

Notes on Arthur Ransome's boats

(See also The Arthur Ransome Society (TARS) website:

www.arthur-ransome.org.uk)

Slug 1920: 17 ft dinghy sailed off Reva (Tallin) "the boat leaked like a sieve and it says much for Evgenia, that after their first eventfull spills and sinkings, she was still enthusiastic." (Notes)

Kittiwake 1921: even smaller and less sea worthy but having at tiny cabin. However the bunks were too narrow for either of them to get a decent night's sleep aboard . Sailed off Riga (Tallin). "There was never such a boat for capsizing. If I shifted my pipe from one side of my mouth to the other I never knew what might happen." (Autobiography p 301)

Racundra 1923 - 1924 their first new build: gaff rigged ketch 30 ft long, beam 11.5 feet 4.5 feet with the centre board up. Much delayed launch and completion. Sailed from Riga (Tallin) around North Baltic. Writing to Evgenia or in March 1924 from the London Boat Show "we are jolly lucky to have got such a stout lump of a boat as Racundra so cheap. Not one of the boats shown, though some of them were much bigger, had anything like her cabin. I wouldn't care to live in any one of them unless alone, certainly not with anything less than an angel as a sailor and an archangel as a cook. Anybody with stiff white feet would make one of these boats impossible in five-minutes while in Racundra one can rub along for weeks with storms inside as well as out. Plenty of room for cyclone and anti-cyclone." They married in 1924 on receipt of his divorce from Ivy.

Nancy Blackett: 1935 – 1938: A R's first Hillyard built in 1931 as Spindrift; later known as Electron and renamed by A R as Nancy Blackett. She was (is) an excellent sea boat, heavy to sail short handed but with poor accommodation especially for Evgenia. As far as we know Evgenia never made overnight passages in her. "Evgenia took against Nancy from the start because of the basic simplicity of the little tailor paraffin stove to starboard of the companion way, and a little white earthenware housemaids bowl to port into which water had to be poured, but she still crewed for Ransome regularly on short trips." (Notes). AR and Peter Tilbury delivered her from Littlehampton to Pin Mill in September 1935.

Selina King: 1938 – 39: 12 ton cutter built by Harry King and Son at Pin Mill: 35 ft overall draft 5 ft with two full length settee berths, a little stove and coal locker, a writing table and a more substantial galley. A R wrote in January 1938 "the new boat has its internal accommodation planned by Genia, who guaranteed that if I built it, she would take up her old job as in Racundra. She wants to call her Selina ." (Letters). AR and Genia had a short season sailing her in November and December 1938 concluding on December 27th with the words "came aboard at 1130. Lit fire. All dry and well. She is a grand ship. Nice sunny day. Wind N W". (Notes).

1939 was overshadowed by the outbreak of war. In September, A R sailed Selina to Lowestoft where she spent the duration of the war in a shed. Told by doctor to give up the boat because it was too much for him. "I am giving up my big ship on doctor's orders and am hoping to replace her with a much smaller, easier run vessel (without having to spend money. I shall get enough for the old to pay for the new), a sort of marine bath-chair for my old age... A comic little boat, with two masts, soa as to keep each sail small and light to handle." (Letters).

Peter Duck 1947 - 49: Laurent Giles ketch built by Harry King and Son at Pin Mill; 28.4 ft overall, 8.7 feet beam. A R's instructions to Giles was for him to design a "ketch-rigged bath chair". Unfortunately he lost confidence in Giles' design and in the boat's construction, compounded by his cracking his head on a low beam on sitting down! Evgenia shared AR's disaffection - under sail "she looked ridiculous". In rain she leaked from everywhere, especially the main hatch. Various experiments with the sails and ballast were unsuccessful in enabling her to go about readily.

However, both enjoyed a good season aboard her in 1947. No sailing was reported in the log in 1948 and in 1949 AR discovered that all the lead ballast had been stolen while laid up in West Mersea!

Lottie Blossom 1: 1951 - 52. Commissioned after seeing and liking and having a trial sail aboard *Norvad* and following chartering a Hillyard five tonner (*Barnacle Goose*) on the East Coast in the first half of September. "With incredible idiocy we have bought a new six-tonner which is to be launched on the 1st April. Bermuda sloop. Two cabins. 8 hp engine. 350 square feet of sail. 27 ft 4 inches overall by 7 ft 8 inch beam and 4 ft 3 inches draft - making bankruptcy loom before us" (Letters) .

"This is the first time I have ever known a boat-builder keeping, so to speak, an appointment." (Notes).

Dennis Cullingford recalled Evgenia's fury when AR enveloped her in the lowered sail on their return at the end of the season (Notes). "Talking of *Lottie minor* with identical hull but tiller steering and a real single-hander which *Lottie* be can never be" 8th September 1952 log entry.

Lottie Blossom 2 1953 - 54. Hillyard 5.5 T as *Lottie Blossom 1* but with a aft cockpit, similar sliding door and interior arrangement to *Lottie Blossom 1* but with a 10 ft cabin and longer berths. They had two excellent seasons in her including a voyage to Cherbourg in 1953 and again in 1954 with AR aged 70.

"AR was not quite a sailor who wrote children's books in his spare time". (Notes)

"Fools build and wise men buy" (Racundra's First Cruise).

Born 1884, met Evgenia Petrovna Shepelina in 1917 when she was Trotsky's Secretary and while he was covering the Revolution for the *Daily News*. Died 1967; Evgenia in 1975.

"A yacht is a pleasure boat, a boat that gives pleasure... This pleasure is given in so direct and personal a way that we feel discomfort until we can thank the boat for the pleasure she gives, so that she must have a name. And this name, whatever it is, gathers to itself associations till it has a magical power of evocation, like the name of some scrubby human being, which for its mother has angelic attributes perhaps perceived by no one else". Diary entry opposite 25th April 1952.

Comments by Peter St John Howe in H O A N 27, Winter 1992:-

Ragged Robin is, in the best Hillyard tradition, a go anywhere boat. She has cruised all over the Channel area and down to the Mediterranean. Commissioned by A R from David Hillyards in 1951 at a cost of £1,500 and named *Lottie Blossom*. The next owner was an eminent medical man as dedicated to fashion as to medicine with the result that he changed her port of registry to Cowes, considered to be a smarter name to display on a yacht's stern! She was apparently well maintained and not overworked because her next owner (Rushworth-Lund) said that when he bought her she was in excellent condition and that her sails were barely stretched. He took her down through the French canals to the Mediterranean. She has had 4 owners since and her condition is all but original. Her Stuart engine has given place to diesel, her sails are white instead of tan, and her sheet winches have been moved. Otherwise she is as AR left her.

And in HOAN 31, Autumn, 1994:-

Ragged Robbin was a splendid partner but this was to be our last voyage together. I had no doubt that her first owner, A R, who had inspired my love of sailing, would have approved of our time together not least our 1000 miles sailed single-handed between September 1991 and July 1992.

E F Evans