

PEOPLE HEADINGLEY



Arthur Ransome 1884-1967
Author

As a child, my favourite author was Arthur Ransome, and on my weekly visits to the library, I would search the shelves for his books. It was reading the adventures of the Swallows and Amazons in the Lake District, and those of Dick and Dora and their friends in the Norfolk Broads, that inspired me to become a children's writer.

When my own children became similarly addicted, we acquired the complete series of Ransome's books, and one summer my daughter smuggled all twelve hardback volumes into the car to take on holiday. In his day, Arthur Ransome's adventure stories were as popular as today's Harry Potter sagas.

They still have huge appeal to children who envy the freedom of Ransome's characters to sail their small boats, camp on an island and explore the wild countryside, unfettered, for the most part, by the restraints of adults.



Ash Grove

Arthur Ransome spent his early childhood in Headingley. He was born in 1884, at 6 Ash Grove, an event that is now commemorated by a Blue Plaque. One of his earliest memories was of seeing "the sun, like a red-hot penny in the smoky Leeds sky." His father was Professor of History at the Yorkshire College, later to become the University of Leeds.

In his autobiography, Ransome recalls how the horse-drawn omnibus which used to start at the Skyrack, had straw on the floor to keep the passengers' feet warm. The alternative transport was provided by horse-drawn trams which had their stables by The Three Horseshoes. The fare cost one penny and progress was so leisurely that young Arthur was often able to keep pace with them by trotting along the pavement.



Balmoral Terrace

At first, through an arrangement with family friends, Arthur was educated privately in Adel, with Eric Rucker Eddison, the son of a Leeds solicitor. The boys' governess, Miss Glendenning, lived by the Shire Oak. She was always collected in the Eddison's dog-cart and would pick up Arthur on the way. In time, this kindly teacher was replaced by a series of tutors, some of whom the boys teased unmercifully.

Later, before being sent to boarding school in Windermere, Arthur attended a day school on Headingley Hill. He usually travelled there by the horse-tram, but would sometimes run all the way in order to save a penny. He was rather a chubby child and the image of the future celebrated author trotting, breathlessly down Headingley Lane is rather an endearing one.

The family lived in various houses in Headingley. From Ash Grove, they moved to 2 Balmoral Terrace, and their final move was to 3 St Chad's Villas, opposite St Chad's church (later Moorlands School, now Ascot Grange Hotel).

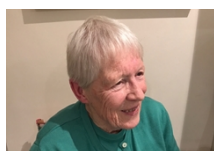


St Chad's Villas, Otley Road

There is no doubt that Ransome was something of a maverick. Whilst working as a correspondent for *The Daily News* in St Petersburg, he became a friend of Lenin. He met and married his second wife, Evgenia Shelepina, in 1924, who was Trotsky's secretary. He was recruited by MI6 as a spy and was almost certainly a double agent.

In the 1920s he put this life behind him and on returning to Britain, he and Evgenia took a cottage in the Lake District. They lived there quietly and he devoted himself to writing the children's books for which he became famous.

Arthur Ransome died in 1967 and his archives are housed in the University of Leeds.



Pat Belford

Children's author and Headingley resident, 2021

<https://www.waterstones.com/author/pat-belford/28729>

See also <https://arthur-ransome-trust.org.uk/>