



# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

January 2025

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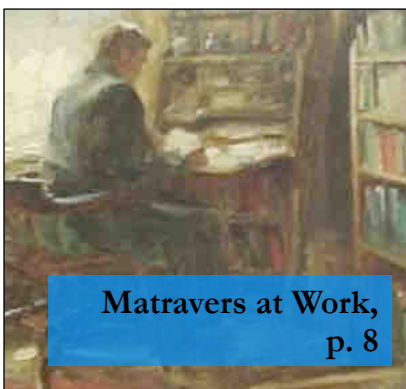
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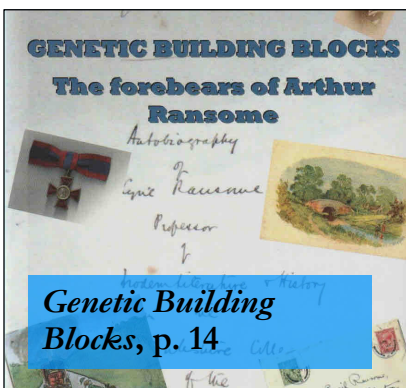
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**GENETIC BUILDING BLOCKS**  
**The forebears of Arthur Ransome**  
Autobiography  
of  
Sir Ransome  
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J.



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



### A Note from the Editor

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

The big news for American members is that they now have a new TARSUS coordinator, Mark Purtill. A short bio appears below. Please welcome him.

For the next issue I will ask Mark if he would like to provide the usual coordinator's editorial.

### Membership renewals

It is that time of year again and our TARS membership fees are once again due, overdue actually. However, if you have attempted to log in to the Members' Area of the TARS website, to pay your dues or do anything else, you will have discovered that it no longer works as it did.

The website was hacked seriously some time last year and the reconstruction is proceeding slowly. Among other things the Members' Area is not yet available, and our old logins no longer function.

From now on, TARS membership will be on an annual subscription basis, and your access to the TARS website will depend on you having an up-to-date subscription.

I was able to subscribe using the new online system, but it was quite confusing, and TARS UK will be pro-

ducing a document explaining things to members. The coordinators or myself will let you know as soon as the situation is clear.

### In this issue

Many thanks to the contributors.

In *The Professor's Laboratory*, **Ian Sacré** looks at what you have to do if your sailing vessel is seriously holed while you are voyaging in the middle of nowhere, in "Make Do and Mend".

In *Captain Flint's Trunk* **Molly McGinnis** considers "Charcoal In Winter", specifically in *Winter Holdiday*, and wonders how the vendors on the icy surface of Rio Bay would have kept their wares warm.

**Martin Beech** gives us another look at Arthur Ransome's past in *Dipping Our Hands* with "Matravers at Work: a painting of Ransome by Alphaeus

P. Cole", placing the painting of the picture in the context of the author's early Bohemian life in London.

**Andrew Fisher** then continues his look at the 12 in "The Great Aunt — Mostly Negative, but Surprisingly Positive Too".

In the *Ship's Library*, I consider Margaret Ratcliffe's 2012 Amazon publication, *Genetic Building Blocks, The Forebears of Arthur Ransome*. (As we go to print (as it were) the book is still available on the TARS Stall.)

**Molly McGinnis** concludes the issue with another recipe in the *Beck-foot Kitchen*. "Add One Ingredient..." considers the wide range of pancakes Susan could have produced if she had had self-rising flour.

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The next issue is scheduled for May 2025. Please think about contributing something to the newsletter.

If you have been paying attention, you will have noticed that it is thanks to my usual suspects that we keep going, but they can't do it all.

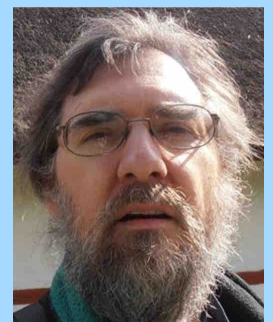
The usual reminder will appear in your inbox around April 1.

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

### Welcome to the new TARSUS Coordinator

Mark Purtill grew up in Bellingham, Washington, where the family read Swallows and Amazons books smuggled in across the nearby Canadian border and sailed a rather small boat on local lakes. After spending time in various other coastal regions of the US, he now lives in the Seattle area. Aside from AR, his interests include karate, learning Japanese, board games and pig-themed comics. He travels, and has attended several TARS events in the UK.

Please give him a warm welcome. His email address is [purtill@alum.mit.edu](mailto:purtill@alum.mit.edu)





## Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator,  
v3965 Marine Drive, Royston, BC V0R 2V0  
[gallivanterthree@shaw.ca](mailto:gallivanterthree@shaw.ca)

Greetings all Canadian TARS members,

Another year has past us by and we are now launched, like it or not, into the quarter century of

two thousand and twenty five. Where does the time go? For me at least every passing year seems to slide by more quickly than the year before.

Procrastination, as my mother used to tell me, will not get things done. I thought I had learnt my lesson but every day my 'to do' list seems to get longer. 'Time for a New Year's Resolution?' Too late for that I am afraid.

I have forwarded to you a number of

communiques from Krysia in an attempt to keep everyone informed of the goings on at TARS HQ. A team of 'experts' are working on finding solutions to the Arthur Ransome website hacking which occurred in 2024.

There are still problems with the on-line membership self-renewal page. Simon Horn, our stalwart editor, tried testing the online renewal suggestions which HQ recommended to us, but sadly Simon found the

process difficult and confusing.

Krysia has promised to advise us of any progress in resolving this matter.

We are hoping that we will soon be informed of an online renewal process which works.

We were pleased to learn that our US TARS members now have their own Coordinator, Mark Purtill of Seattle, WA, who volunteered to take on the role.

We wish Mark good luck in his new job.

Wishing everyone calm winds and smooth seas.

Ian Sacré  
Canadian TARS Coordinator

## Letter: A Find in Japan

After a day of browsing in Japanese print shops in the Jimbocho section of Tokyo recently, my wife and I needed to find a place to get out of the rain before catching a train to meet friends for dinner. So we ducked into the nearest storefront advertising coffee, only to find that it was a children's bookshop.

The Book House Café is a wonder, selling only children's books, toys and games, but offering coffee, tea, juices and snacks for their patient parents.

As we sat sipping, I looked around at the orderly volumes and noticed, on one shelf, about a dozen books with small blue anchors printed at the bottom of the spine. On a hunch, I went to the cashier and, Google translator in hand, asked: "Arthur Ransome?" The young woman clerk perked right up and answered with a

vigorous nod of the head. Using the translator, she said that indeed, all of the volumes with the blue anchors were Ransomes, and that they were among the store's best sellers. She added that she is a devoted fan.

I spent time looking through them, not understanding the text, but seeing many of the same Ransome illustrations as in the British editions. I bought one to add to my American bookshelf.

It was *Winter Holiday*, which I explained to the clerk, in about the only Japanese words I know, is *ichi ban* – number one. The clerk smiled, nodded, pointed to herself and said, in what I expect might have been some of the few English words she knew, "Me, too."

Avi Lank (Milwaukee, WI)





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

### Make Do and Mend

By Ian Sacré (Royston, British Columbia)

.... *Pike Rock stopped her dead. The mast broke off short above the thwart and fell forward over the bows taking the sail with it... Roger spoke first as the Swallow slipped back off the rock. "The water's coming in," he said. It was not so much an exclamation as a plain statement of fact. Swallow was badly holed below the waterline in the bows. The water was spouting in and she was filling fast.....*

And so the saga of *Swallow's* sinking, salvage and repair begins.

