

ARTHUR RANSOME AND THE DIALECT OF NORFOLK

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ABSTRACT

Arthur Ransome provides information about the dialect of the English county of Norfolk as it was actually spoken in the 1930s. Two of his novels (*Coot Club* and *The Big Six*) are set on the Norfolk Broads. In these he offers some Norfolk vocabulary within the reported speech of some of his characters, along with some direct reflection on the dialect. However his masterpiece of Norfolk dialect is within *Coots in the North* (his unfinished novel, not published during his lifetime) where he presents what is in effect an extended Norfolk dialogue of over two-hundred lines. Ransome was an astute observer of language, and records the Norfolk dialogue with apparent accuracy and without contrivance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Norfolk dialect is a Southern English dialect once commonplace throughout the county of Norfolk and of which fragments survive in use today. There is considerable overlap with the dialect of neighbouring Suffolk, and several nineteenth century accounts described the two together as East Anglia dialect. Twentieth century writers made the distinction between Norfolk and Suffolk. Arthur Ransome, a resident of Suffolk, is clear that his Coots are speaking the dialect of Norfolk.

Norfolk dialect has a history as long as the English settlement of the British Isles, though with few texts to preserve it. Horatio Nelson tells us “I am a Norfolk man, and glory in being so”, and in the rare occasions when his words are recorded verbatim it is possible that we glimpse the Norfolk dialect of the second half of the eighteenth century. For example his words to Hardy “Do you anchor” should be interpreted as a Norfolk imperative, not a Standard English interrogative (“Anchor!” not “are you anchoring?”) As all English regional dialects, Norfolk declined abruptly during the nineteenth century, with many of the philologists and antiquarians then recording it aware that they were capturing something which was dying. Today there are people in Norfolk with a sound system influenced by the dialect and who use a few words of the dialect, perhaps as a matter of conscious choice reflecting

an expression of regional identity. Many Norfolk residents will make a conscious decision to use a Norfolk dialect word or a Norfolk phrase which displays syntax different to Standard English. Norfolk is often a form of language which is in part learnt and used as an affirmation of regional pride.

Most records of Norfolk dialect were produced after the decline of the dialect. Among the nineteenth century studies of Norfolk are dictionaries (of what they term East Anglia dialect) by Robert Forby (1830), John Greaves Nall (1866) and Walter Rye (1895), the latter in the English Dialect Society's series of (mostly) county-by-county dialect glossaries. These dictionaries preserve what the authors regard as distinctive lexis. While there are some wider language notes both in print and on the internet these are not extensive. Written texts in the dialect (including attempts to write down spoken Norfolk) are scant. Those texts that do exist are frequently in part artificial in that they present a density of dialect forms within a passage that is scarcely credible for the date of their composition. In effect they present Norfolk not as it was at the time of a particular text but as the writers think it might have been a century or more before, or as it might perhaps be in their day in some hypothetical Norfolk village untouched by the communication of the age. Frequently the dialect as it is presented is best regarded as a form of language play where the form of the dialect is more important than the meaning. Inevitably such use is frequently comic. Thus *The Eastern Daily Press* published in 1893 *Broad Norfolk*, a volume reprinting articles and letters in the dialect previously published in the newspaper, very many of them humorous in intent. Similarly Brereton Knyvet Wilson's *Norfolk Tales and Memories* (two volumes, 1930 and 1931) exploits the comic potential of the dialect and present through a series of short anecdotes a form of the language we can be confident was never actually spoken in the form set out. When presented with a line such as "Well, ivery time yew yow, yew lose a chow" (in the anecdote "Ivery time you yow") my faith in the accuracy of the representation is strained. Knyvet Wilson is inconsistent in the language he presents, while his overt direct comment on "The Norfolk Way of Talking" is disorganised. Knyvet Wilson's recording of Norfolk has been described as "authentic" and "genuine" (reviews of the 2005 reprint) yet it has little about it that is either.

