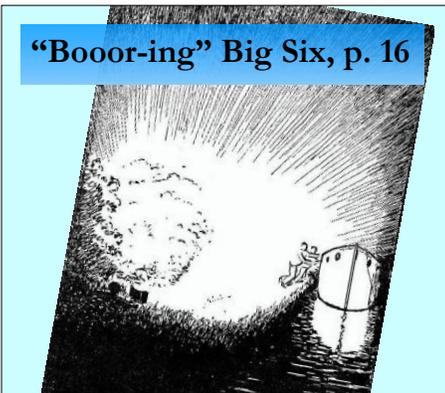
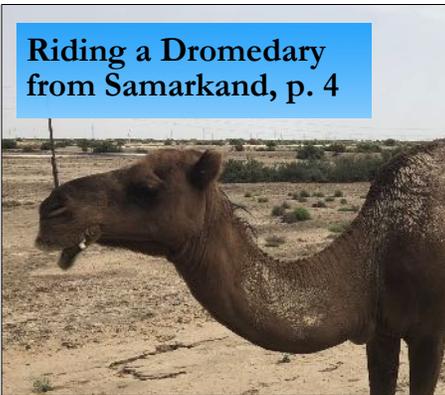




Signals from TARSUS & North Pole News

January 2019

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Ship's Papers — Important information for the Crew



A View from the US Helm

By Robin Marshall
TARSUS Coordinator
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robin@arthur-ransome.org

I hope you all had a Happy Christmas. Very best wishes for 2019 and I hope the New Year will be good for everyone.

As always with the beginning of a new year, it is time to renew your membership. Many have already sent back their renewal forms, and I thank all those that have. Remember, if you would rather do this online use the following link: http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk/TARS_Subscription_Renewals.html Have your ships papers number ready and be sure to check the amount for overseas mem-

bers. This is an easy way to renew and you do get the current exchange rate, plus a portion for the charges Paypal makes.

I am not sure if many members use Facebook but TARS now have a presence on the The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook group, plus our own Swallows and Amazons in North America, and another plain

Arthur Ransome group. It is a good way to keep up to date on things. As we are separated by many miles it is also a good way to discuss our favorite books and post pictures. I would recommend taking a look. (If you go to facebook.com and simply search for "arthur ransome", links to all related groups will appear. Ed.)

One TARSUS member, Andrew Fisher, was able to make the trip to the lakes last year. You can read of his trip and see some of his pictures in the Northern section of the current *Signals*. Well done Andrew.

Have a fun winter if you can. Please note that my new home telephone number is 941-726-1974. Feel free to call if you have any queries.

Robin.



Greetings from the North

By Ian Sacré, TARS Canada Coordinator
750 Donegal Place, North Vancouver, BC V7N 2X5
gallivanterthree@telus.net

Greetings Canadian TARS Members.

The Christmas and New Year Holidays are once again over for another year and now like many I find myself wondering just how quickly all those days went. But at

least the brain wracking of wondering what to give to our nearest and dearest can be set aside for another ten or eleven months, causing, at least for me, a big sigh of relief.

I have five grandchildren ranging in ages from thirteen to nineteen with the whole mob being divided between my two daughters. Three or four years ago, at a loss as to what to buy them because of their interests changing al-

most week by week, I decided to consult with other grandparents much wiser than I. The sage advice I was given was that the best bet would be to give them money! And so to add a little mystery to the gift-giving exercise, chamois leather 'pokes' were constructed here at home and filled with an appropriate number of loonies, which seemed to weigh a ton. Not quite gold, but close enough. The idea proved to be a great success and

has thus been repeated over the years since that time. Of course inflation has had to be allowed for and early December causes a mad search in my daughters' homes for the mislaid now empty leather pokes! I am still left with what to give my daughters and their spouses but at least the gift selection problem has been more than halved!

Reading the latest news from TARS HQ it would seem that a decision has yet to be taken about what to do regarding the escalating costs of printing and mailing *Signals* and *Mixed Moss*. Faced with ever diminishing TARS membership numbers I believe it is inevitable that something will have to be done, the question is what? Many thoughtful comments on the subject were received from Canadian

members and submitted to the powers that be at HQ for consideration and reflection. In the comments, a view shared by some was the reluctance to read large volumes of text on line. On this issue there was a recent interesting article in the press which suggested that on-line data is not assimilated as well by many individuals when compared with the same information in hard copy format held in the hand and read.

As for our own *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* received by email, I

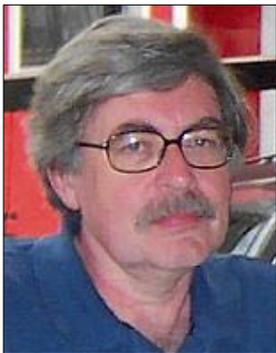
personally always make a hard copy and enjoy perusing it in comfort while sitting in an armchair, with a cup of tea and cookies beside me. Bliss! Our Canadian TARS Membership seems to be holding steady and I have already received over 4/5ths. of the expected renewals. I would gently remind those few who have not yet renewed that their memberships expired at midnight on the 31st. December 2018.

A number of members have mentioned to me that that they really

should produce something for our own publication, *Mixed Moss* or the parent version of *Signals*. Winter is the perfect time to do some creative writing so please do try your hand at producing something for our editor Simon or the other editors. For those who have already submitted material, a big thank you!

Wishing you fair winds and calm seas.

Warm regards,
Ian Sacré
TARS Canada Coordinator



A Note from the Editor

By Simon Horn, sjhorn@gmail.com

Welcome to *Signals from TARSUS/North Pole News* for January 2019.

I ended the previous issue with several unused articles “in the bank”, as it were, and this has made producing the current issue much less stressful. Please note that

the cover date says January, and incredibly I have actually got it out in January, and right in the middle to boot. My thanks to all who sent in material.

In this issue

As you will see, people have been having adventures. *Kanchenjunga's Cairn*, begins with **Alistar Bryden's** promised “Riding a Dromedary from Samarkand to Istanbul”.

Next, in “What We Did on Our (separate) Holidays” Canadian **Ian Sacré** and Brit **Alan Hakim** describe trips to their respective home territories — and how they missed each other in the process!

Robert Dilley explains how his Baltic holiday picture “A View of Tallinn”

would have been familiar to AR.

In “Ransome's Illustrations”, in *Mrs. Barrable's Gallery*, I consider the illustrations Ransome produced for *Swallows and Amazons*, starting from the 1938 edition, and the pictures by Clifford Webb from the earlier editions.

In *Dipping Our Hands*, **Richard Mills** talks about how his discussion of *The Big Six* with a group of 10- and 11-year-olds did not go as well as hoped, as his title — “Current-Generation Sixth Graders' Assessment of *The Big Six*: Boor-ing!” — makes clear.

The Ship's Library continues to grow. I follow up my review of Amazon Publications' *The Twilight Years* with the second volume: *London*, and **Molly McGinnis** provides a small addition

to her review of John Tucker's Snake Island Kids series by introducing the latest volume, *Those Sugar-Barge Kids*.

David R. Elms shares his review of Sophie Neville's *The Secrets of Filming Swallows & Amazons* (1974), and his efforts to get an ebook version of the Ransome 12 that he can take with him wherever he wishes.

In *Pieces of Eight*, **Martha Blue** shares her appreciation of Brian Selznick's combined picture novel and written book *The Marvels*, and lastly **Molly McGinnis** explains how there was “No Moss on Uncle Jim!”.

* * *

The next issue is due in May. As always, it won't appear if you don't send anything in. Short items or long, photographs and captions, drawings, comments, letters to the editor: all is welcome.