In Chapter VII of *Swallowdale* Arthur Ransome continues the tale and begins with a verse taken from Sir Walter Scott's poem written in 1802 called "The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens". (Spence)

**"Gae fetch a web o' the silken  
claith,"**

**"Another o' the twine.**

**"And wap them into our ship's  
side.**

**"And let na the sea come in."**

Sir Walter Scott's poem has 26 verses and tells the story of Sir Patrick's ill-fated voyage to Norway and back, made, much against his better judgment because of the lateness of the year and the approaching stormy months.

His vessel was storm damaged 50 miles off Aberdeen and sank with all hands in fifty fathoms. The full poem is well worth reading and can be easily found on the Internet. The patch of silken cloth and twine obviously did not work!

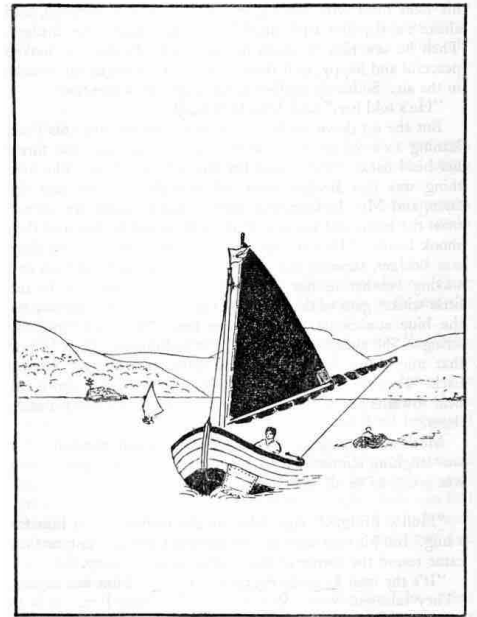
It is interesting to look at some of the facts surrounding serious hull damage that allows water to enter the hull.

For any holing or damage to a

through hull fitting, water will enter the hull at an alarming rate. For instance, a hole one inch in diameter 12 inches below the waterline will allow approximately 1,200 gallons of water to flood in per hour (192 cubic feet) or 20 gallons per minute. A two-inch diameter hole 12 inches below the waterline will permit approximately 6,000 gallons of water per hour to flood in (960 cubic feet) or 100 gallons per minute. No ordinary small vessel bilge pump will likely be able to handle such volumes. So action must be quickly taken to significantly stem the inflow or stop it. No wonder poor *Swallow* sank almost immediately.

Fortunately, the *Swallow* and *Amazon* crews had the necessary materials to hand and a skilled 'Ship's Carpenter' (Captain Flint) to make temporary repairs to the salvaged and beached *Swallow*, and then nurse the damaged craft under her own sail power to Rio for repairs. The incident clearly illustrates the essential need to be prepared and have basic materials always onboard to make and mend. Where's the duct tape?

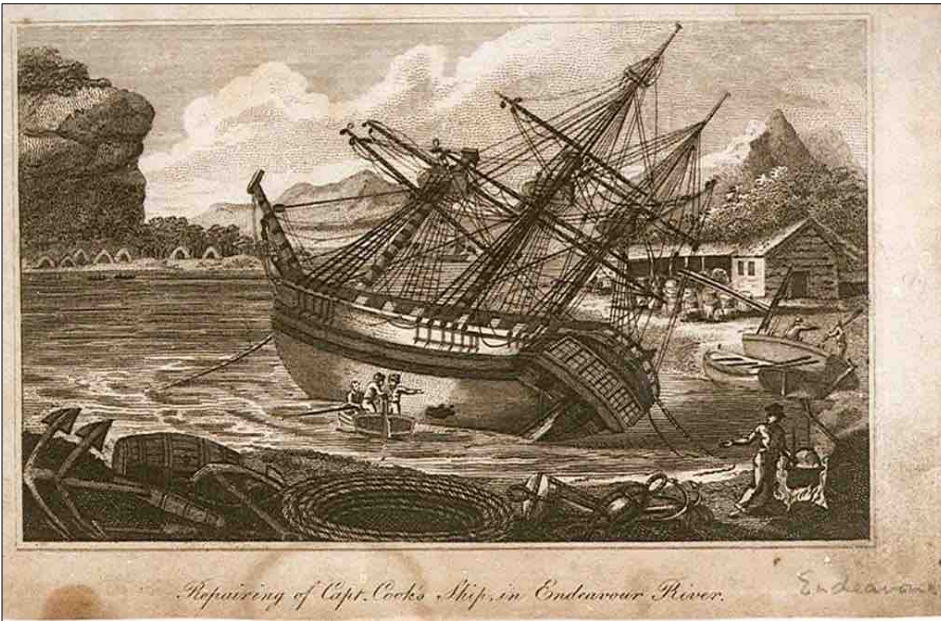
History abounds with true accounts of serious ship damage and near sinkings. Captain James Cook had a close call on his first voyage of discovery in *HMS Endeavour*, when he had the misfortune to run aground on the Australian Great



*Swallow* under jury rig

Barrier Reef in June 1770. Holed well below the waterline and making water with which the pumps could not keep, he limped into what is now the Endeavour River in New South Wales to inspect the damage and make repairs.

As with the *Swallow*, Cook moved nearly all the ballast, stores and equipment from the *Endeavour* to the shore, including six cannons, and proceeded to careen the ship to expose the damage. Careening is a fairly herculean task. Using his boats, he most probably would have had to carry out two anchors and lay them in deep water on the off-shore side of *Endeavour*. The anchor warps



Careening the *Endeavour*

would have then been carried to the bow and stern where they would have been hove taught and made fast. Tackles would then have been secured to the top of the mainmast and the lower end of the tackle carried to a strong point and made fast on shore. A crew would then tally on the down-haul and slowly list the vessel to bring the hull damage above the water. The carpenters could then get to work. For some careenings the captain and crew might be lucky enough to locate a suitable bank of soft clear bottom material against which the vessel might be brought to lie while she was hauled down.

On Captain Cook's third voyage of discovery, in *HMS Resolution*, his ship had serious maintenance problems that forced her to enter Nootka Sound on the 1st April 1778, seeking a sheltered place to carry out repairs. At the time he was northbound to the Arctic in an attempt to find a passage to the east.

Fortunately for Cook they found a suitable cove at the south end of what is now Bligh Island. There were

abundant trees growing there suitable for mast making and a plentiful supply of well-seasoned and large driftwood trees on the beach, which the crews proceed to use.

Some of the *Resolution's* masts, including the foremast and mizzen mast, had to be replaced because of rot. In the days of wooden ships carpenters played a vital role making repairs and keeping the ships afloat. They were incredibly skilled. Work parties would go into the forest, select suitable trees, cut them down and haul them by hand to the beach using tackles. There the carpenters would shape them into masts.



*HMS Resolution* in Nootka Sound

Leaking plank joints and caulking have often been a source of serious trouble and sinkings for sailors.

It may be remembered that Sir Robin Knox Johnston won the single-handed Golden Globe, Round the World Race in 1969 sailing his wooden 32-foot vessel *Subaili*, a William Atkin-designed ketch which he had built in Bombay, India.

Knox left England on the June 14, 1968. A month later found *Subaili* off the west coast of Africa and leaking badly along the garboard strakes (the hull planks next to the keel). Diving down in the open ocean wearing a mask and snorkel to examine the underwater hull of *Subaili*, Sir Robin discovered that caulking had worked out of the garboard seams.

In bad weather all vessels 'work', that is, they creak and groan as their various components flex as their hulls are subjected to the vicious forces of the ocean's winds, waves and seas. *Subaili* had experienced extremely rough conditions during her first month of the voyage, which may have caused the leaking seams.

