

Swallow



Arthur Ransome sailing Swallow on Windermere

Key Statistics

Length 13 foot 6 inch

Beam 5 foot

Description

Built in Arnside around 1912, Arthur Ransome's Swallow was designed for use in shallow estuaries such as the River Kent. Swallow had a full length 6 inch wooden keel rather than a centre board which could be lifted up and down. Swallow carried ballast (lead weights) to provide stability. Swallow was designed as working boat able to stand up to rough weather rather than as a racing dinghy. Swallow could not go as close to the wind as a modern dinghy and took longer to tack. Swallow was a more stable boat than Amazon which was narrower.

Swallow could also be rowed, though a great deal of effort was required to get going.

In the late 1930s Swallow was kept in the estuary at Arnside by a local teenager

Prequel

1904 Arthur Ransome, aged 20, stays with the Collingwood family on the east side of Coniston Water and learned to sail their dinghy, Swallow, with daughters Dora, aged 18 and Barbara, aged 17 .Arthur Ransome had holidayed at Nibthwaite at the south end of the lake as a child. He met William their father in 1903 by chance in the Copper Mines Valley at Coniston. William had been John Ruskin's Secretary and was an artist and writer. Arthur Ransome is first attracted to Barbara and then Dora, who he proposes to 1908, but is rejected.

History by Year

1912 circa Swallow II built in Arnside. The boat probably does not have a name at this point

1925 Arthur Ransome returns to England with Evegina his second wife, who is Russian and buys a house in the Lake District

- April 1928 Ernest Altounyan, Dora's husband and a Syrian doctor of part Irish descent buys two dinghies for £15 each, which are named Swallow and Mavis in Barrow-in-Furness so that his children learn to sail whilst on holiday at Coniston. The Altounyan children were in part the role model for the children in Swallows and Amazon. Amazon is based on the Mavis. The cost of the boats is shared with Arthur Ransome on the understanding that one of the boats became Arthur Ransome's at the end of summer.
- Oct 1928 Altounyans return to Syria. Arthur Ransome takes Swallow to Windermere, which is nearer to his home at Low Ludderbarn in the Winster Valley on the other side estuary from Arnside
- 23 March 1929 When sailing Swallow on Windermere, Arthur Ransome gets inspiration to write Swallows and Amazon
- Jan 1933 Arthur Ransome visits Crossfields in Arnside to arrange for Coch-y-bonddhu to be built for his fishing friend Charles Renold. He record in his diary that he talked to Francis Crossfield, now over 80, the builder of Swallow. Francis is the younger brother of William Crossfield, who set up the Beach Walk Boatyard in the 1890s



Francis Crossfield

- 1934 Charles Renold gives Coch-y-bonddhu back to Arthur Ransome as he prefers fishing to sailing.
- 1935 Arthur Ransome sells Swallow. Roger Fothergill a 15 year old from Arnside buys Swallow from a Windermere boatyard and takes her back to Arnside. Modifies Swallow to improve her performance, including fitting a bowsprit and jib
- 1939 World War II breaks out. Roger Fothergill arranges with Crossfields to sell her. No further records of the boat exist. Roger Fothergill went onto become a head of a yachting school, partner in a yacht charter business, and leading ocean yachtsman, dying in the West Indies in 1999. In the 1950s he owned Kestrel, a Morecambe Bay Prawner, which he kept at Millom. Two of Roger's subsequent yachts Craignair and Tern IV are recorded in the National Historic Ships Register.

Replicas

There are a number of replicas of Swallow, including the one made for the 1974 film.