I hope you enjoy the issue.
Simon

P. S.: In the last issue, the table of contents mistakenly credits Lorne Brown for the review of “Those Snake Island Kids”, though the article page gets it right. My apologies to Molly McGinnis.

Kanchenjunga's Cairn — Places we've been and our adventures

Riding a Dromedary from Samarkand to Istanbul

(Not a water-based adventure, but even our heroes enjoyed a holiday on land from time to time.)

By Alistair Bryden

Every two or three years, TDA Global organize their “Silk Route Tour” from Beijing to Istanbul, a distance of about 13,000 km, taking five months. This summer, I arranged to join the tour in Samarkand, in Uzbekistan, and cycle for the last seven weeks of the tour to Istanbul, through Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey. The daily distance travelled, ranged from

around 60 km up to 160 km depending on road conditions, and height climbed. There were about 20 riders on the trip and we combined camping with a night in a hotel every four or five nights.

I started the trip as a novice cyclist; I had done a bit of training but probably not enough so I eased slowly into the

schedule, wearing two pairs of bike shorts, applying “Butt Butter” (that’s what it says on the jar) and building up distance as I went. All of the cyclists who started in Beijing were hardened cyclists by the time I got there, so I didn’t try to challenge them.

The first country on my route was Uzbekistan. The Silk Route cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan have been on my bucket list for many years and I finally got to tick them off. I would encourage anyone to go there. The travelling was easy, the people were friendly and the restored architectural and historical marvels of Central Asia were outstanding.

Turkmenistan was a bit of a different story. With massive gas reserves, it is moderately wealthy but, unfortunately, there is an authoritarian regime in power and a personality cult around the President... his picture is everywhere. The country is mostly desert and 40 degrees when we were there. The capital is a vision of white marble, sadly with Stalinist-inspired architecture, but few people seem to live there; the streets were empty. Earlier this year all of the drivers of dark coloured vehicles in the capital were pulled over by the police and presented with an ultimatum to paint their cars white or lose them. The president likes white. But again, almost all the people we met except the officials were helpful and friendly.



Alistair on the Bosphorus.

We then crossed the border into Iran and cycled across Northern Iran, stopping in Tehran and then up through Tabriz to Turkey. If you listen to the Western media, Iran is a terrifying place, full of religious fanatics devastated by economic sanctions, where women are downtrodden and voiceless. The reality was nothing like the media view. The people were friendly and charming and very secular. They welcomed tourists. The scenery and country were amazing. The history went back millennia. The streets were bustling and shops were full. The women

did wear black cloaks but were keen to talk to us and the young girls wore fashionable clothes under their cloak. Iran is not by any means all a bed of roses, as Canadians, Brits, Americans and Aussies needed to be accompanied by a guide at all times and the women on the tour did need to cover



Dromedaries, as promised.

their hair and wear long clothes that covered them from head to foot even while cycling. I won't take a view on Iran's politicians and foreign policy, which is a different story, but as a tourist I'd go back.

Finally Turkey: again a country that

has been much in the news. Again at a day to day level, the reality (or at least our reality) was different. More kind, proud and generous people, amazing scenery and unrivalled history. We felt safe. Istanbul is a true world city with a population twice the size of London and four or five times the size of Toronto. I could write a whole article about Turkey but will content myself with encouraging people to visit.

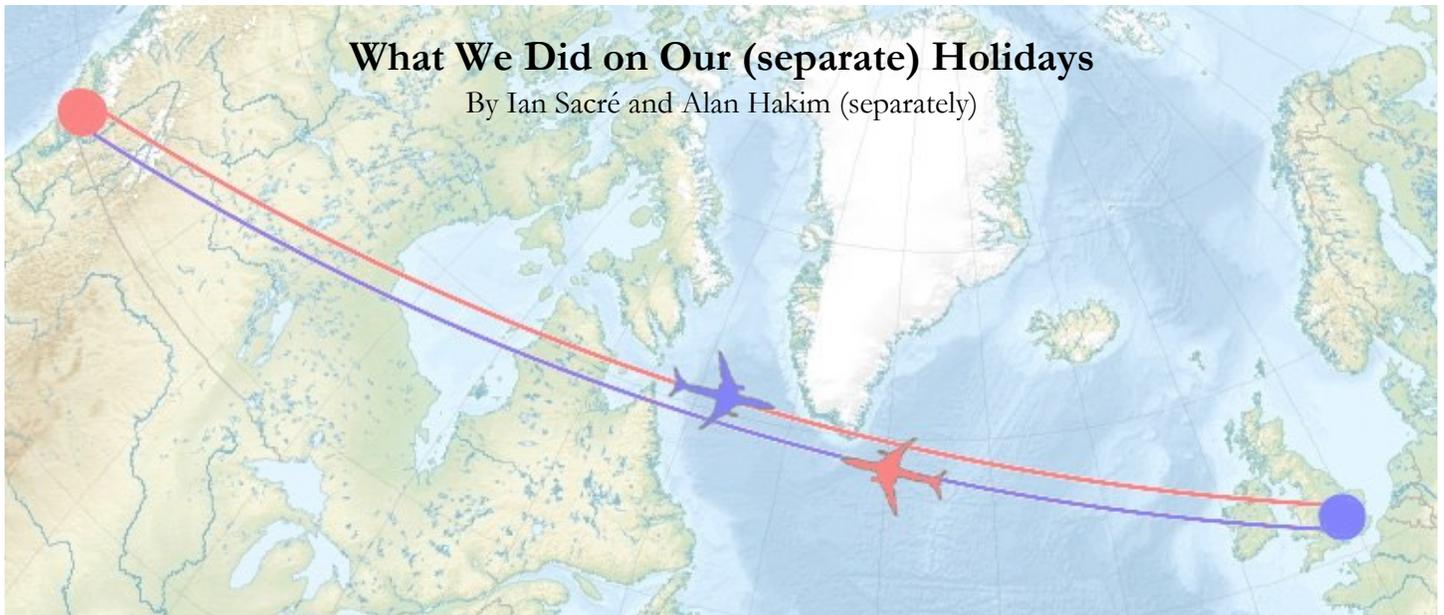
How was the biking? I managed an average of about 100 km per day, climbs were tough and from time to time I'd catch a ride in the van up the steepest hill but I had a real sense of achievement getting to the sea at Istanbul. For anyone with a classical background Thalassa! Thalassa! For anyone saying "I'm too old for that" the average age of the cyclists was over 60 and if I could do it with basically no cycling background, so can you.



The Registan square in Samarkand.

What We Did on Our (separate) Holidays

By Ian Sacré and Alan Hakim (separately)



Towards the end of last year, by chance Ian Sacré and Alan Hakim decided to take vacation trips across the Atlantic at almost precisely the same time, thus precluding any possibility of their meeting up. I like to think of them waving to each other as their planes passed south of Greenland. Read Ian's story by following the left column from page to page, Alan's by following the right. Ed.

In Search of the Great Northern Diver's Range

by Ian Sacré

The plan, if it could be called a plan, started to take shape in the dark wet days of January of last year. I had read Arthur Ransome's *Great Northern* several times over the years but was personally unfamiliar with west coast countryside of Scotland and the Scottish Islands. Previous visits to Scotland had been confined basically to the lowlands and hiking on the Isle of Arran. But a re-read of *Great Northern* convinced me that I had not seen any of the real Highlands and it was time to address this gap in my education.