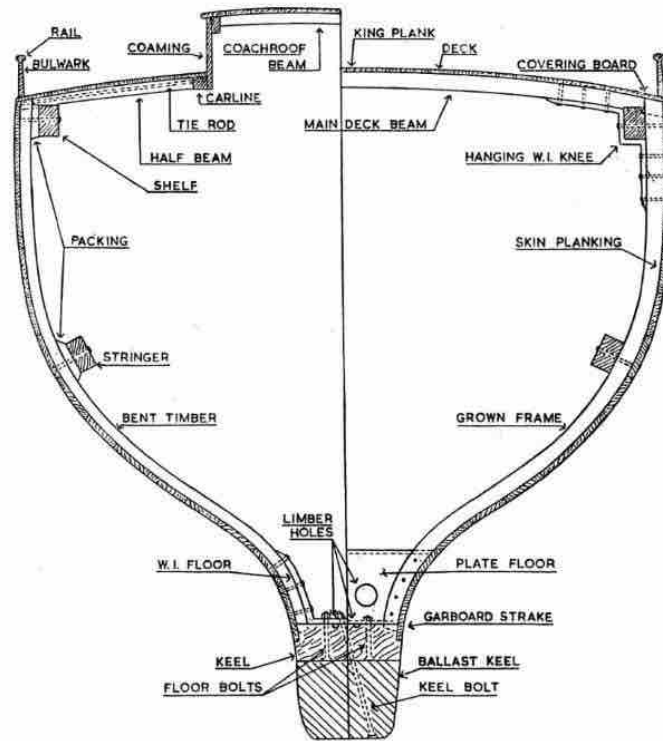
Before leaving England Sir Robin had equipped *Subaili* with a massive inventory of stores and tools including canvas and caulking

material, copper sheeting (for possible tingles), tacks and nails, and Stockholm tar. (Tingles are thin metal patches made of copper or lead sheet which can be tacked over small areas of leaking hull damage).

To make repairs he first of all cut a narrow strip of canvas and sewed to it caulking material. Going over the side again he dove five feet down to the keel area and slowly tacked the canvas strip along the leaking garboard seams.

Later, worried that the canvas strip might come adrift, he covered the offending seams with copper strips tacked over and along the previously covered joint.

Sir Robin proceeded to win the non-stop round the world race, having taken 312 days to do it. His ability to make and mend made it possible.



A cross-section of a wooden hull. Note the garboard strakes at the bottom.



*Suhaili* on its way round the world



## Captain Flint's Trunk — News from abroad

### Charcoal In Winter

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

In *Winter Holiday* the S, A, and D's pass by the charcoal burners' hut, still up ("It wouldn't make half a bad igloo," said John, looking at the hut the charcoal-burners had left.) by "the remains of an old wood," where they saw "bushy hazels and willows that had been cut many times, for kindling or for charcoal-burning."

But nothing is said about even a scrap of charcoal left on the site. What had the Billies done with the charcoal? Had they arranged to sell it to someone who would come and get it? If so, how? Was there a path wide enough for a horse and cart?

I don't think Nancy and Peggy could have been burning charcoal in the igloo, because there would have been a lot of smoke, and because they gather firewood for the igloo and the Fram. But out on the lake there were vendors:

*"A man had fixed a sort of coffee-stall on the top of a sledge, and was pushing it about from group to group among the skaters. Dick and Dorothea passed near enough to him to see that he was selling cups of hot coffee and small, steaming pies," and "People were going about selling roasted chestnuts."*

The coffee stall had to have some way to keep the coffee hot,

and I'm guessing it was a charcoal-burning brazier. The pie and chestnut sellers couldn't afford to take time to collect firewood, whether on the lake or on the shore.

The legs on the brazier would keep the sledge from catching on fire — probably longer legs than on this brazier from the American Revolutionary war.

The ice was crowded.

*"It'll be all right when more of it's frozen," said Peggy. "There'll be plenty of room then. The seals'll just hang about the*



An old charcoal-burning brazier

*Eskimo settlements. They always do. There'll be thousands in Rio Bay and hardly any out in the open..."*

The coffee stalls, the coffee and meat pie sledge, and the chestnut roasters must be further along the shore, out of the photo. I wonder if the Billies came to see the lake frozen over...



The lake frozen, crammed with skaters in Rio Bay

## Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

### Matravers at Work: a painting of Ransome by Alphaeus P. Cole

by Martin Beech (Courtenay, B.C.)

In my minds-eye the images I have of Arthur Ransome are those of a be-hatted, walrus-mustached, somewhat stern-looking, elderly gentleman expertly tying a fishing-fly. Or the waving captain at the helm of a sailing yacht. Or, indeed, the endearing author of books that I have read, and re-read, since I was very young. It is easy to forget that this seemingly contented, be-spectacled, pipe-smoking gentleman was once a cocky bohemian, full of youthful energy, bluster, and boundless enthusiasm.

This youthful exuberance took place during the first decade of the 20th century, and specifically the period when Ransome traversed those Halcyon years between the ages of 18 and 29. Indeed, somewhere in this time-window the American artist Alphaeus P. Cole produced what appears to be the first formal portrait of Ransome, working at his writer's desk. This article will attempt to reconstruct the history of this painting, placing it within the context of the young Ransome's bohemian world. Indeed, it appears that Cole's painting has not been widely noticed before now, and it has not, to my knowledge, been shown or placed within any previously published biographical work, or essay.

#### London life: 1902-1913

After abandoning his undergraduate chemistry course at Yorkshire College, Leeds, in early 1902, Ransome moved to London. Determined to become a writer, he promptly entered into a poorly-paid apprenticeship with the publisher Grant



Figure 1. "The Author Arther [sic] Ransome at Work" by Alphaeus P. Cole. Oil on canvas, size 10" x 16". Image from the estate of Roger Dennis. See <https://archive.org/details/TheAuthorArtherRansomeatWorkAlphaeusColeLAA>

Richards. In the fall of 1902, Ransome moved on, for better pay, to the Unicorn Press, run by Ernest Oldmeadow. In August of 1903, however, with the aim of truly making his living as a writer, rather than as a junior employee in a publishing house, Ransome resigned from this second job – it was a true case of, "grab a chance and you won't be sorry for a might have been".

Towards the close of 1903, and as part of his resolve to become self-sufficient, Ransome moved to new lodgings in Hollywood Road, Chelsea. Then, in August of 1904, Ransome's first two books, *The ABC of Physical Culture* and *The Souls of the*

*Streets*, were published. The former was a mass-market book, commissioned by Henry Drane (for his ABC Handbook series), and concerned aspects of physical health; the latter book was a collection of philosophical essays. More books and essay collections were soon to follow – the fledgling, but now published, writer had found his flight feathers.

In April of 1905, *The Stone Lady*, another collection of essays, was published, while in November and December of 1906, *The Child's Book of the Seasons*, and *Highways and Byways in Fairyland* first saw print. *Bohemia in London*, Ransome's first substantive book, was published in September



of 1907. In the autumn of 1908, Ransome moved to Baron's Court, and first met Ivy Constance Walker.

After marrying Ivy on 13 March 1909, Ransome was almost continually on the move, living at times in Froxfield and Semley (in Wiltshire), Bournemouth (in Dorset), Edinburgh (in Scotland), and Milford (in Surrey). By the close of 1910 Ransome had published *A History of Storytelling* (1909), *Edgar Allan Poe* (1910), and *The Imp and the Elf and the Ogre* (1910). After a brief return to Chelsea in 1911, Ransome and Ivy finally settled at Manor Farm, in Hatch, Wiltshire. Before undertaking his first trip to Russia, in May of 1913, Ransome completed *The Hoofmarks of the Faun* (1911), his study of *Oscar Wilde* (1912), and another collection of essays, *Portraits and Speculations* (1913).

While not becoming financially well-off, nor rising to any scintillating heights of literary brilliance, Ransome successfully made his way as a writer and critic during his bohemian days in London. Furthermore, he also established himself as a distinctive and well-known figure within the London literary and arts scene, rubbing shoulders with many already established writers, poets, folklorists, and artists.

