 2026 at The White Horse Hotel in Haslemere. Southern members will have had an email about this and any other interested members should email the Secretary for details. Menu choices are needed a week in advance please.

Box Hill revisited on Sunday 17th May 2026. After our enjoyable stroll on Box Hill at the IAGM last year, a return visit is proposed to include strolling, geocaching (remember Roger finding the cache on Kanchenjunga) and, for the youd from the station. Full details in the next edition.

Under investigation – learn to sail at Pagham lagoon on the Sussex coast, near Chichester Harbour, particularly for Junior members. Please get in touch with the Secretary if you would be interested in this, probably in the summer holiday.

HELP NEEDED to think of and plan events for Southern Region.

We will be back to a committee of one again in the New Year when Iain takes a very well-earned break from Committee duties, with grateful thanks for all the hard work he has put in over the years.

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 Literary Day - October 2025

Despite a disappointing lack of model trains on display, the village of Hornby in Lancashire turned out to be an excellent location for the Northern Region Arthur Ransome Literary Day on 18th October. The Village Institute proved to be a welcoming and friendly venue, with tea and coffee always close at hand in the kitchen and a good choice of pubs and cafés nearby for lunch. The meeting room was bright and inviting, enhanced by an impressive display of Swallows and Amazons pop-up banners, posters and merchandise – my wife and I are already arguing daily over ownership of our new Swallowdale mug. This was the first S&A event we have attended, apart from the film's 50th anniversary celebrations in Windermere last year, and we greatly enjoyed learning more about Ransome, meeting other fans, and discussing his work.

Although one scheduled speaker was unfortunately unable to attend due to illness, the day's programme was rich and engaging. Geraint Lewis delivered a fascinating talk on Arthur Ransome's life, highlighting many lesser-known episodes, particularly from his time in Russia.
Later, Lesley Wareing led an absorbing session on the beginnings and endings of the novels, focusing largely on AR's Lake District books. Her introductory quiz, asking us to match opening and closing quotations to their titles, set the tone for a thoughtful discussion on how and why Ransome chose to frame his stories as he did. All in all, it was a rewarding and thoroughly enjoyable day, warmly hosted by both the Arthur Ransome Trust and the TARS Northern Region. Many thanks to all involved in the organisation and presentations. *Adrian Dixon*

Dates and Events for 2026

Saturday January 17th – Birthday Lunch at the Fleece in Addingham.
Contact Helen Lewis for more information – booking is essential

Saturday March 7th NR AGM by Zoom from 11.00 with afternoon event.

Wednesday 3rd June Rusland graveside and Day Event – we are in conversation with Lakeland Arts for a private viewing of some of the artefacts in their AR collection
– watch this space for more details.

Rusland's Church Tower at risk

Ransome's peaceful resting-place faces a formidable repair bill

Rusland Churchyard is well-known to many TARS as the resting-place of Arthur Ransome and his wife Evgenia. Arthur first visited it in 1956, calling it "one of the most peaceful places on earth." TARS Northern Region holds a visit to the graves in the meadow on the anniversary of his death, and many members go to pay their respects at other times.

In the past, many have also gone into the church itself, originally built in 1745, and admired the tower, raised and buttressed in1867/8.

Sadly, though, this is no longer possible. Although visitors may still visit Arthur's grave, the church has been closed, for the public's safety. The tower is in 'a dreadful state' says its surveyor.

The loose stone

The closure dates from the beginning of October 2024, when a sharp-eyed builder, called upon to do some repair work, noticed a large stone on the castellated parapet at the top of the NW corner of the tower had begun to lean outwards. He investigated and pushed the stone out easily. Fortunately, this avoided catastrophe to any member of the public.

The area was sealed off with Heras fencing the same day and the footpath which ran past the tower was rerouted by Lake District National Park to an alternative way around the east end of the church.

Major operation

It has become apparent that repair of the tower will have to be a major operation. It is in a very exposed position, bearing the brunt of the extremely wet and windy, predominantly south-westerly weather conditions. The lime mortar holding the quoins and random rubble construction walls together has been washed out over the decades and a serious amount of work, materials and cost must be put in if the tower is to be made safe and the church reopened for all to enjoy.

Roof replacement

There is an added problem that the roof, of alternating green and blue local slate, is also reaching the end of its life and will need replacing within the next decade. Since the building is Grade 2 listed, all repairs must be made using similar materials to the original.