The first task was to purchase a decent map. As usual, Michelin came to my aid in the form of map number 501 – Scotland – scale 1 cm to 4 km or 1 inch to 6.31 miles. Perfect for planning purposes. I decided to fly into Glasgow as it seemed to be the perfect jumping off place to begin the adventure. The next task was to twist the arm of an old family friend to accompany me and share expenses. When I outlined my very vague plan, very little arm twisting was required and with Sherlock Holmes-type zeal, flights were booked, a car was reserved and a remote cottage chosen a few miles south of Oban to form a base of operations for the middle week of our almost twenty day

What I Did in the Holidays

by Alan Hakim

Over the years, I have visited Tars in a number of parts of the world – Australia, New Zealand, Japan, the USA, so on my first visit to Canada (only the west, admittedly) I thought I might look up my contact there, Ian Sacré, your co-ordinator. No such luck: he was in Scotland for the same weeks as I was Canada. Even Alistair Bryden, of Alberta, was away, cycling from Samarkand to Istanbul. The lure of dromedaries was too great.

But your ever helpful editor, Simon Horn, even though in another country, suggested I might like to describe my adventures. I'm sorry to say they mostly concern the weather.

My first stop was Vancouver. Many years ago at school, I was taught that of all places in the world, the climate most like Britain was in Vancouver. Very true. When I emerged from the terminal, it felt exactly as if I hadn't left London at all. After all, it was only an hour since I left; the rest of the long flight had been absorbed by the time zones.

I had come to see my second cousin. When I tell you that last time I remember seeing her was when she came to see

expedition. As Holmes was wont to say, "The game was truly afoot!"

Arriving in Glasgow on the 6th September, we found our hire car and proceeded to a small hotel just up the road in Dumbarton to catch up on sleep. After almost twelve hours of flying made up of two flights, cramped seats, airport waits and an eight-hour time difference, a few hours of R&R were essential.



East shore, Loch Lomond.

The following morning we set off, heading for the east side of Loch Lomond and on to the Trossachs, to Loch Katrine and Sir Walter Scott country. There is a small steamer on the Loch which carries passengers on a sightseeing voyage up the loch. The vessel, also called Sir Walter Scott, has a dead weight of 115 tons, is 110 feet long with a beam of 19.0 feet.

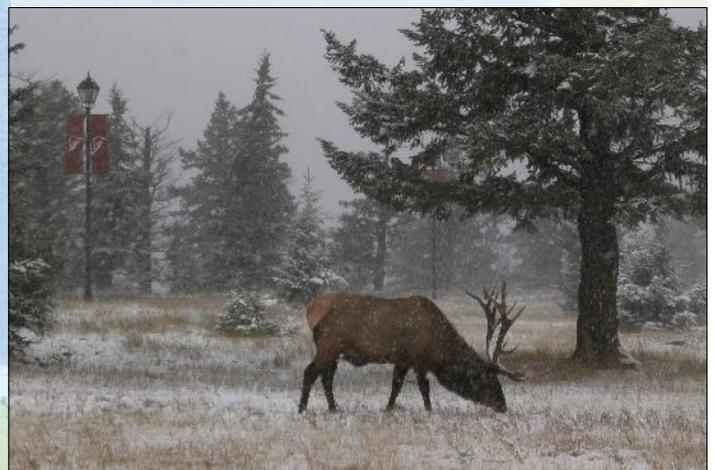
She is propelled by her original triple-expansion steam engine. She is a riveted ship and was built in Dumbarton by William Denny and Brothers in 1899 of iron which was bolted together. Then after trials she was taken apart and the parts barged up Loch Lomond and then carried by horse and cart to Loch Katrine where she was reassembled permanently with rivets and then put into operation. The old girl has been providing service on the loch for 118 years! Those Scottish engineers certainly knew their stuff and Roger Walker would have been overjoyed.

Continuing northward, a night was spent in the charming village of Killin with its old water mill and river rapids tumbling under the single lane old stone bridge. We moved onwards to skirt the banks of the Caledonian Canal, which

me at school in 1950, you will realise that neither of us is very young. But we are still active, and she was able to show me parts of the city which were a pleasant surprise. Why had nobody told me about its magnificent situation? Most importantly, it didn't rain.

My next plan was to go to Jasper by train. Everybody said, "Are you going on the Rocky Mountaineer?" Do they think Tars are made of money? In any case, it isn't a real train at all. They get out on shore when it gets dark. No, I went on VIA, which keeps going for four days to Toronto. A surprising number of passengers were on for the long haul, but overnight to Jasper was a good experience, which I recommend unreservedly, a sort of party on wheels. If you book a sleeper, meals are included. You have random table companions, and all are interesting. Then you meet them again in another part of the train. It had 27 cars, and is the only train I have ever used which departs from two platforms. The front leaves 10 minutes early, in order to be attached to the back before the scheduled departure. On arrival, my pedometer told me I had walked 1½ miles (2 km) while on board.

We left at midday, and travelled all afternoon up the Fraser River Canyon – another spectacular sight of BC which doesn't get enough publicity. I had booked the standard "Some Like It Hot" upper berth, not realising that, unlike European wagons-lits, you don't have any floor to stand on when dressing, because that's the main thoroughfare for all the other passengers. Contortionist skills come in useful.



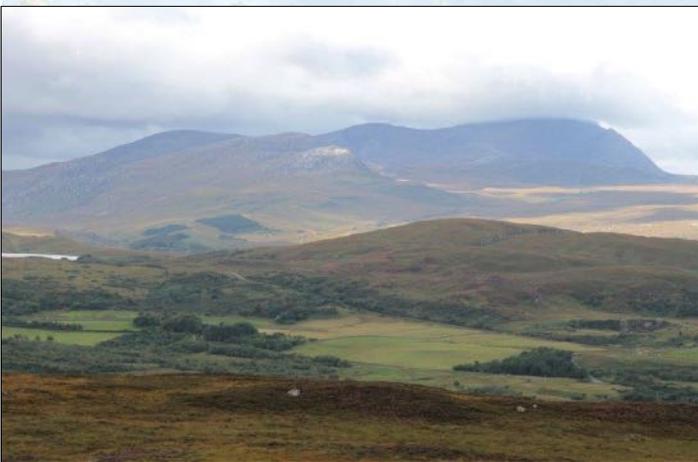
Elk, at Jasper.



Killin Mill.

consists of a series of dug canals and connecting lochs stretching from the Firth of Lorn to Inverness. It was built by the famous Scottish canal and bridgebuilding engineer Thomas Telford, whose works are seen all over Scotland and England.

From Inverness we drove north east to John O’Groats through gorgeous sunlit country of green grasslands, heather and bracken-covered rolling hills and moorland. The settlement, a rather grotty tourist trap, seemed to be one enormous parking lot. It takes its name from a Dutchman, Jan de Groot who, in the fourteen hundreds is believed to have run a ferry from mainland Scotland to the Orkney Islands. The village was not a place to tarry and with no Great Northern Divers to be seen we hurried westwards and found a place to perch for the night in Thurso from where we could look across the bay to the high cliffs of Dunnet Head rising steeply from the sea and brilliantly lit by the setting sun.



Kyle of Tongue.

Editor, you wanted adventure? When I went for a shower in the morning, the door handle came off with me locked inside. My Dick Callum skills were tested, and I did get out before Toronto.

VIA trains are notorious for being late, so we were all surprised to arrive in Jasper at 7 a.m., an hour early, just as it was getting light enough to see we were in a blizzard. Fortunately the guest house I was in was run by an ex-Parks Service man, and they fitted me up at once with winter clothes. I had only packed for September. But I had come to see the Rocky Mountains. Mountains? What mountains? None were to be seen in any direction. Removed for cleaning, I assumed. My host took me around several local beauty spots, mercifully uncrowded in this weather, looking for wildlife. They were staying under cover too, until we found a single elk at the entrance to Jasper Park Lodge.