Ransome's bohemian days essentially came to a close, however, with his unfortunate marriage to Ivy Walker. After describing the year 1912 as his *annus horribilis* (for numerous personal reasons), in 1913 he travelled to Russia, first to learn the language, and then to collect traditional folktales, the latter task seeing eventual fruition in the publication of *Old Peter's Russian Tales* in 1916.

## A Bohemian Life

*Bohemia in London* was published in 1907, and it is an informed and spirited romp through the literary and arts scene of London in the early 1900s. It is an important book, although not for artistic or literary reasons. Rather, it provides an insider's view of the life and times of the British literary and arts community at the turn of the 20th century. To the modern reader it seems set in a far-away, romanticized world, and yet it describes the deprivations and challenges that any struggling, new writer or aspiring artist would recognize even to this day. The book is also concerned with the personal journeys of neophyte artists, and their struggle to find that innermost, authentic voice. It also documents the discomfort and sacrifices required for the struggling newcomer to eke out a day-to-day living in a world that offered, to the non-established writer, very little monetary return.

Ransome describes his fledgling flight into independence wonderfully, writing that, "I was as Columbus setting forth to a New World, a gypsy striking his tent for unknown woods" [1: p.22]. Almost, it would seem, on a whim in the autumn of 1902, Ransome found his first solo lodgings, and packing his books, a bundle of cloths, a traveling rug, and a large wooden chair into a horse-drawn cart, he journeyed what was, in fact, just a few miles down the road – those few miles, however, separated worlds of very-different existence. Upon turning onto the New King's Road, and reaching his destination in Chelsea, Ransome writes, "The pride of it, to be sitting behind a van that I had hired myself; to carry my own belongings to a place of my own choosing; to be absolutely a free man, whose most distant desires seemed instantly attain-

able. I have never known another afternoon like that." [1: p.22]

By far the best description of Ransome, circa 1905, is that given by (Lady) Ethel Stefana Drower (née Stevens). Stevens was destined to become a famed anthropologist and Middle-Eastern folklorist, but at the time that she first met Ransome, she was working as a literary agent. Indeed, it was Stevens who asked Ransome to write *Bohemia in London* in 1906: "There is a book that ought to be written" she said, "and you are the one who ought to write it." [2: p.114]

At this time, Ransome was 22 years of age, but still plagued with internal doubts about his abilities. He later commented of *Bohemia in London* that, "it has much rubbish in it but is not wholly bad, though I should be sorry if it were reprinted" [2: pp.114-115]. The book, although exuberant, and often overly romantic, is much better than Ransome gives it credit for, and thankfully it has been reprinted on numerous occasions. Writing for publishers Mills and Boon, Stevens later described the young Ransome (in the guise of Dicky Matravers): "Who is Mr. Matravers?" Stevens asks, "He is a person who writes small books ... He is, in print, the most fastidious and meticulous creature. In person he is bombastic, Gargantuan, thunderous, explosive, brutal, and bouncing" [3: p.34].

Writing of Ransome in Petrograd, circa 1917, Lola Kinel provides a very similar description to that by Stevens: "He had long red moustaches, completely concealing his mouth, and humorous, twinkling eyes" To this she added, "Ransome was a Bohemian. ... He was clever, yet childish, very sincere and kind and romantic, and on the whole far

more interesting than his books.” [4] These descriptions only partially resonate with the fly-tying, gentlemanly Ransome we recognize in later life – at least through the Swallows and Amazons series of books. But, then, much weariness and change were to enter into Ransome’s life before he could write of Roger Walker tacking up the hill, from the Peak in Darion, to Holly Howe. For all this, the descriptions that Stevens and Kinell give us of Ransome during his early 20s are those of a serious, if sometimes bombastic, young man pursuing his chosen career.

With Ransome now plying his trade as a writer, American artist Alphaeus Cole painted him at his desk, at some time around 1905, in a beautifully moody and impressionistic oil on canvas painting (see figure 1). The painting is vibrant, and yet tranquil, showing Ransome sitting in his “large chair”, and one can sense the writer’s concentration and focus. Ransome is seen working at what he later described as a “green-varnished deal writing desk intended for the writing of masterpieces” [2: p.100], further adding that he and Edward Thomas had memorably carried it up the Fulham Road to his lodgings in 1904 [5: p.33]. Ransome’s many books are carefully arrayed on a large bookshelf, and light pours through a lace-curtained window. Upon his desk are spread various papers, books, jars, mementoes, and assorted containers. It is an idyllic scene showing an earnest young writer in the application of his trade.

Although the exact location is not identified, it is clear that Cole’s painting must have been made while Ransome lived in one or other of his Chelsea lodgings during the period between 1904 (while at 1 Gunter Grove) and 1909 (when at Baron’s

Court). Given that Ransome is described as being an author in the painting’s title, this would make late 1904 the earliest possible production date, when Ransome was some 20 to 21 years old. The fact that there is a bookshelf in the painting is also telling, since Ransome describes the use of packing cases as the first means of transporting and displaying his books.

Ransome further notes in his *Autobiography* [2: p.127] that after he moved, in the spring of 1908, to a flat in Owen Mansions, he, “had there a good work-room, plenty of bookshelves, [and] the first of the big tables I have always liked”. The fact that he is not depicted at a “big table” indicates that Cole did the painting prior to the close of 1907, when Ransome would have been some 23 years of age.



Figure 2. Cole’s 1908 sketch

A portrait sketch of Ransome by Cole, dated “London, 1908”, has been published by Hardyment [6], and this picture shows the young bohemian, complete with clay pipe, pince-nez, and mischievous grin (see figure 2). Cole’s 1908 sketch is the counterpoint to his more formal oil portrait, and we would suggest that it was produced after the painting.

We can take the absolute latest production date of the painting to be 1911, since it was in that year that the Coles moved to America. Ransome appears not to have kept in contact with the Coles after they left England, although he does record in his *Autobiography* [2: p.89] that Alphaeus unexpectedly wrote to him in 1957; what the letter contained, or indicated, is, mysteriously, left unsaid.

## Meeting the Benns

Ransome first met Alphaeus Cole and his wife Margaret while attending an open-house event hosted by Pamela (Pixie) Colman Smith. These informal gatherings attracted artists, writers, actors, musicians, and storytellers alike, each bringing their own imagination, passions, problems, and conversation. Indeed, Ransome describes the arrival of the Coles to one such gathering in *Bohemia in London*. There was a tap at the window: It’s “The Birds”, cried Pixie, scurrying off to let them in. The Coles were then newly married, hence the allusion to lovebirds, but Ransome refers to them as “the Benns”. The description continues, “she [Smith] came back, and a pair of tiny artists, for all the world like happy sparrows, skipped into the room... They were the Benns... Two people better deserving their nickname would be hard to find” [1: p.58].

Ransome records that he soon became strong friends with the Benns (that is the Coles), and that he was often at their studio. Again, in his *Autobiography* [2: p.100], Ransome fondly recalled the day on which half-a-dozen copies of his first book of essays, *The Souls of the Streets*, arrived at his 1 Gunter Grove address, noting further that three copies were to be set aside for the Collingwoods, with one copy going to his mother, and, “one for the Coles”.

