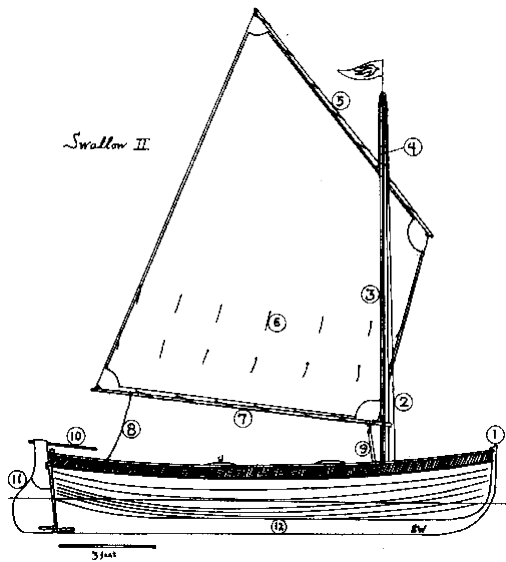


A Letter from Roger Fothergill an owner of Arthur Ransome's original *Swallow*



a proposed sketch plan of the Swallow by SKW

Roger Fothergill bought the original *Swallow* from Arthur Ransome, as a young man of 14, and kept her several years. Fothergill went on to a life in ships and sailing vessels. Here is a recent letter from him about the *Swallow*. He also included a sketch of the changes he made to *Swallow* showing a near full-length addition along the bottom of the keel, with ballast inset amidships. His description of *Swallow*'s weather helm and his correction of that problem by adding a jib matches the experience of other dinghy sailors using a lug rig with the mast set well aft like *Swallow* had.

Mr. Fothergill went off to World War II as a young man and left the *Swallow* in a boatyard for sale. He never learned who bought her. So the *Swallow* disappeared from history - so far as we know now. Keep asking and we may learn more!

8 - 1 - 99

Dear Mr. Wier,

Many thanks for your letter and the enclosures. My ownership of the "*Swallow*" is getting to be a long story. It is over 60 years ago that I bought her, 1936 or '35. I was 15 or 16 years old and now in my 80th year. So you will appreciate that my memory of her is not exactly sharp. I bought her through an agent & never met Ransome himself though I know something about him. At that time his first three books about the *Swallows* and *Amazons* had only recently been published & I read them all and was quite fascinated to be the owner of the *Swallow*. And though I basked in the reflected glopy of being her hew owner, I never guessed at that time that she would later become a sort of "Cult Model" for the Arthur Ransome Society which, I think, has quite recently arisen. If I had I would probably never have dared to make some slight alterations to her; which purists may now consider to have been little short of desecration.

In extenuation, if it is an extenuation, I may say that one of my chief interests in sailing craft is their masting and rigging. I have never owned a vessel, and I have owned a few, that I did not sooner or later modify her rig in some fashion, occasionally quite extensively, this all started with "*Swallow*." When I first owned her she was, as far as I remember, just as you portray in your drawings. I found that she had plenty of 'weather helm' so I set a small jib on her, tacked down to the end of a short iron (or steel) bumkin about a foot long bolted to the topmost breasthook inside the stem & stayed with a bobstay to an eyebolt down the stem, a

'pigstail' hook on its upper side carried the tack cringle of the jib. Also the few lead pigs she carried loose in a sort of box inside her, I had cast into a single piece & secured to a slightly larger keel which I added to her, all I can say now in excuse is that these two alterations greatly improved her sailing qualities.

Following a chance remark to a casual acquaintance I met about three years ago in this Island the Arthur Ransome Society contacted me asking for any details I could give them about 'Swallow' but I could give them no more than I am telling you now. I owned her for about 4 years but had her moved from Windermere Lake to the Kent Estuary at Arnside which runs into the head of Morecombe Bay on the N.W. coast of England. Which raises another matter. It has been said that the firm of William Crossfield & Sons of Arnside built Swallow. She was certainly not built on the Lake. But I had known Fred Crossfield all my short life & if they had built her Fred would certainly have recognized her & told me so. But they looked after her for two years & he never mentioned it, which seems very strange to me.

By this time I had gone to sea in a professional capacity & in 1939 with the prospect of war breaking out I asked Crossfield to sell Swallow for me which he duly did. To whom I know not, nor where she went. It is hardly likely she still survives.

Your drawing is exactly like her as far as my memory goes. The replica you built, allowing for the different method of construction is very similar but I think 'Swallow' had a little more beam. She was a tubby little boat. Round bilge.

When I bought her I was informed she was 14 ft. o.a. which I accepted. I never remember checking it with a tape measure.

There was no organized dinghy sailing then. She had no flotation material inside, she would have sunk if I had capsized her because of the ballast. I do not remember anyone requesting that I should wear a life jacket & the waters of those lakes were dark & icy, but I survived.

If there is any specific point you want information on I might be able to supply it.

Cordially,

Roger Fothergill

Roger Fothergill died in December 1999 in Tortola, British Virgin Islands. His life was spent in boats and ships of all kinds. His passing is a loss of one of the remaining connections we have to a time when sailing was naturally simple.