Rocky Mountains invisible in the distance.

My faith in the Rockies was restored on the second afternoon, when they suddenly emerged from the low cloud, and were indeed magnificent. No more wildlife, but I gained kudos with my host, reporting fresh bear droppings on the trail I had walked. (Jasper shops have signs, “Bear Spray sold here.”)

On then to Edmonton AB (not Titty, but Alberta) where I was staying with my friends from Adelaide, South Australia. All was well at first, but then the weather saw I had arrived, and it started to snow again. The locals were furious. They had no Spring this year, winter lasting till May, and now their Fall had been lost too. Perhaps not: I’m on my way home now, and the forecast for next week is warm

Dawn broke partly cloudy and clear, and we breakfasted on an enormous Scottish repast. Then with the car loaded we drove westward to the Kyle of Tongue, close to the remote north west corner of Scotland and in this sparsely populated land the search for Great Northernns began in earnest!

Our now southward route took us past Lochs Craggie, Loyal and Naver, crossing the beautiful eastern lower slopes of Ben Loyal and the western slopes of Ben Kilreck to Inveran. We passed by vast areas of reforested conifers, which crept up the mountainsides and ended short of the summits in clearly defined horizontal forest edges; in some places the evergreens had already matured and were in the process of being harvested temporarily leaving ugly clear-cut swaths on the hillsides. It was clearly 'tree farming' in a perfectly controlled sense and we knew that new seedlings would shortly green up the valleys once again.

And so we came to the Isle of Skye via the bridge crossing at Lochalsh and we spent the first night near Broadford in the little village of Breakish. It proved to be the perfect place to explore part of the island before travelling on to Dunvegan and the castle, which overlooks the beautiful Dunvegan sea loch.



Dunvegan Castle.

In the village of Dunvegan we found a small country hotel where we roosted for another night. While driving the narrow roads on Skye the words of that old favourite The Skye Boat Song kept running through my mind. I had always imagined that Bonnie Prince Charlie, after his defeat at Culloden and on the run, had been carried over to Skye from the mainland. But after driving over the Lochalsh

again.

Edmonton is not your typical tourist town, but there is plenty to do when it isn't snowing. The thing I liked best was the Provincial Legislature, which is open to visitors from anywhere for an excellent guided tour.



Alberta's Provincial Legislature.

They maintain many traditions of the British Parliament, which I had visited almost exactly a year earlier. They are particularly proud of the mace, which represents the authority of the Queen. When the first session of the Parliament was held in 1906 (in a hockey stadium) they realised too late they hadn't ordered one. No mace, no authority, so a local craftsman was asked to make one quickly. This he did, from bits of old plumbing, and they were so pleased with it they used it for 50 years.

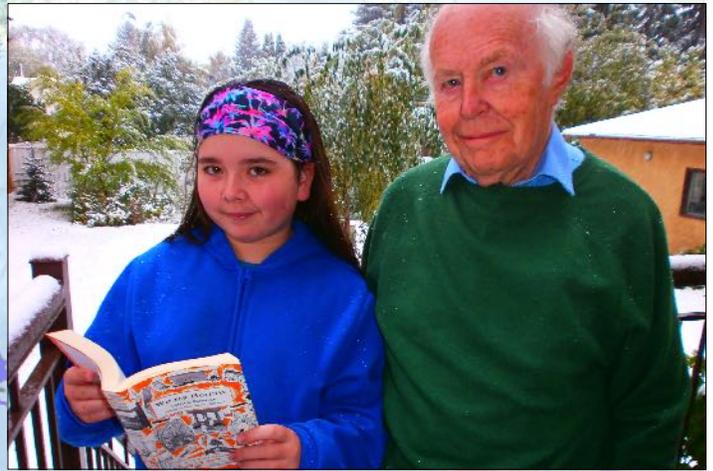


Alberta's regalia.

Bridge for the first time I realized the words of the song simply did not fit my long held mental picture, for the narrows could not have been more than a cable's width. (600ft.) The third verse of the song goes:-

Though the waves heave, soft will ye sleep
Ocean's a royal bed
Rocked in the deep, Flora will keep
Watch by your weary head.

A ten-minute crossing at the most did not even warrant a nap, let alone a sleep! But the cook in the local pub, an avid, amateur historian came to our table and kindly cleared up my confused thoughts. It appears that Flora MacDonald, who was visiting the Outer Hebridian Island of Uist at the time felt sorry for Prince Charles, disguised him as an Irish house maid, obtained travel permits from her uncle, found a crew of six and sailed over the Minch from Uist to Skye. Now indeed the strait between the Hebrides and Skye (the Minch) can at times be a nasty piece of water to cross and well might the weather described in the second verse have been in play.



TARS Global Reading Day in Alberta.

I'm assured that once it has snowed, and it's proper winter, Edmonton has all sorts of winter festivals and it's a really lively place. I did have one day of really beautiful late summer weather, the Canadians are delightful, and the snow made an impressive background for my Global TARS Day picture of us reading *Winter Holiday*.



Torrisdale Bay, west along the coast from John O'Groats

Loud the wind howls, loud the waves roar,
Thunderclaps rend the air
Baffled our foes, stand by the shore
Follow they will not dare.

Did Flora MacDonald land at Dunvegan? Who knows but I would like to think she did. Incidentally, she spent nine months in prison for helping Prince Charles and she wasn't even really on his side of the conflict! What was Charles doing in the Outer Hebrides? I do not know either, but he had been on the run for about five months. From Skye he found a ship that took him back to France.

The lonely coves and bays of Skye failed to provide even a fleeting glimpse of our quarry so we pressed onward to our cottage on the Kilninver estate, nine miles south of Oban. The old manse was to be our home base for a week. Set at the top of a low escarpment the cottage gave us a stunning view of Loch Feochan below us, and the Firth of Lorn beyond.

The rainy days with intermittent bright sunshine between the southerly, wind-driven squalls provided us with spectacular rainbows as the teaming rain rushed over the beautiful sea and landscapes and filled the burns to almost overflowing.



Loch near Kilninver Cottage.

One day we drove down to Easdale, a small island to the south west of us, and a five minute ferry ride from the mainland. Easdale was famous for its slate, which was used for roofing tiles and shipped all over the British Isles and in fact the world. The quarries, very close to the sea and deep, were flooded in an enormous storm many years ago and the damage was such that it was not economically feasible to continue operations. The island's fame now lies in its annual stone skipping contest which is held every year in one of the flooded open quarries. But alas, despite its



Dunstaffnage Castle.

remoteness no Great Northern Divers were to be seen, though we did catch sight of a cormorant sitting on a buoy in the channel.

On another day, while the region was battling a strong gale with winds gusting over 50 knots, we went to look at the Crinan Canal built at the turn of the 18th century. Only nine-miles long, it cuts across the top of Kintyre peninsula and allows smaller vessels to avoid the long and often dangerous doubling of the Mull of Kintyre. The craft moored in the bay nearby at Lochgilphead seemed to be exposed to the full fury of the gale and danced and gyrated on their moorings, some rolling over thirty degrees. We chatted with one gentleman who was watching the antics of his yacht and finally he said, "I can't watch what she is doing any more, I am going home!" It was simply too rough for him to row out and tend to his little vessel.

On the day before we left we hiked inland on the estate to a lonely, isolated little loch up on the moors which seemed like possible habitat for our birds because our factor had told us there were lots of fish fry in its waters that would provide an easy source of food. But after puffing up the hills for an hour and arriving on its shores we were greeted by no more than a pair of gently quacking mallards!