On the same evening that we first meet the Benns in Bohemia, Alphaeus asked Pixie if she had such a thing as a “big sword”, that he might borrow as a prop for a painting he was working on. She had, and produced “a gigantic two-edged sword, as long as either of them”. The evening ended splendidly, with Ransome and the Coles walking down the Fulham Road together, “and I [Ransome], swinging the great sword... and wondering if I swung the sword with sufficient violence, I had the slightest chance of being rebuked by a policeman for carrying a drawn weapon in the streets.”[1: pp. 65-66]

### The Artist

Alphaeus Philmore Cole was born on 12 July, 1876, and lived for a remarkable 112 years, 136 days, being, in his later years, the oldest man in America. Cole’s father was a famed wood engraver, and during the 1890s he studied art in Italy and France, producing mainly still life and portrait paintings. Cole moved to England circa 1901, soon establishing himself as a portrait artist, and he married British sculptress Margaret Ward Walmsley in 1903. In his *Autobiography* [2: p.98] Ransome refers to Margaret as Peggotty, and recalls her acting as an “exigent housewife” when helping him search out a flat for the Collingwood family to live in during the winter of 1904/5. As a sign of their friendship, the Coles called Ransome “Piper”, in recognition of his playing on the penny whistle [2: p.98].

Returning to the United States in 1911, Cole taught art at various colleges, and over the years was elected to numerous clubs and associations, becoming a member of the National Academy of Design in 1930, and being elected to the Lyme Art Associa-

tion, Connecticut in 1962. Cole exhibited paintings with that association from 1960 through to 1980, and the painting of Ransome (figure 1) was displayed at 40th Autumn Exhibition in 1972. The asking price was just \$125, and at this stage the painting passed into the ownership of Roger Dennis, himself a well-known artist, and fellow member with Cole at the Lyme Art Association.

### Comparisons

When the painting of Ransome was placed on sale in 1972, Cole was 96 years old, and Ransome had been dead for five years. With a production date circa 1905, Cole had accordingly held on to the painting for some 67 years. Interestingly, Cole had earlier exhibited a portrait of Pamela Coleman Smith, dated “1906, London”, at the 31st Lyme Art Association exhibition, in 1963.

In this oil painting Smith is dressed as the story teller Gelukiezanger, sitting cross-legged on the floor, in a voluptuous red gown, with beaded hair. In front of Smith are seen a number of the small toy animals and painted figurines that she used for the purpose of animating her Jamaican Annancy folk tales. The painting had, in fact, been exhibited earlier, at the Royal Academy of Arts (London), during its 138th exhibition, in 1906, then being titled, “Miss Pamela Colman Smith: the story teller”. The asking price for this work in 1963 was \$1000.

While there are numerous photographic images of Ransome, relatively few portrait paintings are known. Among those identified are the paintings by Dora Collingwood and Cyrus Cuneo, and a ferro-gelatin print by Robert Lutyens. Of these only the works by Dora Collingwood and Lutyens have a clear line of

provenance. Lutyens print formed part of a series of 10 portraits representing “The Old Burgundians”, an informal group formed within the Garrick Club (to which Ransome belonged), and were produced in 1962 and distributed privately. A painting by Dora Collingwood was made in early 1932 when Ransome, then some 48 years old, was staying in Aleppo to write *Peter Duck*. Other sketches, and watercolor studies of Ransome by Dora, are also known before this time.

Sophie Neville [7] has recently described a newly (re)discovered portrait (believed to be) of Ransome, and attributed to American-born artist Cyrus Cuneo. This particular painting shows a mature figure at work, slightly balding, with a stiff white collar to his shirt, working at what appears to be an open-topped, “big table” (in contrast to the compact writing desk seen in the Cole painting).

Neville suggests that the portrait may have been produced as early as 1915, but acknowledges that it could also have been painted in the 1930s, at a time when Ransome had ended his years of self-imposed Russian exile, returned to England with his second wife, and was first beginning to compose the Swallows and Amazons series of books.

A picture from about the same time that Cole (likely) made his study of Ransome is that seen on the cover of Hugh Brogan’s *The Life of Arthur Ransome* [5]. The portrayal (by painter Trevor Scobie) is based upon a photograph provided to Brogan by Tabitha Ransome, and shows Ransome aged 25 years or so, circa 1909 (figure 3). Scobie’s painting complements Cole’s work, but contrasts with the wilder, outdoorsman photo-



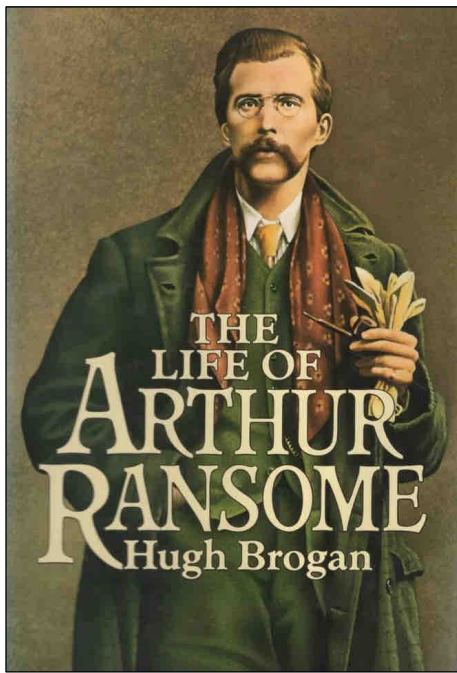


Figure 3. Trevor Scobie's cover art for Brogan's biography of Ransome. (Based on a photograph provided to Brogan by Tabitha Ransome, dated circa 1909.)

graph of Ransome (figure 4) taken in 1905. Indeed, this latter photograph has much in common with Cole's 1908 pencil sketch.

Scobie's painting shows us the more refined and sophisticated side of Matravers. The hair is no longer tussled, but quaffed; the facial expression is serious, and the mischievous grin is gone. The pipe is still there,

but it is now a stylish ebony one rather than a common clay pipe. He holds delicate suede gloves in his hand, and his dress is stylish, even bordering on foppish. The pince-nez and moustache are still there, and so too are the enquiring eyes. Intriguingly, it looks as if Ransome is wearing the same greatcoat in both the painting by Cole and the photograph re-worked by Scobie.

Unlike a photograph, painted works don't simply capture a moment in time. Rather, they express how one human being has seen, experienced, and interpreted another human being over an extended period of time. Indeed, Ransome discussed the importance of these very ideas in his philosophical essay, "Art for Life's Sake" [8] published in 1913.

Accordingly, we see the painting by Cole as a depiction of a good friend and kindred spirit, and it gives us a wonderful view of the young Ransome at work. The ambience is that of an earnest writer, seated at his desk, lost in thought, but very much in his element.

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- [1] Ransome, A. *Bohemia in London*. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. 1907.

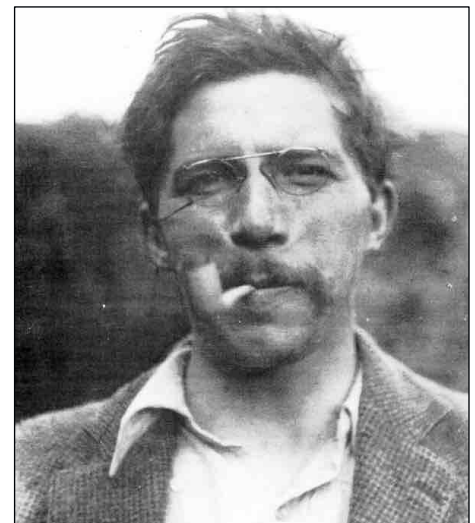


Figure 4 Ransome as the bohemian, outdoorsman (photographer unknown, but dated to 1905 by Brogan).

- [2] Hart-Davies, R. (Ed.). *The Autobiography of Arthur Ransome*. Cape, London. 1976.
- [3] Stevans, E. S. *And what happened: being an account of some romantic meals...* Mills and Boon Ltd., London. 1916.
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## The Great Aunt — Mostly Negative, but Surprisingly Positive Too

by Andrew Fisher (Evanston, Illinois)

We first meet Maria Turner, Nancy and Peggy's Great Aunt, in *Swallowdale*, where she is that terrible native who is preventing the Amazons from camping with their friends, the Swallows, and insisting the girls wear best frocks, come to all meals on time, read poetry, and practice on the piano.

