



## MANCHESTER CRUISING ASSOCIATION

Arthur Ransome's *Racundra*  
8 April 2004 Brian Hammett

Brian is President of the East Coast Gaffers Association and an authority on Arthur Ransome. He came with a fine little model of *Racundra*, some good slides and a library of the works of the Great Man. Well, if not Great at least Remarkable.

Ransome was a biographer of Oscar Wilde with the distinction of being sued by Alfred Lord Douglas (quite what for no-one liked to ask). He won the action but fled to Russia as the *The Manchester*



*Guardian* correspondent to avoid the publicity and (it seems) his wife. There he fell in love with Leon Trotsky's ex-secretary and bought his first boat "Slug" off a beach near Riga. Slug was 100 years old and Ransome's only sailing experience had been in a dinghy on the Lakes but he and *Evgenia Shelepina* (His Love) made a 30 hour storm-tossed coastal passage the day after he bought her. She wasn't quick – the boat that is. Hence the name.

"Kittiwake", bought in Riga, was an improvement on "Slug". Faster, she had two bunks. They sailed her to Baltic Port and spent the summer there. Ransome had a dinghy made by the nearest thing locally to a boat builder: an undertaker. It was an unstable vessel. If he moved his pipe from one side of his mouth to another, he said, he was liable to capsize. It was then he met Otto Eggers and decided to have him design his ideal boat, "*Racundra*". *Racundra* was to be a solid 30ft LOA, 12 ft beam, gaff ketch perfect for the Baltic. Ransome planned to sail her back to England but the boat builder was so slow that she was not available until the summer was nearly over. He just managed to fit in one of the most famous small boat cruises ever - "*Racundra's* First Cruise" – to Helsinki (Helsingfors). He still had an English wife so Evgenia became, for decency's sake, "the Cook" in the book. They were accompanied by the best sailor in the Baltic, Carl Sehmel, and he became the "Ancient Mariner".