And so it was time to leave this beautiful place where we had spent so many exhilarating days. We never did see a Great Northern Diver but it did not matter really, we have plenty of them to see and listen to in Canada, and besides, the search provided the necessary excuse for the trip if one was needed.

A View of Tallinn

This view must have been familiar to AR, as he and Evgenia married here. It shows the lower town of Tallinn, Estonia, from the upper town. Prominent is the spire of St Nicholas Cathedral. To the left the towers with conical roofs are part of the old town wall. In the

left background is the Gulf of Finland.

This picture was taken in August as part of a Baltic tour including Copenhagen, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Helsinki and Stockholm.

– Robert Dilley



Are You on Facebook?

Despite the many problems with Facebook, it does enable groups of like-minded people to share and exchange. (These are the groups I can find. Let me know if you find any others — Ed.)

The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/762560473886537/
(This is a closed group, so you will have to ask to join.)

Arthur Ransome's Swallows and Amazons in North America: www.facebook.com/groups/tarsfriends/

The Arthur Ransome Society in New Zealand & Australia: www.facebook.com/tarsnz/

The Arthur Ransome Group: www.facebook.com/groups/2612950856/

Mrs Barrable's Gallery — Art from our members AR

Ransome's Illustrations

By Simon Horn

Twice a year the Friends of the Westmount Public Library, here in the west-end of Montreal, hold a book sale to raise funds for the library. It's a good book sale, very big, and you never know what you might find among the usual suspects.

Last year my wife Maryann unearthed a copy of the 1931 "New illustrated edition" of *Swallows and Amazons*, more specifically the 11th reprint from 1937, still with the pictures by Clifford Webb. It would be October of 1938 before a new edition would appear with Ransome's own illustrations.

I received or bought my copies of "the 12" between 1959 and 1961, more than 10 years after *Great Northern?* was published, so it is very strange to look at "Also by Arthur Ransome" at the beginning of the 1937 edition and see the list end with *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea*.

Of course, the pictures were the most obvious difference between the 1937 edition and my original copy ("New Edition, Type Reset, 1958"). I thought it might be interesting to compare the illustrations from the two versions.

It's well known that Ransome had trouble with illustrators. Steven Spurrier was commissioned to illustrate *Swallows and Amazons*, but Ransome rejected Spurrier's pictures totally, and only the end-paper map that we all know so well was kept. So the first edition had no pictures at all.

Clifford Webb was asked to produce the illustrations for the second edition. According to Roger Wardale, in his book *Ransome the Artist*, our favourite author was publicly polite about the result but "privately scathing" (p. iv) especially about a picture of Titty facing the audience (which was not used).

To be fair, I have to admit that I start off preferring Ransome's illustrations to Webb's, but that is probably prejudice, since I knew Ransome's first. Nonetheless I will make a stab at comparing them.

Some pictures illustrate different scenes entirely in the two editions, so I will start by comparing some that show the same scenes.

Starting with "Making Ship's Papers", I was struck immediately by how

much darker Webb's picture is compared to Ransome's. This is partially because Ransome doesn't bother with shadows at all; really, the sun would have to be right overhead! Perhaps more important, however, Ransome's line drawing gives a much greater sense of space, and the sky takes up half the picture. The Swallows are on the peak in Darien, looking out over the broad expanse of the lake towards Wild Cat Island, the high hills seeming small in the background and a single branch above them framing the view. The children's faces are turned away, either partially or totally.

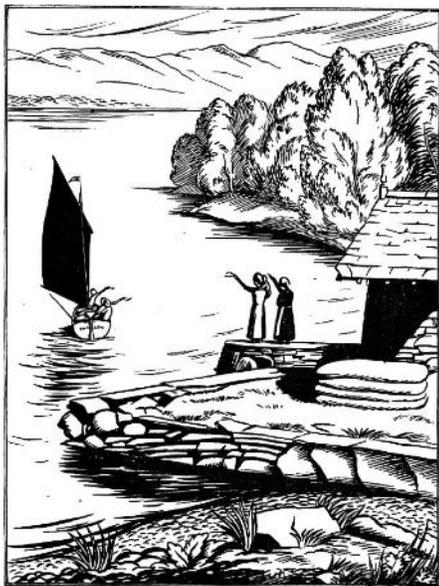
Webb's picture is more in close up and more of the children's faces can be seen. The lake, however, cannot be seen at all, only a hill or two are in the background.



MAKING THE SHIP'S PAPERS Facing p. 20



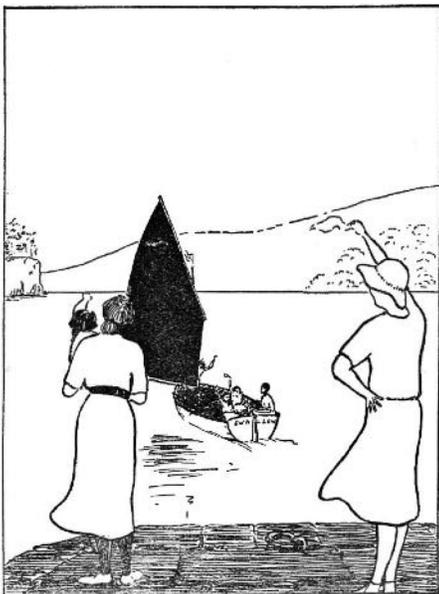
MAKING SHIP'S PAPERS



THEY SET SAIL

Webb's picture "They Set Sail" provides more space, since we see the parts of the shore on both sides of the lake. The foreground shows detail of the boat house, with Mother and nurse waving goodbye. The *Swallow* is in the middle distance. Webb's style continues to require a clear direction of light and shade.

In Ransome's equivalent, "The Start of the Voyage", the same scene is shown more in closeup. The figures



THE START OF THE VOYAGE

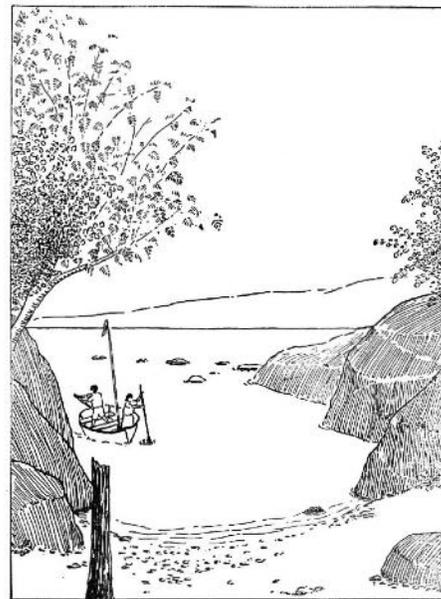
of Nurse, holding Vicky, and Mother (both facing away) frame the *Swallow* as it sets out. The faces of the children look back towards the viewer, but are too far away to be made out. The far shore can be seen, and once again the sky takes up half the picture. The only shadow is that of the *Swallow's* sail on the water.

Webb's picture "The Hidden Harbour" is roughly equivalent to Ransome's "Feeling Their Way In". In Webb's the Swallows are pulling their boat up on to the beach in the secret harbour. The picture is fairly dark with trees and rocks framing the scene. There is no horizon line. When you compare it to Ransome's drawing, you see yet another difference: Webb's pictures tend to be drawn with the viewpoint, the artist, standing higher up and looking down on the children.



THE HIDDEN HARBOUR

Ransome has *Swallow* coming into the harbour, with John sculling over the stern, while Titty fends off with an oar. The viewpoint is from lower down. There are still no shadows, or faces. And the sky still takes up half



FEELING THEIR WAY IN

the picture. Once again we have a greater sense of space, but perhaps this time Webb's interpretation catches the "hidden" nature of the harbour better. Ransome's picture makes the action look easier than the text does.