Early in *Swallowdale*, the Amazons

and Captain Flint manage to slip out between meals to help after the shipwreck, move the Swallows' camp up to Swallowdale, and help John with the new mast. They are usually late as a result, but manage to get back.

After the Amazons' unsuccessful surprise attack, however, where they are the ones surprised, not the Swallows (who have hidden their camp in

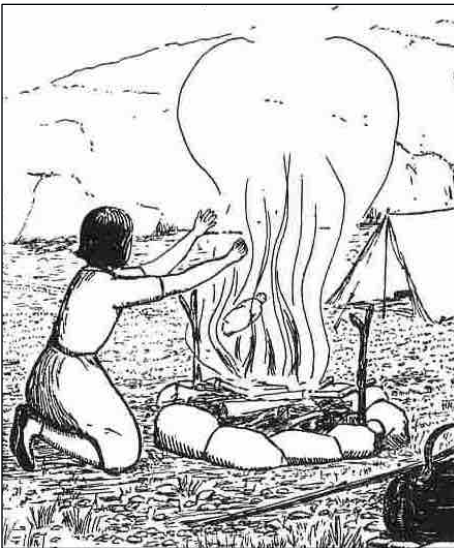
Peter Duck's cave), they stay to help set up camp again.

The parrot is put on his special post ("Oh, that's what it is for," said Nancy. "We couldn't think.").

Before they can leave, however, a native comes down the valley with a drag for a hound trail. Nancy is very excited, and they go up to Watch

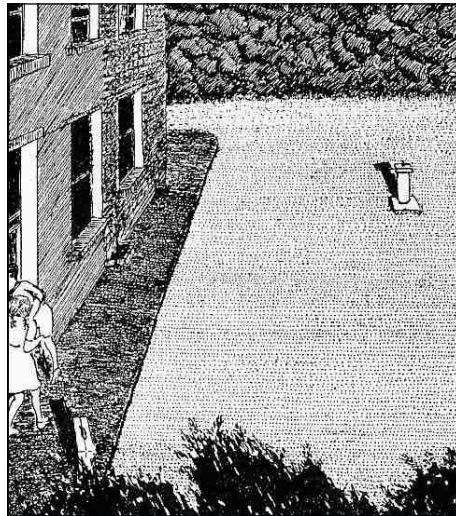
Tower Rock to see it. She explains all about hound trails and the Great Aunt is totally forgotten. After all the dogs have past, when Nancy is explaining that each owner is now telling their hound how good he is, she suddenly remembers the time. The situation is so serious that John does not even bother to put the time into bells.

“All three meals” said Peggy. “We’ve fairly done it this time,” said Nancy. “Come on. We’ll go by the road. It’s quicker, really. And someone may give us a lift. But we’re done, anyhow.” The Swallows look at each other, and realize that, if Captain Nancy is talking about about getting a lift, things must be very bad indeed.



Titty melting the Great Aunt!

In another book the Great Aunt is mentioned again, but only very briefly. At the beginning of *Secret Water*, when the planned adventure looks like it is over, they receive a letter from Beckfoot. At the bottom is a code in semaphore: THREE MILLION CHEERS. What could it mean? “Captured the houseboat I should think,” said Roger. “Or drowned the Great Aunt. She wouldn’t send three million cheers about nothing at all.”



Burglary!

It is not until *The Picts and the Martyrs* that we see the Great Aunt in a more positive light. On the day after the burglary, when Dick and Dorothea have returned all the scientific instruments, chemicals, test tubes, scales, and the book on quantitative analysis to Timothy in the houseboat, the Amazons burst in, still dressed in best frocks. As they explain, we understand.

At the end of the burglary, Dick had been forced to bang up the noisy study window to escape (after hiding in Timothy’s hutch/boot cupboard while the Great Aunt searched). The Great Aunt leaned out of her bedroom window yelling “Stop, I can see you. I have a gun here and I will shoot!” Nancy yelled, “But Aunt Maria, you haven’t got a gun.”

In the houseboat Nancy remarks, “Jolly sporting of her, anyhow, even to pretend. I never would have thought she had it in her.” Timothy’s response: “She’s your aunt, you know.”

Later, after the Great Aunt disappears, the incident where the Great Aunt had the spirit to pretend she actually had a gun is mentioned in a

even more positive tone. Nancy really likes her spirit and says so: “And the very last day,” said Nancy. “And we’d managed so jolly well. We’d almost got accustomed to her ourselves. And... And she really was pretty sporting when she thought that Dick was a full-sized burglar.”

The Great Aunt lost was beginning to seem a rather different character from the Great Aunt invading Beckfoot in holiday time and having her own way about everything.

Finally, when the Great Aunt returns to Beckfoot in the Picts’ boat, while Colonel Jolys and the police have been searching for her and now are all there to meet her, she takes on Jolys, characterizing him as like a little boy: “No, Tommy,” she went on slowly. “You have really changed very little. You always liked toy trumpets...”

Peggy, listening, thinks it is very much like hearing Nancy call someone a galoot. When Nancy explains to her aunt why they got the search together and her worry, their eyes meet: “It was surprising, but it almost seemed that the Great Aunt was pleased.”



The GA returns



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

### ***Genetic Building Blocks, The forebears of Arthur Ransome***

By Margaret Ratcliffe (Amazon Publications, 2012)

Reviewed by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

*Genetic Building Blocks, The forebears of Arthur Ransome* was the Amazon Publications book for 2012. I do not remember exactly when I first joined TARS; it must have been around then, but I didn't buy the 2012 book. (My name is on the subscribers list for the 2014 book, *Drawn at a Venture*, which I reviewed for this newsletter in September 2023, and I think that was the first Amazon book I received.)

I think the title *Genetic Building Blocks* put me off. I am a firm believer that family and background are the foundation of one's personal culture and therefore of great interest in understanding how anyone turns out. But I don't think that genetics works that way: I don't believe Ransome had an inherited "author" gene.

Of course, that is not what *Genetic Building Blocks* is saying in any case; the title misled me. The book isn't about genetics, it's about Ransome's family, his "forebears", especially Ransome's father Cyril, and how their lives and activities provided the backdrop to Ransome's own development.

Margaret Ratcliffe has taken the Ransome material available in the University of Leeds Brotherton Library and packaged it in a way that makes it more accessible to the Ransome enthusiast. As she says in her introduction, talking about Cyril Ransome's unpublished autobiography, which forms a significant part of her book:

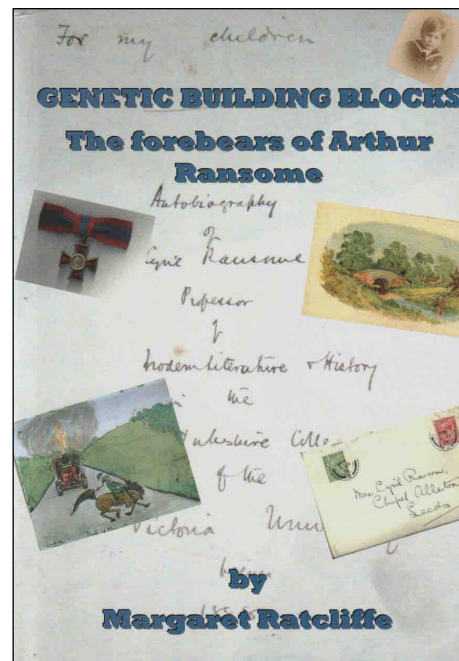
"Cyril Ransome's manuscript autobiography was in many ways the first obvious item ripe for publication. But in others it was less so. I deemed it would not stand alone; there were long passages which would be of limited interest to anyone. Only a very specialist AR aficionado would labour through it. Yet if read in conjunction with other family items; letters especially, then I felt it would present an important feature in AR's history." (p.8)

The first question Ratcliffe had to answer was, how to present the sources she had found, and the information in them, in a way that would be interesting to all the rest of us, and not just present a list of unconnected bits:

"I still felt that simply to list and quote this material would result in a work of reference, akin to a text book and I didn't want to do that. Then I had what is probably the closest I will ever get to a brainwave. Almost from the outset I decided that I would let Arthur and Evgenia present the information. It was some fifteen years later that I hit upon a framework within which to pull together the different strands.

