



# Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

## January 2026

### Contents

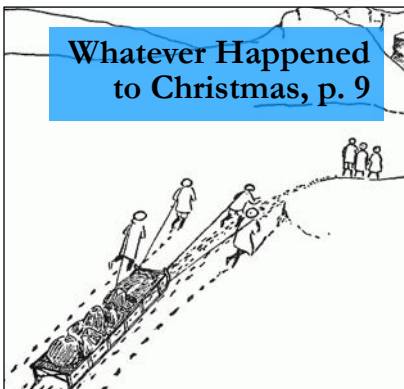


#### *Ship's Papers*

[A Note from the Editor](#) — Simon Horn ..... 2  
[Greetings from the North](#) — Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator ..... 2

#### *Dipping our Hands*

[Gleanings from \*The Gryphon\* and \*The Palatinate\*](#) — Martin Beech ..... 4  
[Whatever Happened to Christmas in Winter Holiday?](#) — Alistair Bryden ..... 9  
[Natives Get More Acceptable to Explorers Over Time](#) — Andrew Fisher ..... 10

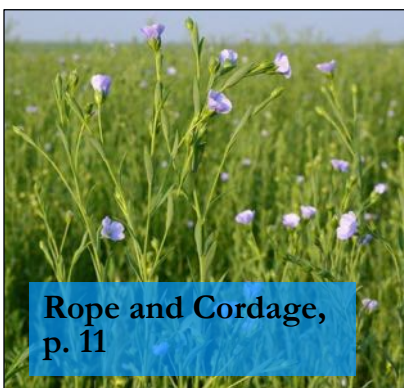


#### *The Professor's Laboratory*

[Rope and Cordage Found on \*Swallow\* and \*Amazon\*](#) — Ian Sacré ..... 11

#### *Ship's Library*

[Arthur Ransome Ebooks](#) — compiled by Simon Horn ..... 13  
[Jibbooms and Bobstays](#) — reviewed by Simon Horn ..... 15



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



### A Note from the Editor

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

Welcome to *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* for January 2026. Unfortunately, at only 17 pages, this issue is a bit thin. The newsletter continues to rely on a small number of contributors, and if their enthusiasm or imagination dries up, we are in trouble.

A former editor once said to me in an email that they liked doing it but gave up when they found themselves writing most of the content.

### In this issue

Thanks to the contributors as always. You make it possible.

In *Dipping Our Hands*, **Martin Beech** looks at Ransome and his family's relationship with Yorkshire College of Science (later the University of Leeds) in "Gleanings from *The Gryphon* and *The Palatinate*".

**Alistair Bryden** asks "Whatever Happened to Christmas in Winter Holiday?".

**Andrew Fisher** then considers how our favourite characters related to the local adults in "Natives Get More Acceptable to Explorers Over Time".

**Ian Sacré** continues his work in *The Professor's Laboratory* by presenting the various types of rope available, before the invention of nylon, in "Rope and Cordage found on *Swallow* and *Amazon*".

In *The Ship's Library* I begin with "Arthur Ransome Ebooks, How and Where to Get Them" and present the various websites that provide a way of finding lesser known but interesting Ransome works.

Next I take a look at another Amazon Publication, 2003's *Jibbooms and Bobstays*, described as "A Miscellany for Readers of the Twelve Children's Books of Arthur Ransome". Unfortunately, though very interesting this one is *not* available of the TARS Stall.

\*\*\*

As I said, this issue is a bit short, so please think about helping out, whether this means an article, a question, a picture or a comment. My usual reminder for the May issue will show up in April.

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



### Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator  
3965 Marine Drive, Royston, BC V0R 2V0  
[gallivanterthree@shaw.ca](mailto:gallivanterthree@shaw.ca)

Greetings Fellow TARS Members,

Simon's call for action arrived several weeks ago and I fear I have been tardy in answering his call for the Canadian TARS newsletter. But the gale force south

easterly winds and accompanying pouring rain lashing my windows have finally prompted me to produce something. However, as I sit writing this missive, the end of the year is fast approaching and I find myself still at a loss to find any

worthwhile TARS news to tell you. Our small, ever decreasing Canadian membership has been very quiet lately so presumably no news is indeed good news!

It will soon be time to renew our

TARS memberships and it is gratifying to learn that all Canadian members are doing their renewals on line. I think most of the 'bugs' are out of the system now, but in case any one is having problems let me know.

Once again I would like to thank Simon Horn for all the work he does in putting together TARSUS & North Pole News in such a professional manner every four months. Without his expertise we would be in dire straits!

Wishing everyone fair winds and calm seas,

Ian Sacré  
Canadian TARS Coordinator

Please note: Mark Purtill's message will return in the next issue.

**Editor's Note:** These instructions for renewing your membership on the TARS website appeared in the January-April 2026 issue of the UK *Signals*. You have probably seen them already, but in case you have yet to receive your copy, here they are again.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS REMINDER

If you haven't yet switched to our **new, easier payment system**, please go to the **TARS website** [arthur-ransome.org](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:webmaster@arthur-ransome.org)

**Membership queries:** [memsec@arthur-ransome.org](mailto:memsec@arthur-ransome.org)

Thank you!

**Ben Hambleton - TARS Webmaster**

## Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

### Gleanings from *The Gryphon* and *The Palatinate*

by Martin Beech (Courtenay, B.C.)

Although Arthur Ransome enjoyed just a brief residency at the Yorkshire College of Science, from the autumn of 1901 to the spring of 1902, his family name carries a deep connection with the University of Leeds – the University having evolved from the College in 1904. Indeed, Ransome was born in Leeds in 1884, and his father, Cyril Ransome, held a professorship at the College from 1878 to 1896. Added to this, in modern times, the archive of Ransome’s papers, notebooks, letters, and diaries is held at the University of Leeds, in the Brotherton Library, and the library itself is built upon the location of a house in which the young Ransome once lived[1].

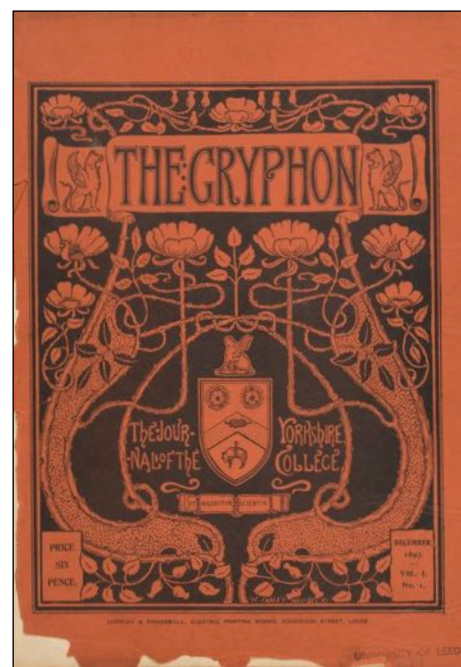
The imminent opening of the Yorkshire College of Science was announced in the science journal *Nature* for 1 January, 1874 [2]. The article begins, in fact, by questioning why it had taken so long for such a college to be founded, but, in grand, no-nonsense, Yorkshire fashion, the article’s author concludes, “better late than never”. The announcement indicates that the College will offer instruction in “those sciences which are applicable to the Industrial Arts, particularly in their relation to manufactures, engineering, mining, and agriculture”, and that professorships were to be established in chemistry, engineering, physics and geology.