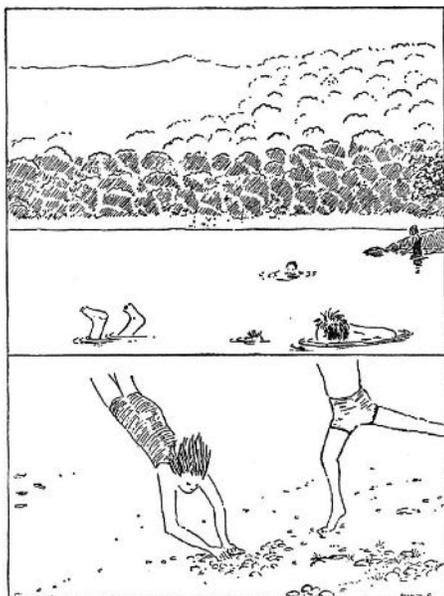
"Pearl Diving" also shows clearly the difference between the two artists: Webb (the artist) is standing on the shore, looking down at the children, who are swimming. The ends of Tit-



PEARL DIVING

ty's legs can be seen above water. An overhanging branch, rocks on the shore, and hills across the lake frame the scene.

Ransome's picture is much closer to the children – if it was a photograph, the photographer would have been in the lake with them, since the view is bisected by the surface of the water. You see Titty scabbling on the bot-



PEARL DIVING

tom for “pearls”, her feet sticking out above the surface, and Roger, “swimming”, head above water and one toe on the bottom. The hills across the lake are higher and more massive. (Still no shadows or faces, though.)

A last comparison: Ransome's “Leading Lights” takes place in the dark;



LEADING LIGHTS

Webb's could be in broad daylight. Ransome's shows the two glowing candle lanterns, lined up with the bows of *Swallow* in the beach. Webb's shows one lantern only and the water is out of sight. Ransome's technical accuracy is clear here. After all he knew what he had written.

To summarize, I still think Ransome's drawings are better. I think they catch the spirit of the books, the children's enthusiasm for making their own way in a wide world that was both imagination and reality. And they are (almost) always technically right. Ransome apparently rejected Spurrier's pictures “as not being nearly accurate enough” (*Signalling from Mars*, p.192).



LEADING LIGHTS

What about Ransome's problem with portraying faces? Some people somewhat churlishly say that this just shows he wasn't that good an artist. Maybe so, but on the other hand, perhaps he knew what he was doing. In a 1931 letter to Clifford Webb about the illustrations for S&A he says:

“I'm more than ever convinced that that is the right way with such things, keeping the figures such that any child can identify itself with any character, and throwing the whole energy of the artist into setting the adventure in its romantic landscape that no child can invent but that every child needs as food to its own fancy.” (*Signalling from Mars*, p.194)

Useful Links

The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) website: <http://www.arthur-ransome.org.uk>

All Things Ransome, a website devoted to keeping articles, artwork, and anything related to Ransome: <http://www.allthingsransome.net>

The Arthur Ransome Wiki, an encyclopedia on Ransome, his life and works: http://arthur-ransome.wikia.com/wiki/Arthur_Ransome_Wiki

Dipping our Hands — Personal relationships with the books

Current-Generation Sixth Graders' Assessment of *The Big Six*: “Booor-ing”!

By Richard Mills

A few years ago, through the long-standing relationship that my local service organization¹ has with the several public schools in my community, I found myself in the first of eight years of teaching “Language Arts”² to a handful of top-performing 10- and 11-year-olds.

My assignment to this post – made by a very optimistic and adventurous classroom teacher – was a most interesting experiment for all concerned, as I had, and have, no qualifications for teaching at the elementary-school level, having previously taught only university graduate students. But I was given the job, and my group of seven top-scoring sixth-graders would meet for 90 intensive minutes each week, critiquing their homework compositions and reading and dissecting our current book.

We would often focus on setting – the time, the place, and the ambient culture within which the story was set – with an eye to expanding the experience horizons of the students. “Suppose you had lived, like Jim Hawkins, in the 18th century world of R. L. Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, or, like Brian, alone and in a survival situation in the Canadian wilds of Gary Paulsen’s *Hatchet*? What would it be like then/there . . . ?”

Or perhaps in ‘tween-wars England? Why not try that one on them?

Let’s see . . . might there be an author who has spun a tale capable of engaging the interest of my group, and whose development of the setting would provide the richness to give us a true sense of life in that time and at that place? I, who have lived and breathed “The Arthur Ransome ‘Twelve’ since before the final six of them appeared, did not take long to select *The Big Six* to meet this need.

You say, Arthur Ransome, of course, but why *The Big Six*? My first thought had been *Swallows and Amazons*; why not start at the beginning? Well, I got an instant veto from my “real” teacher partner on the ground that I would never get past the giggling and snick-

ering over the name “Titty” to get any serious work out of my group. That left only the non-Walker stories to choose from, and I chose “Six” for its detection/mystery/whatever plot elements.

Well, the whole thing was no-go. Despite the richness of the Norfolk setting, where rivers were more important than roads, money was measured in shillings, sixpence, ha’pennies – and “bobs” and “tanners”. A world with chemist’s shops, ginger beer in stone bottles, wherries, staithes, and dykes. The social strata were hinted at, with the professionals (doctor, solicitor) and the boatbuilders, the policeman (our town, not vastly larger than Horning, has a dozen or more), and the fisherman with his great cruiser.

But, bottom line, it didn’t sell. My failure as teacher, I guess. I couldn’t get them past their reactions to the story to get to looking at the setting. “Boring” (pronounced in sing-song “BOOOR-ing”) was the verdict. “Even the characters weren’t real; they didn’t even have real names. Tom? Bill? Pete? Dick? Joe? Come on!” “And where’s the mystery? You knew who was doing it from the first.” They did agree that the final photography ploy almost saved the story. Oh, well.



THE MOMENT

¹The Rotary Club of Hollis-Brookline

²Reading, formal composition, and some introductory literary criticism and narrative-fiction analysis

Ship's Library — Books we've read and want to share

The Twilight Years - London

Reviewed by Simon Horn

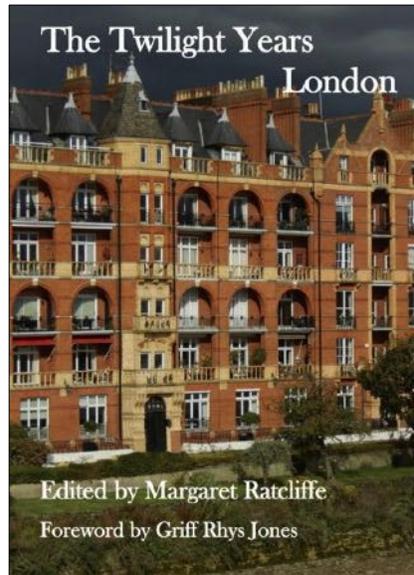
If you didn't like the first volume of this pair, *Hill Top*, you probably won't like this one either, since it is more of the same, but without the appendices about the argument over the BBC television version of *Swallows and Amazons* to make it more interesting.

The *London* volume is really little more than a seemingly interminable list of billiards games and discussions at the Garrick Club, but without the content of those discussions, some of which must have been fascinating.

Volume 2 chronicles Ransome's continual annoyance with noisy neighbours, his fishing or sailing expeditions, and the poor man's endless medical problems. In a few cases the editor has included letters from Ransome to his correspondents, and these are the most interesting entries.

Where *Hill Top* was both more interesting and more upbeat, probably because the Ransomes were in the Lakes, which they loved, I found *London* pretty depressing, probably because Ransome's medical difficulties seem so constant.