"This framework is based on fact. It is based on AR's own diary entries starting on the day many of these papers were delivered to him." (p.8-9)

A neat framing device! And it is very well done, taking bits of actual diary entries to provide a context for the



Ransomes' supposed reading of the material that now resides in the Brotherton Library. (You will remember that Ratcliffe later edited the two *Twilight Years* volumes of Ransome's diaries put out by Amazon Publications in 2017 and 2018.)

There is a drawback, however, since the diary entries are not very extensive, and say absolutely nothing about what the Ransomes actually thought of the family papers. It didn't give Ratcliffe a lot to go on. As a result she had to make up most of it: "Where I have taken absolute liberties is, of course, with the fictional dialogue between the two. I hope my liberties are credible." (p.9)

On the whole I think Ratcliffe does a creditable job of this, but of course it remains her interpretation. We simply do not know what Evgenia



and Arthur really thought about Ransome's family papers.

The first 50 pages or so of the book have the Ransomes reading from Cyril Ransome's autobiography, with Arthur commenting on various aspects of his background that he had forgotten, or never knew. They then move on to letters between Cyril and Edith Boulton, who would become Arthur's mother. These go on for almost another 50 pages.

We have to remember that Ransome's parents married in 1882. They had hardly even seen each other for much time before the wedding in December. They did exchange many letters, however, during the previous eight months.

For the period, Cyril Ransome seems to have been relatively progressive as concerns the relationship between husband and wife. Ratcliffe quotes the first letter, where Cyril says he wants his prospective wife to have her own opinions: "...though to agree with one's husband is considered 'nice and pretty' while I think it is simply degrading to one person and demoralising to the other."

He did, however have expectations, ending the first letter with: "P.S. This is quite the essay – It will take you some time to read it. Mind you write a thoughtful answer and tell me if you like it." (p.54)

The letters apparently discussed anything and everything, from history to politics to religion, not to mention Cyril's personal prospects and their future together. Unfortunately, we only have Cyril's letters. Edith's are apparently lost. To his credit, Cyril clearly expected a close intellectual relationship. I would, however, love to know exactly how Edith an-

swered. Unfortunately, we do not have her replies.

By Chapter 7 it is the end of 1882 and Cyril and Edith are married, so their daily letters have ceased.

In Chapter 8, Ratcliffe moves on to a look at Cyril and Edith's books, that is, the ones they wrote. Cyril Ransome's *A Short History of England* is just that, a comprehensive survey of English history from before the Normans until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, in 1887, "short" meant some 500 hundred pages. Ransome was clearly an imperialist, that is, he believed in the British Empire and, essentially, its "civilizing mission". Ratcliffe quotes the Preface to Cyril Ransome's 1885 lectures, *Our Colonies and India*:

"The following lectures were delivered... before an audience composed almost entirely of working men. Their aim is to combat the impression which I fear is widely spread among the working classes – that they have little or no interest in our Colonies and Dependencies. For this purpose I have tried to give such an account of these as would place in a clear light the financial aspects of the case... At the same time, I have not neglected the moral side of our relations to our Colonies, and especially to the natives of India." (p.112)

Edith Ransome also wrote books, and Ratcliffe presents her *A First History of England*, which was published after Cyril's early death in 1897:

"I began this little book some years ago, in the hope and belief that I should have my husband's help and advice in the undertaking. When I found this was not to be, I should have given it up but for his earnest

wish that I should complete it, and in accordance with his desire I have done my best to finish it on the lines we had planned together." (p.115)

Edith felt she was carrying on Cyril's work, and she wrote it because his books were too hard for children:

"The book is intended to be read by children, before beginning the series of school histories my husband wrote himself. Much that he put in his *Elementary History* has been omitted as beyond the capacity of beginners..." (p.115)

Further chapters of *Genetic Building Blocks* cover various other Ransome relations, including his brother Geoffrey, who died of wounds in 1918, the last year of the Great War, and his Aunt Edie, whose memoirs of childhood are among the Brotherton papers.

If further evidence of the Ransome family's almost instinctive imperialist view of the world is required, I think Chapter X, "Aunt Jessie's Boxer Rising Diary" should be enough.

Aunt Jessie joined the North China Mission in 1896 "to take charge of a children's home in Peking" (p.149), and Aunt Edie followed soon after. The "Boxer Rebellion", as it is known in the West, followed in 1900 and with it the famous 55-day siege of Peking's legation quarter. The siege continued until an international force fought its way to the capital to relieve the Western defenders, which included Ransome's missionary aunts.

Jessie's memoir tells the story from their perspective, and after her return to Britain she was awarded the Order of the Royal Red Cross by King Edward VII.

(For China the failed anti-imperialist uprising almost marked the beginning of the end for the Qing dynasty, which finally collapsed in 1912 with the founding of the Republic of China and the abdication of the final, child emperor Puyi.)

There is much more that could be covered in *Genetic Building Blocks*.

But among other things I think the book demonstrates the quintessentially middle class nature of Ransome's family, and middle class in the classic sense (not the confused modern understanding of the term, especially in North America, as "anyone who isn't rich").

Ransome's forebears were not working class. His father was a professor,

originally destined to be a clergyman; his paternal grandfather was a chemist and "failed Inventor". Edith's father was an artist and a sheep farmer in Australia. The Ransome ancestors had roots in East Anglia, where they had been engineers and makers of agricultural implements. His great-grandfather was a famous surgeon. Various uncles and aunts were vicars and vicar's wives, as well as missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

This middle class origin and the family's unsurprising belief in the the goodness of the British Empire provide one explanation for Arthur Ransome's outlook (including perhaps the children's regular references to "savages" throughout the Swallows and Amazons books<sup>2</sup>). On the other hand the Cyril and Edith's rel-

atively forward-thinking marriage and attitudes provide an opposite effect. Combine this with Ransome's early experience as a Bohemian writer in the London of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and then his years in revolutionary Russia, and I think you have a starting point for understanding the sources of his ideas.

*Genetic Building Blocks* is a fascinating book and well worth a read for anyone who would like a greater understanding of our favourite author.

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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to the *All Things Ransome* site for some of these biographical details: <http://www.allthingsransome.net/literary/arbiography.html>

<sup>2</sup>My rough count puts it at some 180 references in the 12 books.

## Beckfoot Kitchen — Eating with the Swallows and Amazons

### Add One Ingredient...

by Molly McGinnis (Manteca, California)

*Think of the breakfasts the crews could have had if Susan had added a tin of self-rising flour to her supplies.*



### Pancakes!

Pancakes for breakfast, stacked with butter and sugar or rolled around buttered eggs. Pancakes for supper, with pemmican hash. Pancakes for trail food, rolled around last night's pemmican hash or bits of chocolate.

#### Some like them thick, some like them thin

I'm learning along with you here, but I wasn't able to ruin a single batch of pancakes with self-rising flour. I made thick pancakes, thin pancakes, tiny pancakes, very large

pancakes, batters with egg and without, with butter and without, with fresh milk and powdered. Conclusion: it's hard to go wrong with self-rising flour.

You don't need identical cups like the ones in the photo, you just need to keep track of the amounts of flour and liquid you use. This is a starter batch – you could double the recipe if you're brave enough to practice on the family. I liked half an egg for a one-cup batch.