With three of the four professorships filled, the inaugural intake was 24 students. The College, however, rapidly expanded its course offerings, as well as student intake,

and in 1884 it amalgamated with the Leeds School of Medicine (which had been founded in 1831). Following the issue of a Royal Charter in 1904, the Yorkshire College became the University of Leeds.

The Yorkshire College journal, *The Gryphon* (figure 1), was first published on 1 December, 1897. And, the very first article in this volume, after the introductory editorial, was a 3½ page obituary for Cyril Ransome. Two anonymous accounts are given, one by a faculty member and the other by a student. The faculty colleague commented that, “Professor Ransome was indefatigable in the work of the college”, and that, “the characteristic of Mr. Ransome, indeed, which comes back most vividly to the mind of the writer of this notice is that of his absolute genuineness, and with this, his contempt for all that bore the most distant resemblance of falseness”.

The student commentator began by expressing shock and sadness, and then continued that their memory of Ransome, “will always be, first and foremost, that of a *man*, genuine to the core, without trace of sham or affectation; strong in will, with something of sternness ... yet a perfect gentleman and typically English”. Noting that Ransome was a, “kind and skillful teacher of history and literature”, the student commentator, recalled that Ransome “had a very practical mind”, “was business-like”, “delighted in clearness”, and that, “he would have made a successful general”.



**Figure 1.** Front cover to the first issue (December 1897) of *The Gryphon* – the journal of the Yorkshire College. Image from: <https://digital.library.leeds.ac.uk/view/newspapers/TheGryphon.html>

Arthur Ransome’s godfather, Sir Arthur Acland, was an old Oxford University friend of Cyril’s, and co-author with Cyril of the best-selling text, a *Handbook of the Political History of England* (published in 1882). He was also closely associated with the Yorkshire College. Acland was a renowned educational reformer, and Liberal politician, and he was instrumental in lobbying the British Government to enable the College to become the University of Leeds. Indeed, in its very first honors presentation, in 1904, Acland was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) by the university.

Ransome also knew Arthur Acland's son, Francis, first from his days at Rugby, and later through conversation and correspondence. Sir Francis Acland, who was a long-term Liberal MP and Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs from 1911 to 1915, helped Ransome on many occasions with letters of introduction and encouragement during his early forays into Russia [3].

The second issue of *The Gryphon*, published in February 1898, is also informative, and contains an article, written by *The Philistine*, entitled, "Kemmy Lab." Indeed, this was the very chemistry lab where Ransome would have studied during the fall term of 1901 and the winter term of 1902.

The article begins with a classical description of a chemistry department, "There is a certain region within the College, where the atmosphere is generally cloudy, and where strange and fearsome odours predominate". To this, however, the writer adds, "now, the Kemmy Lab. Enjoys a popularity limited only by its capacity for accompanying students". Indeed, the article notes that in 1898 there were a total of 162 students enrolled in chemistry at the College, and that, "Professor Smithells and his able staff, consisting of Mr. Ingle, Dr. Patterson, and Dr. McCrae, have a busy time of it catering for the wants of this motley throng".

Ransome would have encountered Professor Arthur Smithells (figure 2), who joined the College in 1885, and who was well known for his work relating to the structure of flames (indeed, he studied under Robert Bunsen), and flame spectroscopy. As to the activities of "fresher" students, the "Kemmy Lab." article

informs us that, they first get, "busy bending glass tubes", and then move on to making "pops ... and finally a deafening detonation", and that with these there are accompanying, "sulphurous fumes, and the peculiar smell of burning phosphorus". Following this early basic training, the chemistry students moved on to, "tackle the analysis of salts", and eventually began quantitative analysis. In contrast to the "perpetual motion" and happy comradeship of the "Kemmy Lab.", we are told that, "on the quantitative side ... the folk here don't lark about much, for delicate work demands all one's attention".

From the absence in Ransome's autobiography of any reference to his time at Yorkshire College, it seems clear that he did not have any great or deep interest in chemistry. Such basic studies that Ransome did experience, however, would eventually prove useful, adding meaningful background depth to the storyline when he set about writing *Pigeon Post* (first published in 1936). They may have also influenced Ransome's choice for a penname [4].

Ransome describes in his autobiography the serendipitous event that resulted in his dropping out of the chemistry program, turning, in spite of great family protests, to the precarious world of the written arts. Ransome would additionally comment that he left the College in order to save the memory



Figure 2. The new chemical laboratory at Leeds University. To the middle right (holding a spherical flask in a small bucket) is Professor Smithells. Drawing by Max Cowper. From the *Illustrated London News*, July 11, 1908.

of his father's name from embarrassment – that is, he left in the certain likelihood of failing his chemistry exams.

The chance event that changed Ransome's life, and precipitated the dramatic change in career choice, was John Mackail's *Life of William Morris* (published in 1899). Morris, of course, beside being a textile designer and prominent member of the Arts and Crafts movement, was a socialist activist, poet and artist – qualities and attributes that the young Ransome was keen to emulate.

For all of the implied epiphany found within his reading of Morris's life, however, Ransome was already flexing his literary muscles prior to leaving the College. His very first published poem concerned the death of Queen Victoria, and was published in the *Rugby News and*

*District Observer* newspaper for 26 January, 1901. His next three published poems appeared in the November 1901, the December 1901 and the February 1902 issues of *The Gryphon*. I have written on these early poetic works in *Mixed Moss* [5], and it remains the case that it was the readers of *The Gryphon* that saw Ransome's first attempts at writing for a specific audience. This being said, Ransome chose to remain somewhat anonymous by signing his works 'A. M. R' [4].

Not only did The Yorkshire College play a part in the transformation of the young Arthur Ransome. Some 14 years after his undistinguished departure, the opportunity arose for a possible return to his old alma mata. It is apparent from a letter to his mother on 6 March, 1916, that Ransome was in the running for a Professorship at the University of Leeds.

Ransome explained, "it seems that other northern universities, besides Liverpool, are taking up Russian studies", and that, "Professor Pares asked me if I'd like Leeds supposing it was offered me" [6. p.30]. Ransome was certainly intrigued by the idea, noting that he would only have to be at Leeds for two terms in the year between October and March. Furthermore, he noted, "it would be a perfectly marvelous piece of good fortune", and that,

**Figure 3.** The honorary graduates of Leeds University for 1952. Ransome is seen standing second from the left (light grey suit). To his right is Sir James Turner (President of the National Farmers' Union). Also shown, to Ransome's left, are, Wyndham Lewis (writer and critic), Sir Cyril Hinshelwood (Professor of Chemistry), and Ernest Green (Chairman of the Adult Advisory Council). Image from Leeds University *Union News*, vol. 7. #4, 1952.