I also had a problem with the parallel chronologies. *London* covers 1950 through 1963, where *Hill Top* runs from 1956 to 1965. I can see why the editor decided to split the diaries in two, since a single volume would have been even less readable, and probably too heavy to lift. Still, while reading *London* I often found myself confused about what happened when. In the *London* volume, a single sentence summarizes each month the Ran-



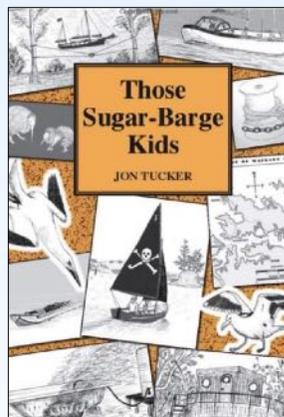
some's spent at Hill Top. Looking back, I think I might have been better to re-read the related *Hill Top* entries as they appeared.

Both volumes could have been improved by the inclusion of a timeline off the important events in Ransome's life over the period: when a boat was bought, when a cruise was

taken, when he was in hospital, when he received his honorary degree from Leeds, etc. This would have made the whole narrative more accessible.

Another problem that struck me as I read: poor Evgenia doesn't show up much at all aside from an occasional reference to G or Genia. This can't be blamed on the editor, of course, but I can't help wondering what Genia's life was like, and what she did with her time while Arthur visited his clubs.

As I said in my review of Volume I, *The Twilight Years* are not books you would give to someone you were trying to interest in Arthur Ransome. They are books for people who are already devotees. Even then, I think, they have a limited appeal. For what it is worth, the subscribers list at the end of Vol. 1 has more than 240 names, Vol. 2 has less than 190. This is a pity, since for historical purposes alone the books are important, but it is not really surprising.



Those Sugar-Barge Kids

Fourth in Jon Tucker's series, "Sugar-Barge Kids" is the most adventure-packed and richest yet. And don't worry about reading the series from the beginning, the characters reveal themselves from the start – no introductions needed. Night hunts to see Kiwi birds, Oyster wars, mud galore, storm, fog, capsizes, life in a converted sugar barge, and a weapon that would have had Nancy or Daisy dancing with glee.

Three fine maps, and the usual special treats for Ransome lovers. The Kindle edition is a bargain at \$3.99, and a 6"x9" paperback is \$12.95 US from Amazon. — Molly McGinnis

Back to Swallows and Amazons

By David R. Elms

A year or so ago I became a member of the Facebook group “Arthur Ransome’s Swallows and Amazons in North America” (www.facebook.com/groups/tarsfriends/) and made an inquiry about a book by Sophie Neville who played Titty in the 1974 movie *Swallows and Amazons*. I was pleasantly surprised when Sophie “friended me” on Facebook. She suggested that I might be interested in reading the book that she had written about the making of the movie. I found the book on the Kobo website for only \$5.34 Can (and apologized to Sophie for the small royalty).

This was the review I posted on Kobo:

The Secrets of Filming Swallows & Amazons (1974) by Sophie Neville

I could hardly put the book down; it was delightful. I loved the way Sophie

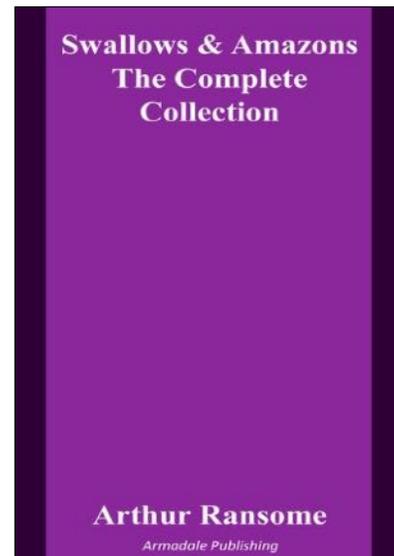
described the events of filming along with actual wording (with errors) from her diary. AR’s books played a major part of my life as a youth in Canada after immigrating from the UK in 1958. Coincidentally, the first time that I visited Windermere was in 1974, the same year that the movie was released. It was years later that I ‘discovered’ the movie in Canada. As soon as I finished Sophie’s book, I watched the movie again (for the several dozenth time); this time besides enjoying the story, I also enjoyed looking at the various anecdotal comments from Sophie – wind or sun in one scene and not in the next or looking at the poor freezing actors enjoying their swim. Well done Sophie and thanks for sharing your experience.

After reading her book I decided to re-read the entire series, this time again on my Kobo. I found the entire series for a pittance of \$1.99 CAN, comprised of 3,896 pages on my little e-reader.

Unfortunately, the e-reader version has eliminated all of the pictures but their memory from the dozens of times I’ve read the books is still with me. (I should mention that Sophie’s book on the e-reader does have many photographs to aid in the memory of watching the movie.)

The Kobo synopsis states:

The Swallows & Amazons series of children’s novels written by Arthur Ransome which follow the adventures of a group of children which occur between the two World Wars. The stories are mainly based around



sailing and are largely set in England although some of the novels do involve journeys to other places.

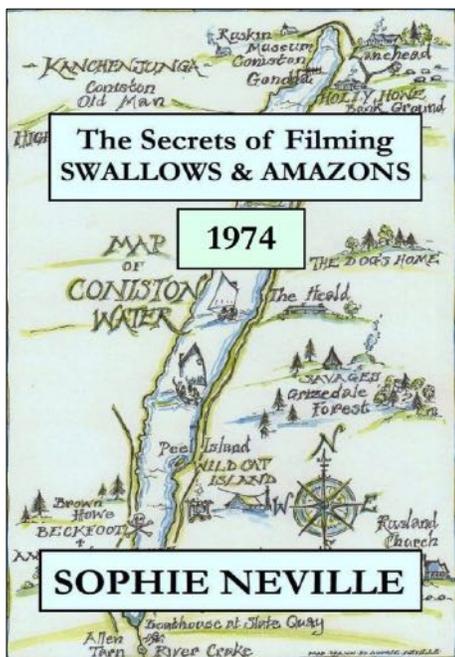
This collection includes all 12 novels which were released as part of the series.

Ed. note:

After a bit of investigation, it would appear that *Swallows and Amazons, the Complete Collection*, without illustrations, is available from the Canadian Kobo site (www.kobo.com/ca/en), but not the American one (www.kobo.com/us/en). This is because Canadian copyright ends 50 years after an author's death, while in the U. S. it goes on longer.

The individual books, with illustrations, are available in both countries. Needless to say, the illustrated individual ebooks are more expensive.

They are also available in Kindle format at amazon.ca or amazon.com, generally cheaper and some much cheaper. So shop around.





Pieces of Eight — The Junior Pages



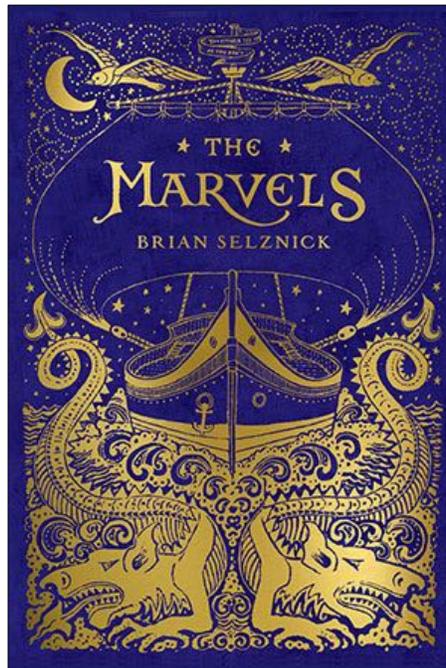
The Marvels by Brian Selznick

A review by Martha Blue

I've always liked picture stories; Asterix, Tintin, Graphic Shakespeare, in short, the cartoon comic-strip style.