Thick: 2 parts milk, 1 part flour, or... Medium: 2.5 parts milk, 1 part flour, or... Thin: 2.75 parts milk, 1 part flour



You'll also need a fork or wire whisk for mixing, and your longest, most flexible metal spatula for turning.



I thought this was the standard shape for a spatula — I could hardly even find a “vintage” model! I don’t see how anyone could get the current “pancake turners” with their turned-up ends under a floppy half-done pancake.

I mixed my trials in measuring cups with pour spouts, convenient once I’d figured out the right amounts by measuring.

A little egg will help the pancakes rise and firm up in the middle. Beat to mix white and yolk.

### A starter batch

1 egg

Put about a tablespoon (you can also use only white or yolk) into your mixing vessel. Beat milk into the egg up to the level of the liquid.

1/2 c milk

1/2 c self-rising flour

scant tsp sugar

pinch salt

(optional: ~1 tsp melted butter)

The batter needs to sit for a few minutes to let the first part of the double-acting baking powder start to make bubbles (the other part is released by heat). The time it takes to get the pan or griddle evenly heated just right

should be long enough, but a little longer, even a half hour or so, didn’t seem to hurt.

Powdered milk? I had neither milk nor car that day, so I mixed a cup’s worth of powdered milk into the flour. Self-rising flour is so versatile that it would be a better thing to take camping — with some powdered milk — than pancake mix.

Spoon a tablespoon or two onto the griddle and cook. If the pancake is thicker than you like, add milk to the batter a tablespoon at a time. The 3/4 cup amounts in the photo filled the 10” comal with several thicknesses of pancakes and a big thin pancake with enough left over enough for another batch of thin pancakes.

Can’t find self-rising flour? Mix about 2 to 1/2 teaspoons of double-acting baking powder with each cup of all-purpose flour. Be careful not to beat too much — the stronger gluten will make the batter tough. If you have cake or pastry flour, try using it as about 1/3 of the flour. Butter and egg will be a big help here.

## Considerations

### The Pan’s The Thing

Susan must have had a very large frying pan, to make meals for six people. Definitely not “that new aluminy ...that soaks away wi’ a drop o’ soda and makes food taste funny” that Slater Bob decries. Holly Howe’s pan would most likely have been cast iron, to smooth out the vagaries of campfire cooking (though Susan must have managed her fires very well to be able to make buttered eggs for all those people without soup on one side of the pan and scorch on the other).

I used my flat comal griddle of thick sheet steel the most, but experimented with a stainless steel lined cast aluminum frying pan and a big cast iron frying pan. The rimless comal was much the best. The lined aluminum pan



was good too. Its slanted side and rounded bottom edge made turning easy, I kept filming the pan with butter between batches, and nothing stuck. One batch in the cast iron pan was enough – mine had a deep vertical rim and the spatula kept bumping into the rim when I needed to turn the pancakes. Other designs might work well.

**Starting with butter:** I put a good dollop in a metal cup, set the cup on the comal to melt while it heated, and used it in the batter, on the griddle, and on the pancakes.

**From thick to thin:** With the mixtures under the picture (previous page), the thickest batter mounded up on the spoon a bit, and slid off it without having to be pushed. Thin and thinner: the batter coats the spoon and flows off it easily. Thin pancakes can be crisp on both sides (my choice) or just on the edges, or soft and buttery. It depends on the temperature.

**And the temperature?** The classic test: tiny droplets of water sprayed or flicked on form little balls that roll all around. I had better results with a slightly lower temperature, especially when using butter. Electric griddle and pan directions suggest 350 to 375°F, a little lower than most of my comal when I measured its surface temperature.

**A bit of butter...** A well seasoned pan needs only a film of fat – a few drops of oil or a smidgeon of butter, spread about with a folded paper towel. (A really well-seasoned surface may need no fat at all after the first batch.) Pre-buttered pancakes are very nice too, with enough butter on the pan to make a visible layer... Just enough to bubble up a bit, as in this photo.



The batch in the picture is just ready to turn. The batter isn't set on top but firm enough in the middle so that the bubbles don't close right away. Small pancakes (1 to 2 tablespoons of batter) are easier and don't weld themselves together as badly as big ones (1/4 c batter). These 2 1/2 inch cakes are about half again as wide as they were when they first hit the surface.

Turn in time and the baked side will be an even golden. Turn too late and the color will be spotty (and darker), but the pancakes will taste just as good. Very thin pancakes may crisp on the edges before they're ready to turn – the best part, to some palates. You're only supposed to turn pancakes once and they are much better that way.



## And Now to The Table

I had maple syrup. The first camp had sugar, very nice sprinkled on pancakes, especially when stacked with butter on each pancake. At other times the crews had jam, blackberry-banana mash, and golden syrup.

“Soft sugar” was on the Death and Glories’ shopping list when they got the pike money – was this brown sugar? They could, of course, had had blackberries mashed with sugar if there were blackberries.

### Parrot Pancakes?

My mother said you had to throw away the first pancake or the first waffle. Ours went to the dog but I can guess where it would have gone on Wild Cat Island! Just adjust the temperature and try another if your first pancake is a throwaway.

Susan would have probably have made some big thin pancakes. Very thin pancakes rolled up with sugar and lemon juice were such a tradition for Shrove Tuesday in England that it was often called Pancake Day.



(Shrove Tuesday is the last day before Lent starts – Mardi Gras in some Latin countries, Carnival in others).

Our batter recipe is different, but the method is the same. Put something on them and roll them up. I put a row of chocolate chips on the pancake in the picture. The pancake was a little too thick, but I was able to fold a bit on each end, burrito style, to hold in the melted chocolate. Milk chocolate would have been better – Roger would have approved. Maybe the kind with raisins?

I tried some other things with self-rising flour too, with one experiment good for camp dinners: a potato pancake that Susan could easily have made. Just grated potato, salt, pepper, and a bit of flour. It turned into something almost like a thick batter when mixed.

I dropped spoonfuls into a hot buttery pan, and spread and pressed them into a rather thick raggedy pancake. It needed turning several times and more pressing to keep it even so it would brown well.

Most directions say to squeeze as much moisture out of the potatoes as you can but I didn't because I didn't think Susan would have. The potato pancake was quite good without squeezing the gratings. Susan might have mixed in a bit of pemmican.

### Wild Cat Pancakes?

I felt sure Susan would have used butter and egg in her batter and, when consulted, would have said:

First, melt butter in the saucepan. Take the pan off the heat and add milk. Get someone to beat the milk and butter while you break eggs into it – the milk should have cooled the pan enough not to cook the egg. Beat in the self-rising flour with a fork and let it rest while you heat the frying pan. Melt a little butter in the frying pan, spread it around, and drop spoonfuls of batter onto the



pan. Turn the pan around if the coals aren't perfectly even. Put the pancakes into cereal bowls and pass the toppings. Or set them aside, make buttered eggs, put pancakes on plates and put buttered eggs over them. Hardly any washing up!

This turned out to be quite a good system. I put maple syrup in my cereal bowl, added pancakes, swooshed them around and ate them whole from a fork. Next time I made big crispy pancakes I cut them in strips with scissors and tossed them with the syrup. Delicious.

## Epilogue

Having fun? Have some more. There are lots of things you can add to pancake batter. I even saw a recipe with chocolate chips in the batter! Chopped walnuts or pecans, crisp bacon bits, fine-cut chives – anything that won't burn before the pancakes are done. Cheese is possible, but questionable, since browned cheese is not to everyone's taste.

If you're skilled enough, you can make smiley (or frowny) faces by dropping tiny bits of batter on the griddle before you pour the batter on, so they are browner than the rest. Or initials.

Toppings can also be as wild as you want. I lunched on waffles heaped with whipped cream and several kinds of soft fruit after a visit to the dentist, but they could as well have been pancakes. Leftover bits of pancake in my soup that evening – quite tasty.

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