"because of father ... I'd love to be connected with the university".

The professorship was not offered to Ransome, however, and in a letter dated 1 May, 1917, he indicated to his mother that, "I hear the Leeds professorship has been given to Boswell of Liverpool, so I am probably out of the running altogether. Never mind" [6. p.43-44].

Bernard Pares was a historian and diplomat, who founded the School of Russian Studies at the University of Liverpool in 1907, and also a correspondent at *The Daily News* on matters concerning the war in Russia and upon the Russian revolution. Much later, in 1931, Ransome reviewed Pares's *My Russian Memoirs* for the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper, but decried several statements that Pares had attributed

to him – he, "puts words in my mouth that I never used" Ransome complained [7]. For all this, Ransome praised Pares's *Memoirs*, and fondly recalls the difficult adventures and times that they shared in Russia as the Revolution unfolded. Ransome concludes, "His book is of permanent value as a record of the old Russia and of a personal character devoted to great ends.... It is a book that should be read by both his friends and his opponents" [7].

Russian studies were first established at Leeds in 1918, with a chair being endowed by Sir James Roberts (a Yorkshire textile mill owner and philanthropist with commercial links to the merino wool trade in Russia [8]). Alexander Boswell, it turns out, was appointed acting Department Head at Leeds, and Mr. Kolni-Balosky, "a native Russian speaker"



[9] was hired as the first Assistant Lecturer.

Interestingly, as far as is known, Ransome did not approach Sir Arthur Acland (surely an influential reference) for help in obtaining the Leeds professorship. Rather, he suggested to his mother [6. p.30] that she should contact Dr. John Eddison, who was Professor of Medicine at Leeds, for advice. Professor Eddison was uncle to Eric Rücker Eddison (author of the high-fantasy story *The Worm Ouroboros* – published in 1922), whom Ransome had known since his early childhood days.

In the later years of his life, Ransome received two honorary degrees. A Doctor of Letters (D. Litt.) from the University of Leeds in 1952, and a Master of Arts (M.A.) from the University of Durham, in 1948. Of these, the former was pleasing to Ransome, but the latter was not (as we shall see below). While no mention is made in *The Gryphon* of the honorary awards to be made in 1952, the *Union News* newspaper at the University does carry a small article and photograph on the honorary graduates (figure 3). The awards were presented on November 12<sup>th</sup> by Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II at an “impressive and colorful ceremony” held at Leeds Town Hall. It seems worth noting an amusing, presumably not planned, coincidence concerning the honorary graduates seen in figure 3. Specifically, Ransome (2<sup>nd</sup> from the left in light grey suit) is standing next to Sir James Turner. And, James Turner, of course, is the family name of Ransome’s alter ego Captain Flint – brother to Molly Blackett, and uncle to the Amazon Pirates.

While Ransome had a friendly and largely happy association with the University of Leeds, the same cannot be said for the University of Durham. In the later case the resentment was the result of what Ransome perceived to have been a public snub. Indeed, this slight appears to have been a deliberate act made by the then acting Vice-President of the university. Hugh Brogan explains the background circumstances in his biography of Ransome [10. p. 419]. Essentially the story begins with Ransome receiving an “extraordinary nice letter” [10. p.396] from James Duff, Vice Chancellor of Durham University in August of 1948. In the letter Duff explained himself to be a great fan of Ransome’s *Swallows and Amazons*, and that he had greatly enjoyed reading the then recently published *The Picts and The Martyrs*. Further to this Duff recommended and endorsed Ransome to the University of Durham for an honorary degree.

Unfortunately, however, when the degree was finally awarded, later in the year, the then acting Vice Chancellor, Lord Eustace Percy, had no sympathy for Ransome’s literary works. Indeed, Lord Percy was a staunch Conservative, and had no time for Ransome’s supposed past sympathies for the Bolshevik cause in Russia. The end result was that, rather than receiving the expected Doctor of Letters (D. Litt) *Honoris Causa*, Ransome was given a Master of Arts degree (M.A.). Certainly, the award of an honorary M.A. is still recognition of high merit and respect, but it seems fair to say that Ransome deserved, and would have rightly expected, higher recognition, especially so, given his then standing as an internationally recognized author and recipient of the 1937 Carnegie Medal (for *Pigeon Post*).

Not discovering Percy’s slight until the very day of the ceremony, however, Ransome was incensed, and left Durham as soon as he could get away, even avoiding the celebratory dinner for the honorands. Hurt and annoyed, Ransome specifically instructed his publisher (Jonathan Cape) to ignore the award, and he even asked that the M.A. be removed from his entry in *Who’s Who*.

There were two other recipients of honorary M.A.s. at Durham in 1948, these being John Jackson Adams and Eustace Maxwell Shilstone. Adams was a civil servant and politician from Cumbria (Ransome’s beloved Lake District), who was to be elevated to the peerage, by King George VI, becoming 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Adams, in February 1949. Shilstone was a solicitor, and founding member of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society. There were two recipients of Doctor of Letters *Honoris Causa* at Durham in 1948, these being (Dame) Edith Sitwell, and (Sir) Godfrey Rolles Driver. Sitwell was an acclaimed poet, who was well known for her eccentric public performances and exotic costumes. Driver was an Oxford scholar who specialized in semitic languages and Assyriology.

The University of Durham student newspaper, the *Palatinate*, which was first published on 17 March 1948, made no mention of the honorary degrees that were to be awarded in that year. For all this, the editor, J. A. Gordon, was certainly aware that Ransome was one of the recipients, and in the 28 January, 1949 issue of the *Palatinate*, a “vigorous and stimulating” letter from Ransome was published. Ransome had been asked to send a New Year’s message to the paper’s student readers.

We asked **Mr. ARTHUR RANSOME**, an Hon. M.A. of this University, famous for his ever-popular stories for young people, if he would send a New Year message to our readers. We publish his vigorous and stimulating reply, to comment upon which would be to gild the lily:—  
Jan. 17th, 1949.

Dear Mr. Editor,

The whole point of an “undergraduate” newspaper is that it is written by undergraduates. Once you invite the ancients to sport on the green, that point is lost and you throw away the one thing in which your ancients cannot compete with you, namely, youth. No. No. Keep your green to yourselves and let the ancients, hobbling on their sticks and crutches, look enviously on. You’ll see them straining their eyes, trying to follow the game, and hopefully lifting their ear-trumpets, trying to catch what the players, with complete indifference to these decrepit spectators, are saying to each other.

Yours sincerely,  
ARTHUR RANSOME.

**Figure 4.** Ransome’s letter to *The Palatinate* for 28th January, 1949.

His response, written on the 17th January, is both lively, and informative (figure 4). Indeed, Ransome’s message was all about the vibrancy, and rebelliousness of youth, and the absolute necessity that an undergraduate student newspaper be written by undergraduates, and not by “the ancients”, and specifically, he might just as well have added, the old Conservative ancients of the university. “The whole point of an

undergraduate newspaper is that it is written by undergraduates”, writes Ransome. Further advising, “keep your green [that is, playing field] to yourselves and let the ancients, hobbling on their sticks and crutches, look enviously on”.