Last year I read *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick, which was adapted into Martin Scorsese's Oscar-winning movie *Hugo*. This book introduced me to the unique style of Selznick's – continuous pictures followed much later by continuous prose story-writing.

The Marvels is a set of two distinct stories, the first of which is pencil-drawn, with detailed and vivid visual description over about 400 continuous pages. It is set in 1766 and as I turned the pages I slowly learned that a boy had stowed away on a sailing ship called the *Kraken*, on which a play (*The Angel and the Dragon*) is being performed for the crew. During the performance there is an actual storm, and since no one is on watch, the *Kraken* is wrecked



with only two survivors – read it for yourself to discover who survived!

Suffice to say the survivors find themselves washed up on an island where one quickly dies from their exposure at sea. A fire is made but whilst the

remaining survivor sleeps it spreads and engulfs the whole island and all seems lost! Fortune is on the horizon, literally, in the shape of a passing ship. I also like how one of the survivors was a dog called Tar!

We are then taken to London where our survivor is taken in by a half-built theatre. We see images of him helping backstage during various performances, all of which are significant in the following written story. We are given snippets of what follows through newspaper cuttings or letters pinned up on cork-boards!

“Of course, the real thrill will be in watching this lucky child as he grows up and discovers his great family's history, the strands of time that reach from him all the way back to the unforgettable shipwreck of 1766” (*London Theatre News*, 1888, *The Marvels*)



Down several generations we watch as one disaster follows another, all told through dramatic images of revelation... up to a certain point.

The second story begins in 1990 and explains, this time in words, the story that had come before in pictures. We meet Albert Nightingale, the creator of that story, who had related it to a friend called Billy Marvel who had then illustrated the story, but who died in 1989.

In this related tale, A. Nightingale has a nephew called Joseph Jervis who runs away from his boarding school and makes friends with a boy called Frankie. Frankie is always chasing after a dog whose name he doesn't know so he is always trying to find out what the dog's name can be! Meanwhile Joseph finally finds his uncle who eventually decides to house him until his parents come home from their foreign cruise. Albert keeps his house as if it is still the 1700s, and he even cooks food every day and lays it on the plates so it looks as if the owners of the house have just finished their meal! In another room, the drawing room, there is a lit-up Christmas tree with presents under it! In every

single room in the house it is the same – old-fashioned furniture, pictures and rugs. Fires burn in every grate and Joseph wonders why the house is like this, but as he is tired and has a burning fever, he goes to the room his uncle told him he could use and he falls asleep. As the weeks go by he helps his uncle around his house, and, slowly unfolds the story of the Marvels, their theatre, and the part his uncle plays in it! Story-within-a-story and fictions built on truths – this reminded me of the writings of Arthur Ransome since he, too, used his own life experiences as material for his stories. I'm sure that Captain Flint is modelled on Arthur himself! It is, no doubt, a challenge,

when reading anything, to separate fact from fiction.

The theatre in the tale is actually based on the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, London. Apparently, 18th century sailors came to London to help rig and build these theatres!

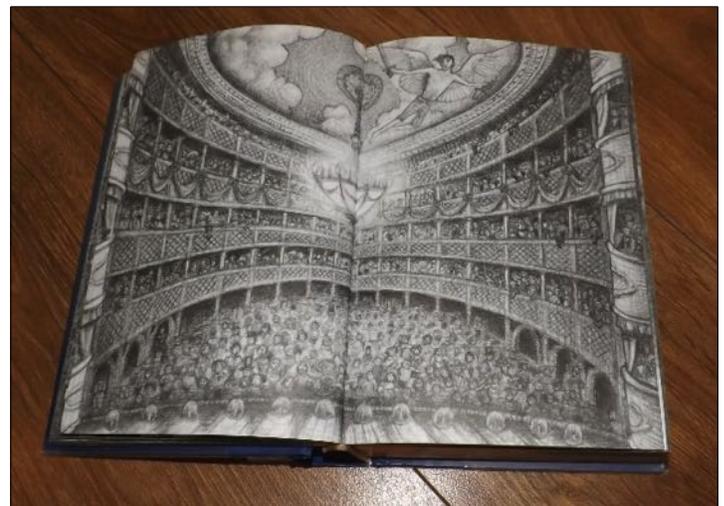
Mystery, fictional families; a mysterious but not fictional house which you can actually visit in Spitalfields, London, England, a living museum, a time-machine! Take a look:

www.dennissevershouse.co.uk

“Is this a true story?”

I said: “It is now.”

(Wim Wenders, *The Act of Seeing*)



No Moss on Uncle Jim!

By Molly McGinnis

Where had Uncle Jim been, when he collected all these treasures? These were taken from their places and thrown about the houseboat when it was burgled in *Swallows and Amazons*.

“green and scarlet painted gourds, that were relics of Captain Flint’s travels”

No one can resist playing with gourds. They’re painted, carved, and decorated with seeds and beads all over the world. Gourd rattles are among the oldest musical instruments, and the brightest are from Mexico. Most start as “calabash” gourds (*Lagenaria siceraria*), which are so useful for food, musical instruments, containers, and toys that they spread from Africa to the New World long ago. So long ago, in fact, that *Lagenarias* were long thought to be American, like the *Cucurbita pepo* (squash/pumpkin relatives) gourds on the far right.

Captain Flint had tomahawks also, made by American Indians, so I suspect his gourds were Mexican or Amerind maracas. The American continent is rich in metals from the furthest north of Canada and Alaska to the tip of South America—plenty of territory for Uncle Jim’s prospecting.

“a little ebony elephant from Colombo”



Colombo is a city in Sri Lanka, which was Ceylon – and British – when Uncle Jim was prospecting there. Tiny ebony elephants are still very popular there. If Uncle Jim was mining or prospecting, he’d have been looking for sapphires, rubies, tourmaline, topaz or some of the many other gemstones Sri Lanka was, and is, famous for.

“a little jade image of Buddha that Captain Flint had bought in Hong-Kong.”

‘Pretty Polly,’ said the parrot, as the head of the idol dropped on the floor.”

Statuettes of Ho Tei, the Laughing Buddha, are by far the most popular, but how could Polly get that head off? Maybe Uncle Jim’s Buddha was a Kwan Yin, the female Buddha.



“Captain Flint bent to pick up the fallen head, and a broken emu’s egg cracked under his feet.”



The emu is in Serendip sanctuary near Melbourne, Australia, where the egg was collected.



(Emu egg and emu: [Dick Daniels, Wikimedia Commons](#))

“leather cushions from Omdurman”

Ondurman is a large city in Sudan, south of Egypt in eastern Africa. The Red Sea is to its east. The British took over the Sudan and Egypt in 1898, and there was a famous battle in Ondurman in that year, so maybe Uncle Jim was fighting rather than digging for

gold. 120 years later, the Sudan and countries around it still produce attractive leather cushions like this one.

“a bamboo flute from Shanghai”



The Shanghai flute would have been a dizi, unusual in that it’s blown almost in the middle of the flute. Maybe that unusual style is why he brought his dizi home. Almost all other side-blown flutes are like the ones to the right, blown near the end cap.

Fife player, photo [Linda Fletcher, Wikimedia Commons](#)



P.S.: Confused? Shanghai is the biggest city in China. Hong Kong was under British rule in Ransome’s time and has never to this day quite merged with mainland China.

For maps visit geology.com/world/ to see maps. [Wikipedia](#) will tell you more about the countries.

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

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