The western half of the church itself, under the tower, is now closed off, though the eastern end is still available to be used for services.

The PCC (Parochial Church Council) has been active in engaging an architect, commissioning surveys and removing some stones and slate louvres from the bell tower "before they fell out of their own accord". Rachel Lumsden of the PCC tells us that they are considering three options: carry out repair work; reduce the tower height (*if* permitted and any cheaper) or close the church – a very real possibility though subject to advice from the diocese.

Costs of tower repair are coming in at approximately £500,000. Replacing the roof has yet to be estimated. Rachel has asked us to emphasise that they are not yet in a position to accept donations or 'pledges'. She has asked anyone wishing to be kept informed to use her email address, rachellumsden24@gmail.com .*Peter Willis*

JACK BLAKE's bits and pieces

Reading on the radio

Two mentions of *Swallows and Amazons* on Radio 4 in two days last month – on the Friday (November 28/29 if you want to check back on BBC Sounds) Salman Rushdie referred to it on his *Desert Island Disks* interview, and followed it up, to my intense pleasure, with Bob Dylan's *Blowing in the Wind.*

And on the Saturday's *Week in Westminster,* where they discussed the Select Committee enquiry into the "worrying decline in children's reading for pleasure" Lowestoft MP Jess Asato looked back on her own childhood – "I was a proper reader when I was a kid, and my favourite book was *Swallows and Amazons* by Arthur Ransome". (Oddly, given her constituency, no mention of *Peter Duck*.).

Apparently the Government has earmarked £5million to buy books for secondary school libraries – laudable though in my opinion it's probably too late by then – how about primaries?. The Committee is open to receive submissions until January 9th.

Both Jess Asato and co-panellist on the show AF Steadman (author of unicorn-based Skandar series), asked to recommend a book for the libraries selected Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights.* I couldn't disagree, though I'm not too sure about his latest, *The Rose Field*.

To Er… is human?

Signals Editor Peter Willis owns up: In my profile of potential Ransome biographer Jim Ring, in the last issue, I made much of his excellent biography of *Riddle of the Sands* author Erskine Childers. Why then did I refer to him in the header as "the biographer of *Ernest* Childers"? It took until November for anyone to point it out (thanks Linda Hendry). My feeble excuse is that due to a surfeit of Shackleton lately I'd got my Ernests and my Erskines muddled up.

Rather worse, in what was a highly personalised article, based around my friendship with Jim, I forgot to put my name to it.

If you'd been wondering what the sleeve of an old VHS cassette of *Swallows and Amazons Forever* (the strangely mistitled compilation of the BBC's *Coot Club* and *The Big Six*) was doing on the front cover of this *Signals*, this photo might give you a clue. As you see, it's of the *Death and Glory,* the boat owned by Joe, Bill and Pete once they've spent the *Margoletta* salvage money on giving her a cabin, a stove, and a chimbley. So the cover pic could be in honour of the 'Roaring Donkey' camp. And/or there might be another occasion to mark. Earlier last year (2025) the present owners of this BBC's version of the *Death and Glory,* which had belonged to their late father, let it be known that they wished to sell it. TARS East, with the backing of the Board have opened negotiations with the owners, who it appears are taking their time, "weighing all the various options" and have said they will come back to us as soon as they can. Probably just after we've gone to press…

Tunnel vision

The Northern Region's substantial "tunnel" tent, which has given many years of active service at junior camps and other events since it was purchased back in 2012 as a result of a generous legacy, has reached the stage where is facing retirement. It has served its purpose well but is very large and heavy, especially when wet, and. in the intervening years, gazebos made of more modern, light-weight and quick-drying materials have been invented and campers have found them to be far easier to use, transport and stow away.

The current plan is to donate the tunnel tent to a charity shop (if the local Scout group don't want it, and if the charity shop does) at the end of February 2026 – unless of course any TARS shout out before then that they will house and transport it.

If you can think of a purpose for it, contact Helen Lewis or Rachel Chandler.

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.

'Despatches', with news and booking forms for the International AGM normally appears in the January-April issue, and 'Ship's Log', with reports of the IAGM, follows in September-December; both may vary dependent on the date of the event itself.