It might be argued that Ransome gained some revenge over Lord Percy’s snub when, in 1953, he was awarded a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) in the New Year Honours list. These awards were, in fact, the first to be made under the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. Ransome had first met the then new Queen at the University of Leeds ceremony in 1952, and one suspects that she may well have had a kind word to offer one of her favorite authors.

Indeed, some 22 years earlier, Ransome had written enthusiastically to his mother, on 25 November 1930 [6. p.179] that he had been informed that the then Queen Mary, consort of George V, had brought a copy of *Swallows and Amazons*. Proof of the fact that Ransome’s first Lake District book later caught and then held the imagination of another royal, the young Princess Elizabeth (later Queen Elizabeth II), is evident in a comment made by Her Majesty in 2012 that *Swallows and Amazons* was the first book that she could remember reading [11, 12]. High praise indeed.

## References

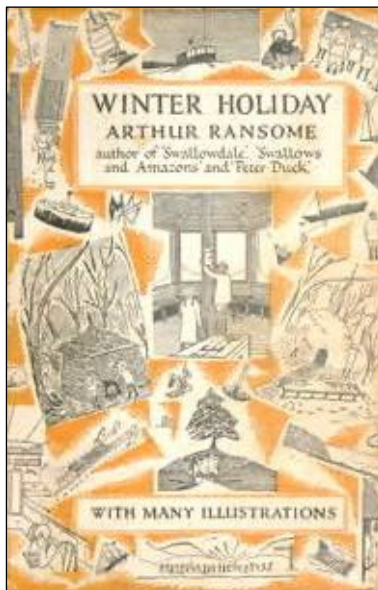
- [1] Alexander, C. *Ransome at Home: Snug Berths and Temporary Moorings*. Amazon Publications, Kendal. 1996.
- [2] The Yorkshire College of Science. *Nature*, 9, 157 - 158, 1874.
- [3] Chambers, R. *The Last Englishman: The Double Life of Arthur Ransome*. Faber & Faber, London. 2009.
- [4] Beech, M. “A critic called KQ”. *Signals from TARSUS – North Pole News*. September 2025.
- [5] Beech, M. “A.M.R. the Poet, and the Discovery of Three Early Poems”. *Mixed Moss* 2025.
- [6] Brogan, H. (Ed.) *Signaling from Mars: the Letters of Arthur Ransome*. Jonathan Cape, London. 1997.
- [7] Ransome, A. “Sir Bernard Pares: His Russian Memoires”. *Manchester Guardian* newspaper, Monday, February 9th, 1931, page 5, columns 4-5.
- [8] See <https://www.saltairecollection.org>.
- [9] Taylor J. “New Horizons and New Challenges: Developments in the Modern Languages in the University of Leeds, 1914-1918”. *Northern History*, 59 (1), 116 – 136, 2022.
- [10] Brogan, H. *The Life of Arthur Ransome*. Jonathan Cape, London. 1984.
- [11] See <https://www.peterjames.com/largeing-it-with-the-royals/>
- [12] See <https://sophienville.com/2022/09/10/>

## Whatever Happened to Christmas in Winter Holiday?

By Alistair Bryden (Calgary, Alberta)

*Winter Holiday* has always been one of my favourite books in the series. It seems to have everything that makes these books memorable: exploration, independence and imagination with the familiar characters and the first appearance of the D's. One might argue that sailing is missing but of course there is sailing, just on ice rather than water. AR's personal memories of the Great Freeze make the descriptions very real and his personal links with Nansen add a link to real adventure. Greenland was much in the public eye when the book was published, with successful and well-publicized expeditions to Greenland by the likes of Gino Watkins.

But there is one strange absence in *Winter Holiday*... namely "Christmas"! The children are clearly on holiday from school for the Christmas holidays. The season is right, with snow, ice etc. There are no other school holidays with these conditions. You would normally expect Christmas routines, church, carol



singing, decorations, Christmas trees, Santa Claus, presents and of course family! But it's all missing. Christmas is implied rather than stated... even the title is *Winter Holiday* rather than Christmas holidays. The Walker and Callum parents are quite happy to send their children away to the remote Lake for the holidays and the children show no sign of missing them. It's a tribute to Ransome's narrative skills that I didn't perceive this absence for many years. It all seems very normal.

So why did Ransome omit Christmas? I can see a few reasons.

*Winter Holiday* is not inconsistent with the rest of the series. Ransome was not religious (no vicars in his books) and tended to keep religious references to a minimum. There may be a reference or two in the books but I can't remember one.

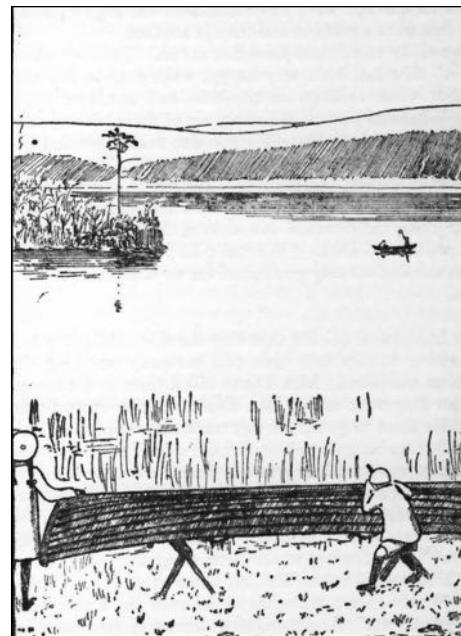
The focus of *Winter Holiday* is exploration, independence and exploration, sledging on the frozen lake and friendship. A Christmas celebra-

tion would interrupt and distract from the narrative.

Christmas naturally involves family and the adult world and again this would interfere with the self-contained children's world that Ransome creates. Of course there are adults in the story: Uncle Jim, the Doctor, Mrs Blacket... but they are on the edge of the story rather than at the core.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, with *Winter Holiday* Ransome created a timeless story that can be read at any time of the year. It's not a seasonal story, instead it's an adventure that just happens to take place in winter!

So in conclusion, Ransome clearly made a very conscious decision to leave Christmas out of the book. And this decision keeps the story focused on the children and the adventure, free from adult-centred rituals that would have interrupted the narrative.



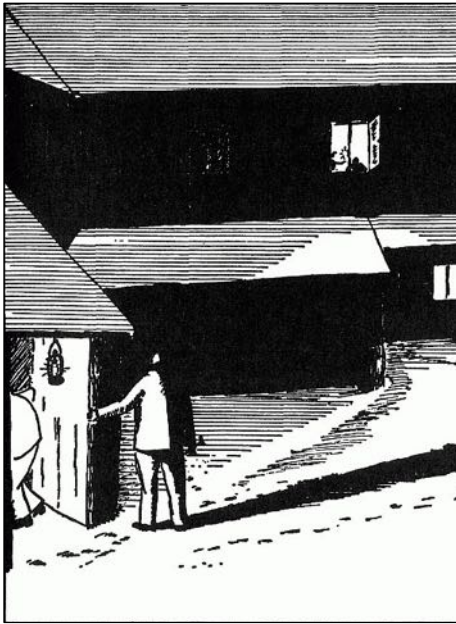
## Natives Get More Acceptable to Explorers Over Time

by Andrew Fisher (Evanston, Illinois)

Several of the adult “natives” get much more friendly and acceptable to the explorers over time. The five that come to mind first are:

- Mr. Dixon in *Winter Holiday*
- Mrs. Tyson in *Pigeon Post*
- The Great Aunt in *The Picts and the Martyrs*
- Missee Lee in *Missee Lee*
- The McGinty in *Great Northern*

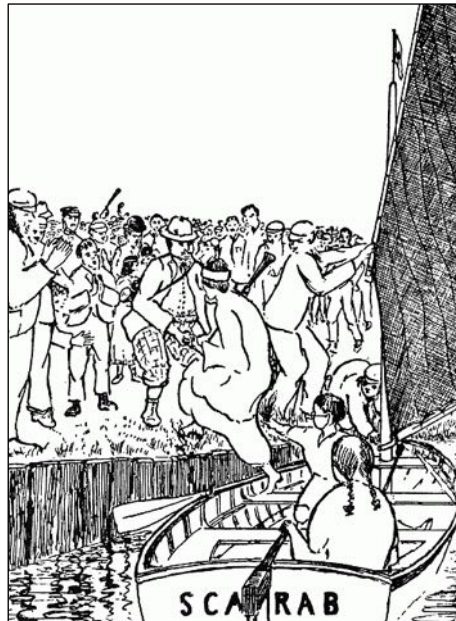
In *Winter Holiday*, after Dick goes along the dangerous ledge to rescue his cragfast sheep, Mr. Dixon makes a sledge for the Ds so they can have one like the others at Holly Howe. Further in the book, Mr. Dixon makes the mast and rigging while Mrs. Dixon makes the sail so their sledge can sail.



In *Pigeon Post*, Mrs. Tyson first thinks they started the fire on the High Tops. Later, after she learns they summoned the firefighters with the pigeon (Sappho), she is extremely grateful and will let them camp anywhere.

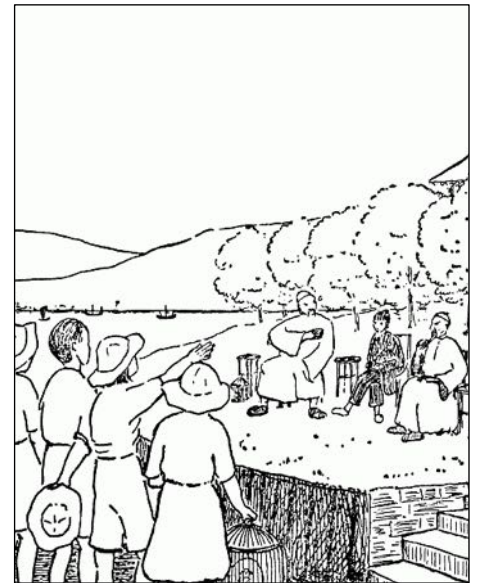


When Great Aunt Maria totally disappears in *The Picts and the Martyrs*, they feel much more positive towards her. Nancy particularly likes the drive she showed during the burglary by pretending to have a gun. Later, when the Great Aunt returns in Dick and Dorothea’s boat and is being criticized by the police, Nancy interrupts and says it was all her

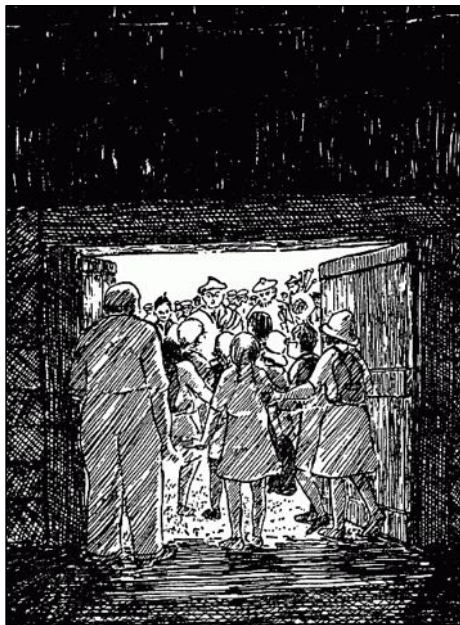


fault. When their eyes meet, it almost seems as if the Great Aunt is amused and approves!

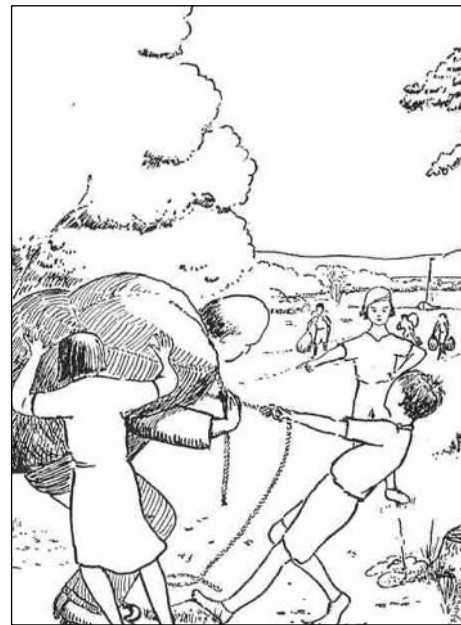
At the end of *Missee Lee*, when they are escaping in the junk *Shining Moon*, Missee Lee turns up aboard and guides them through the dangerous channel with the whirlpool. Roger is worried about what happened to his monkey, Gibber, but it turned out that the monkey was below with Miss Lee. She didn’t mind the company of the monkey then.



The laird of the Gaels in *Great Northern*, the McGinty, first thought they were chasing his deer to disturb their breeding, so he locked them all up in a prison. Roger saw the egg collector heading to the loch where the Great Northern divers were nesting, one with a gun, told the others in the prison and was thrown in there himself. The only way to get the needed attention was to yell. As they were explaining to the McGinty, two shots were fired by the egg collector, and those immediately turned all the Gaels to their side.



Of course there are several other sympathetic “natives” in the books, like the Dutch pilot in *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*, the Missionaries in *Secret Water*, Mary Swainson in *Swallowdale*, the Admiral in *Coot Club*, the Billies charcoal burners in both *Swallows and Amazons* and *Swallowdale*, Peter Duck in *Peter Duck*, the lawyer Mr. Farland, and the skipper of the *Cachalot* in *The Big Six*, and, of course, in almost all of them, James Turner as Captain Flint.