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
01394 387907 / 07979 721901
Copy deadlines 1 March,
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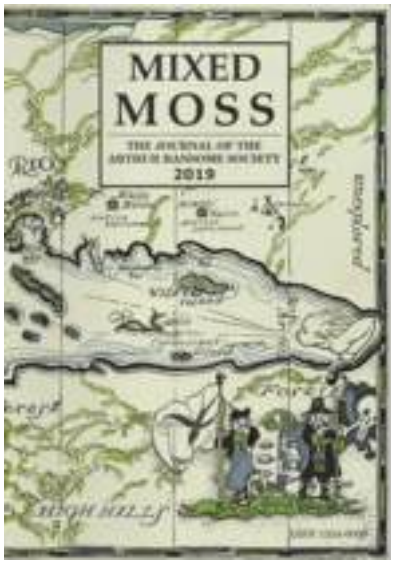
USA/Canada: *Signals from Tarsus/North Pole News*,
Editor: Simon Horn
shorn@colba.net
Australia/New Zealand: *Furthest South*
Editor: Phoebe Palmieri,
phoebe.palmieri@gmail.com.



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 with the December Signals.
Mixed Moss 2024;
Editor Peter Wright
peterwright180@btinternet.com
Published with Signals December
Back issues: most in stock at the TARS Stall, £4 + p+p

LITERARY WEEKENDS

Transcripts of Talks from previous events are available from the TARS Stall, £6.50

Amazon Publications
produces a Ransome-linked book yearly on a subscription basis. Next title (2026) *With a Blunt Instrument.*
Some back issues are available via the TARS Stall.
Enquires to
tarsstall@arthur-ransome.org

THE OUTLAW is the TARS magazine specially for Juniors, sent to all Youth and Group members, three times a year, along with Signals.
Contact the Editors on outlaw@arthur-ransome.org or **Outlaw Editors c/o TARS, 17 Chesterwood Road, Birmingham B13 0QG**

RANSOME ONLINE

TARS WEBSITE:

arthur-ransome.org
with log-in access for Members pages

Webmaster: Ben Hambleton
email: **webmaster@arthur-ransome.org**

OTHER WEBSITES

The Arthur Ransome Trust:
arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk

The Nancy Blackett Trust:
nancyblackett.org

allthingsransome.net
a useful resource site

tarboard.net discussion forum

FACEBOOK GROUPS

The Arthur Ransome Group
(monitored public group)

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

The TARS Library

contains nearly 1,300 books written by Ransome, read by him, written about him or connected with him.
Browse the complete list on the TARS website, or request a paper copy for a small charge.

Currently relocating, expected to re-open for lending in mid-January.

email

tarslib@arthur-ransome.org

TARS Committees etc

Literary & Resources:
Krysia Clack (Chair), Elizabeth Williams (Secretary),Chris Birt, Paul Crisp, Ann Farr, Amanda Kitchen, Susan Gouldbourne, Ben Hambleton, John Pearson, Christine Rae, Lesley Wareing, Peter Wright

Publications:
Susan Gouldbourne (Chair), Barbara Flower (Secretary), The Blue Family (Outlaw), Peter Willis (Signals), Peter Wright (Mixed Moss)

Child Safeguarding Officer:
Rosemary Beal 01243 605889
rebealtars@gmail.com

Contribute to Signals!

Letters, articles, reviews, news, photos always welcome. Send them to the Editor at peterwillis1144@gmail.com or Creek View, School Lane, Martlesham, Woodbridge IP12 4RR, tel 01394 387907
Advertisements also accepted. Ask for rates.

TARS Subscriptions

2026 rates

(renewals due 1st January)
Adult (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 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
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 may be able to 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

Book Donations Guide

If you have Ransome-related books to dispose of, or have been offered some, and would like advice from TARS, guidelines are now available on the Website, from all Regional Secretaries or the Chair of the Literary Resources Committee, Krysia Clack (steve@ksclack.plus.com)

The Arthur Ransome Society

IAGM

August 14th to 17th 2026

Northern Region would like to welcome you to Rydal Hall, near Ambleside, for the 2026 International Annual General Meeting.

This is Wordsworth country.
Wordsworth, like Ransome, was a great walker and this is a grand walking area for both flat walks and the high fells.

You can also bring your sailing boats to sail on Windermere.

A full programme of events is in preparation.

Accommodation is available in the Hall or in self-catering cottages and cabins or in tents on a section of their extensive campsite.

Book early to avoid disappointment.

Booking will commence in January 2026