## The Professor's Laboratory

### Rope and Cordage found on *Swallow* and *Amazon*

by Ian Sacré (Royston, British Columbia)

Arthur Ransome's twelve books have many things in common, and these individual similarities appeal to readers in numerous different ways. Some are intrigued by his geographic references to places they personally know or the way Ransome cleverly wove the places into his tales. Others are more interested and intrigued by the personalities and how they interact with each other and how their strengths and weaknesses were developed in the stories. Other groups are more interested in practical aspects, such as how Mrs. Walker made the tents in *Swallows* and *Amazons*, or the actual physical design of *Swallow* and of *Amazon* and the materials from which they were built, or the sled design used by the D's in *Winter Holiday*.

For my part, I recently became interested in the rope and cordage which was available to the various story participants in the years in which the tales occur because, you see, syn-

thetic yarns were not invented until 1939 (nylon) while Arthur Ransome's last book *Great Northern* came out in 1947

During those intervening years nearly all nylon production was devoted to the WWII war effort, so it follows that the only rope and cordage available during the years in which the twelve books were written would have been made of natural fibre. What were these biodegradable natural products derived from?

First, just to set everyone's mind at rest, the noun 'rope' is used generically in this article because the product is known by numerous other names when referring to the cordage found and used in the marine world. For example, 'lines', 'hawsers', 'rodes',

'sheets', 'pennants', 'bolt ropes', 'man ropes', 'heaving lines', etc. are all made of rope.

The list of plants suitable for providing fibres for the making of ropes and cordage around the world is a long one, but the following list gives some idea of what was used in the distant past and even today: coir, (coconut husks), cotton, flax (linen), hemp, jute, sisal, raffia, manila. And



Coir rope used on an outrigger canoe.

while we will not discuss their properties here, let's not forget other unique lashing products from an earlier time: spruce tree roots used as lashings for building birch bark canoes, cedar tree bark used for lashings and weaving a type of cloth and, although they are not plants, we should also include wool, hides, leather, silk and animal sinews.

**Coir Rope** is made from the husks of coconuts and while it has some excellent properties it is doubtful if it would be found on either *Swallow* or *Amazon* except perhaps in the form of rope fenders. It is of light weight and stronger than cotton rope, but not as strong as manila or hemp rope. In old days it was used as a marine tow rope, the advantage being it floated. It is also used for dozens of domestic and industrial products.

**Cotton Rope** is made from the bolls of the cotton plant. It is not very strong, and rots easily. Being a soft rope it is often used for decorative work. But it too would likely not



Cotton boll.

have been found as rope on the boats, but cotton would definitely have been used for the fabric of which the sails were made. The cotton sail on *Swallow* would most likely have been soaked in tree bark tannin to help preserve the cloth and prevent mildew. The process would have dyed the white cotton reddish brown. *Amazon's* white sail was prob-

ably also made of untreated Egyptian cotton.

**Flax Rope (linen).** I do not believe this product would have been found on either boat but linen sails were common prior to 1900.



Flax plants.

**Hemp Rope.** This rope was often used for rigging, tackles and other purposes on craft of all shapes and sizes. It was frequently tarred to help resist rot. It might also have been used as the bolt ropes on the cotton sails and reef points on *Swallow* and *Amazon* because it is both strong and soft.



Hemp plants.

**Jute (Hessian).** It is unlikely that this product would be found on either boat. Much of jute fibre yarns are woven into burlap type cloth which is used for numerous purposes.

**Sisal Rope.** This rope is considered a cheap version and substitute for manila rope but possesses only 80% of its strength and is not as flexible. I doubt if it would have been used on either craft.



Sisal plant.

**Raffia.** This fibre would not have been used on either craft. It is used for handicrafts and biodegradable lashing material.



Rafia palms.

**Manila Rope.** One of the most popular natural fibre ropes it probably would have been used for halyards and mooring lines and perhaps for the fibre section of the anchor rodes. Manila and sisal ropes can be difficult to tell apart. Manila is smoother to the touch. It was often tarred to prevent rot.

When one considers the above list, all of the materials referred to are totally biodegradable. They do not pollute our fragile planet with synthetic modern plastic material, which can take hundreds of years to degrade, and which pollutes our seas, oceans, rivers and lakes with micro plastic particles which are now being found in our food chain. It makes one ask what have we really gained and at what cost?

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

### Arthur Ransome Ebooks, How and Where to Get Them

by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

Many of us now read ebooks, at least some of the time. I thought it might be useful to provide an list of books by Ransome that are available as ebooks, many of them free and, if not, often inexpensive.

#### What about copyright?

To begin, however, a word about copyright, since that will affect how much a book costs, or if it can be found for free. The length of copyright varies in different countries, and this can affect the price.

For example, in Canada, all 12 of the Ransome stories are in the public domain, that is, they are no longer covered by copyright and you can reproduce and distribute them freely. (They can all be downloaded for free from the FadedPage website, for example.)

However, in the United States, because of its different copyright law, while *Swallows and Amazons* came into the public domain on January 1 of this year, the remaining 11 books are still under copyright.

This explains why you may have to pay a significantly different price for the same book purchased on amazon.com (i.e., in the U.S.) versus on amazon.ca.

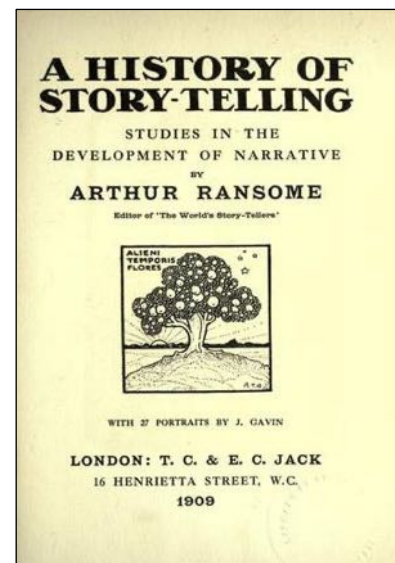
The various websites that I mention in this article all specify that you are not supposed to download a free

ebook unless it is in the public domain in the country where you live.

(If you are interested, a UK site, *The Public Domain Review*, has an interesting page about copyright: <https://public-domainreview.org/what-is-the-public-domain/> The rest of the site is worth looking at too.)

#### Tip:

Do not buy a Ransome ebook on Amazon or another commercial site, whether you live in Canada or in the U.S., until you have checked if it can be had for free on one of the sites I list. (Amazon, for example, will charge you something, even if the book is in the public domain.)



### Ebook Sites

#### Project Gutenberg

Project Gutenberg <<https://www.gutenberg.org>> introduces itself as:

*Project Gutenberg is a library of over 75,000 free eBooks*

*Choose among free epub and Kindle eBooks, download them or read them online. You will find the world's great literature here, with focus on older works for which U.S. copyright has expired. Thousands of volunteers digitized and diligently proofread the eBooks, for you to enjoy.*

If you do a Quick Search for "Arthur Ransome", the following books appear:

*Oscar Wilde, a Critical Study:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/36017>

*Old Peter's Russian Tales:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/16981>

*The Soldier and Death:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/49278>

*Portraits and Speculations:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/65992>

*Pond and Stream:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/40447>

*A History of Story-telling: Studies in the development of narrative:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/62129>

*The Crisis in Russia:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/1326>

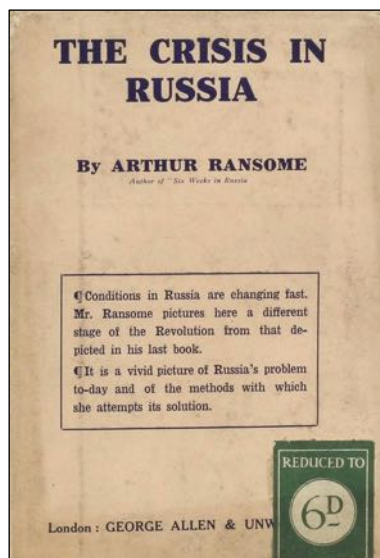
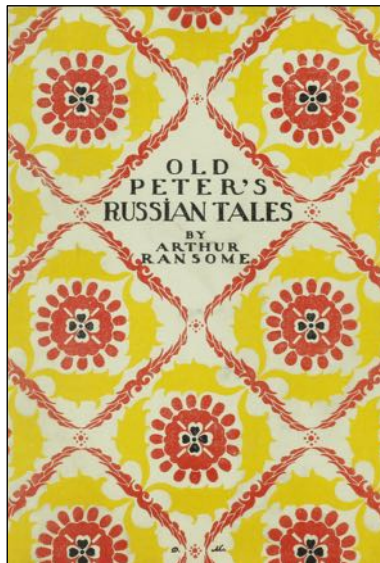
*The Child's Book of the Seasons:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/40448>

*Russia in 1919:*

<https://www.gutenberg.org/e-books/1324>

(The search also shows a number of works not by Ransome; while some were translated by Ransome, I have no idea why the others appear.)



## Internet Archive

Internet Archive <[archive.org](http://archive.org)> is a bit different. It includes a whole range of things, including books, documents, audio recordings, videos, etc., etc.

If you search for “Arthur Ransome” you will get an enormous range of possibilities, including:

- Many ebooks that are still under copyright but are available to borrow, just like from a library, if you have a free archive.org account. This includes all 12 of the stories.
- Some public domain ebooks available for download (the same as at Gutenberg).

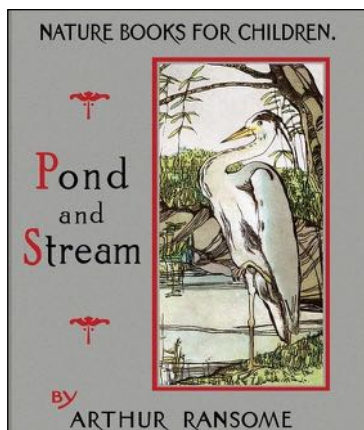
- Some public domain works available as Librivox audio recordings.

(The library part of the Internet Archive means that you can also borrow books *about* Arthur Ransome; try a search for Roger Wardale, for example.)

By the way, the one item on archive.org that does not seem to be on Gutenberg is:

*On behalf of Russia ...an open letter to America:* <https://archive.org/details/onbehalfofrussia00rans>

(Please note that there may be other authors named Ransome, even Arthur Ransome, so other works may show up when you search.)



## WikiSource

WikiSource <[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Main_Page)> is Wikipedia's repository of texts.

It does not seem to have much Ransome material, but you might find other ebooks of interest.

## Faded Page

Faded Page <<https://www.faded-page.com>> provides ebooks of works that are in the public domain in Canada, which may not be the same as in the United States, or anywhere else. As a result, the 12 Swallows and Amazons books, for example, can be downloaded from Faded Page, but you are supposed to be in Canada.

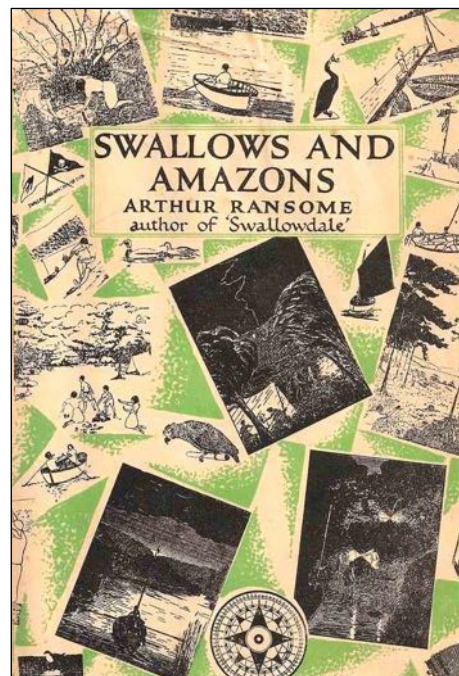
The proviso on Faded Page reads:

“These books are public domain

in Canada (because we follow the Canadian copyright laws), but if you are in another country, you should satisfy yourself that you are not breaking the copyright laws of your own country by downloading them.”

I leave this up to your individual consciences.

To find the Ransome items they have (the 12), you are better to click on the “R” in the Authors alphabet list at the top right (rather than use the search).



## Commercial sites

You can, of course, get Arthur Ransome works from the various commercial ebook providers such as Amazon or Kobo. Of course they have the 12, and various others of Ransome's works.

However, they also have things called *Arthur Ransome - Ultimate Collection* or *Delphi Complete Works of Arthur Ransome*. These are quite cheap, but I have no idea of their content or their precise copyright status, whether in the U.S. or Canada. Take a chance?

## One other site...

The "Sailing Swallow" website has a page <<https://www.sail-ransome.org/ebooks>> listing books by Ransome that are available as free ebooks, as well as books that Ransome read and recommended. You might start here since it provides many direct links.

("Sailing Swallow" was set up to secure the *Swallow* used in the 1974 movie, and to encourage Ransome enthusiasts to sail in her. This task has now moved on to TARS: <https://arthur-ransome.org/home/sail-swallow-and-amazon/>)

I hope this article gives you an incentive to look into other Ransome works that you may not have thought of, or didn't know were available. Have fun.

Please note that there are many, many websites that provide links to free public domain books. I have looked at only a few of them here, the ones I thought most useful. Please send in any other suggestions you may have.

(The trouble with producing this list, and it really is just a list, is that it took quite a long time, for the simple reason that it gave me multiple opportunities to take a good look at the various sources and, time after time, get diverted into reading something other than Arthur Ransome. So if you go looking, be prepared to spend more time at it than you expect.)

## Jibbooms and Bobstays, A Miscellany for Readers of the Twelve Children's Books of Arthur Ransome

by Simon Horn (Montreal, Quebec)

For the past few years I have been populating *The Ship's Library* with my reviews of various Amazon Publications books. I hope people have liked them.

(Of course I would prefer that other members – some of whom I am sure must read – would send in reviews of their own reading material. You may not have paddled up the Amazon in a canoe this past summer, the Ransome 12 in hand for inspiration and helpful tips, but surely you have read something you liked, or disliked. Please, tell us about it.)

I have tried to select Amazon books that are still available on the TARS Stall, so that if you liked the sound of a book you could still get a copy easily. (Of course, according to the latest UK *Signals*, the Stall is "temporarily closed". Hmm...)

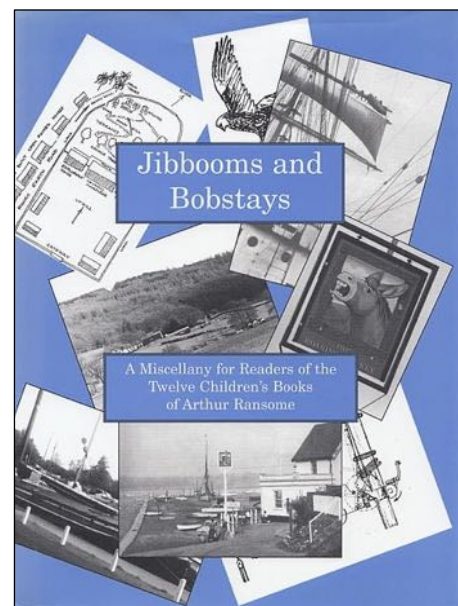
In any case, in this issue I present *Jibbooms and Bobstays, A Miscellany for Readers of the Twelve Children's Books of Arthur Ransome*, which is **not** available on the Stall.

This is one of several books I was given by TARS member Gordon McGilton that I had not yet read. Unfortunately it seems to be even harder to find than most. The Stall does not have it and I have not found any copies on the usual internet used book sites.

That is a pity, since it is well worth reading... if you can get a hold of a copy.

### A Miscellany

The 2003 Amazon Publication is billed as a "miscellany", that is a collection of various information re-



lated to a particular topic, in this case the Ransome 12, that will be of interest to enthusiasts for the subject.

As a railway enthusiast, I might enjoy James Henry Russell's 1978

“Great Western Miscellany. Volume One”, but you might not. However, as Ransome enthusiasts you will enjoy *Jibbooms and Bobstays*, especially since it is one of those something for everyone books.

The book was compiled by Paul Crisp, Trevor Johnston, Claire Kendall-Price, David Jones, Diana Sparks and Roger Wardale, and includes chapters about Lakeland, Broadland and the East Coast, as well as subjects covering almost everything you might stumble across in the books: nautical terms, ships and boats, poetry and poets, people, plants, animals, food and drink, and much more, ending with useful glossaries, both covering general terms and specific Lakeland or East Anglian words and expressions.

As well, Paul Heiney and Jill Purvis provide a step-by step course for learning the penny whistle, and John Irving explains how to star gaze like Dick Callum and know what you are doing.



The “steamer” Tern. (By Nilfanion - [CC BY-SA 4.0](#))

## Questions and answers

*Jibbooms and Bobstays* can answer many questions, and unless you are an amazing expert in everything Ransome related, you will find out things you didn't know.

Here are just a few of the many questions the book dicusses:

### The Windermere lake steamers:

Did you know that today's Windermere lake steamers have the same names that they have always had, but

only one, *Tern*, was afloat when *Swallows and Amazons* was written? Two others, *Teal* and *Swan*, were built in the 1930s to replace older boats, while today's *Swift*, also replacing an older *Swift*, was built in 2020, but to a design that is reminiscent of the older steamers. They are all diesel powered now, of course, but we still call them “steamers”. (p.43)

(*Jibbooms* is over 20 years old, so Wikipedia helped here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windermere\\_Lake\\_Cruises#Fleet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windermere_Lake_Cruises#Fleet))



Trindade Island - Simone Marinho, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

**Crab Island:**

Ransome never visited the Caribbean, so *Peter Duck's* Crab Island was based in part on the South American island of Trinidad. This was not the large Caribbean nation of today, but a “a desert island” some 1000 km off the coast of Brazil. This was the location for the treasure hunt described in Knight's *The Cruise of the Alerte*. That Trinidad also has lots of horrid land crabs! As *Jibbooms* puts it, however, “Ransome makes it a more welcoming place”. (p. 49)

**What is a jibboom or a bobstay anyway?**

From the Nautical Glossary chapter:

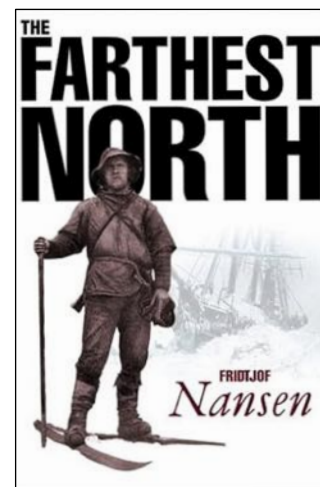
**'Jibbooms and Bobstays':** just one of Nancy Blackett expletives, provoked by keen irritation or ex-

sopic continuation of the bowsprit, serving to extend the foot of the jib and the stay of the fore-topgallant mast, the tack of the jib being lashed to it. The jibboom is attached to the bowsprit by means of a cap and saddle where a strong lashing confines it. A **Bobstay**, made of rope or chain secured to cranse-iron, confines the bowsprit downward to the stem. Its use is to counteract the strain of the foremast stays that draw the spar upwards. Side-ways movement has to be confined by shrouds either side of the bows. One can now understand Nancy's reluctance to be so constrained as these two ship's fittings! (pp. 72-73)

I am afraid that I found this explanation almost more confusing than helpful, and I had to use the Nautical Glossary to look up some of the terms used in the definition. (This is known as “recursion”, see Doctor Who, *Castrovalva*, 1982.)

**Who was Fridtjof Nansen?**

And why was he and his book, *Farthest North*, an inspiration for our explorers in *Winter Holiday*? *Jibbooms* explains Nansen's history, including his first crossing of Greenland on skis, his drifting towards the North Pole in the ice-bound *Fram*, his work as a diplomat, and much more. (p. 97)



There are many more interesting bits, including recipes for stalwarts like bun loaf, Christmas pudding, pork pie and seed cake.

Also, if you have always wanted to play the penny whistle (available for a £, not a penny in 2003) but didn't know how to begin, an amazing chapter gives a full course in how to go about it. Tempting...

**How to get it**

If anyone discovers a way to find a copy of *Jibbooms and Bobstays*, please let us know.

If you are ever in the UK, you can probably borrow it from the TARS Library (soon to be functioning again), but in North America we seem to be out of luck. My thanks to Gordon McGilton for this opportunity.

*Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* is a joint publication of TARSUS (The Arthur Ransome Society USA) and TARS Canada.

The TARSUS coordinator is Mark Purtill, [purtill@alum.mit.edu](mailto:purtill@alum.mit.edu)

The TARS Canada coordinator is Ian Sacré, [gallivanterthree@shaw.ca](mailto:gallivanterthree@shaw.ca)

The editor is Simon Horn, [sjhorn@gmail.com](mailto:sjhorn@gmail.com)

Please send contributions, questions and suggestions for the newsletter to the editor.