In the inter-war years comedian Sidney Grapes utilised Norfolk dialect in his performance and in a series of letters to Norfolk's newspaper the *Eastern Daily Press* – letters signed "boy John" and subsequently collected as *The Boy John Letters*. While the dialect can indeed be glimpsed in such material it is important to bear in mind that Grapes was exploiting its comic potential and exaggerating features in order to express a regional identity. What "boy John" writes is not an accurate reflection of the dialect of that time or any time. Similarly the folk singers *The Kipper Family* in the 1980s used Norfolk dialect for comic effect and cannot be regarded as an authority. The association of this regional dialect with comedy has been exploited in the

early twenty-first century by *The Nimo Twins*. Today Norfolk can be a commodity marketed to tourists through such vehicles as mugs and tea-towels which give examples of vocabulary.

Against a background of sources in Norfolk dialect which are much less copious than we would like, and frequently unreliable, it is therefore particularly welcome to come across Ransome's un-self-conscious and seemingly accurate representation of a dialect he knew well. The fragments found in *Coot Club* and *The Big Six* are valuable; outstanding for the study of the dialect is the conversation he constructs in *Coots in the North*, which can be extracted (as in Appendix One) and which provides an extensive and reliable source for 1930s Norfolk, perhaps the best single source now available.

Arthur Ransome was a talented observer of language. His novels are littered with overt references to dialect, including Norfolk, Lake District, London and Lowland Scots. Arthur Ransome studied at Yorkshire College (now Leeds University) though he dropped out after two terms. He worked for a publisher in London (Grant Richards) and began to write. Later he taught himself Russian and became a fluent Russian speaker. Linguistics as an academic discipline scarcely existed in his day, yet Ransome demonstrates many of the skills of observation and interpretation that are key to the discipline. Above all, Ransome knew about language. In *Missee Lee* he imitates the non-native speaker English of Soong Ching-ling (wife of the leader of the 1911 revolution Sun Yat-sen and a friend of Ransome's) and gets it right in terms of some of the characteristic issues of pronunciation and grammar displayed by this generation of Chinese learners of English.

Language play is apparent in the invention of words expressing a created identity. Nancy Blackett plays the role of an Amazon pirate and uses a form of nautically-inspired slang "jib-booms and bobstays" and "shiver my timbers" along with invented swear-word substitutes as "barbecued billygoats" and "galoots". In *Secret Water* and *Great Northern* she changes her invented swear words to reflect the created story of these novels, respectively eels and birds.

Ransome correctly observes that regional dialect is associated with social class. Most of the children in Ransome's "Swallows and Amazons" series are from middle class families and speak without a marked regional dialect. There's an occasional throw-back to the Victorian middle-class nursery in a term such as Mrs Dudgeon's "honest Injun". In the novels set in the Broads the contrast is between those who do and those who don't speak in a dialect. The Ds – Dick and Dorothy Callum, children of an archaeologist – use a form of Standard English throughout and have some difficulty understanding Norfolk. Norfolk residents include Tom Dudgeon, the son of a doctor, and Port and Starboard, twin daughters of a solicitor. These three understand the Norfolk dialect but don't themselves speak it. Dialect is the province of a different social class. It is a servant who is represented as speaking Lowland

Scots, and her dialect is seen as a source of humour by Port and Starboard who imitate such utterances as “Time for the bairns to be stirrin’. It’s a braw and bonny mornin’” and “Can she no?”, as well as the set phrase “Never say dee till ye’re deid”. London dialect is represented by a wherry-man and his wife, presented through the characteristic elided /h/: “‘alf”, “‘usband”, “‘e”, “‘andsome”. The clearest example of Lakeland English comes not from the families of the Amazons (long-term residents of the area) but from the charcoal burners they visit (in *Swallowdale*).

Norfolk dialect is presented primarily through three sons of Horning boat-builders, Joe, Bill and Pete, who have the use of an old boat they have named *Death and Glory*. These three children – called the “Death and Glories” and also when protecting birds’ nests as part of the Coot Club called “Coots” - are aware that their register is not that of Standard English. In effect they know that people from outside The Broads as well as people living in The Broads who are better educated speak differently. Thus in *Coot Club* “We let Pete do the talking. As polite as he know how. ‘If you please’ and ‘do you mind’ an’ all that”. When confronted with an educated form of English they are out of their depth. While the middle class cultural milieu of most of the children permits references in *The Big Six* to Shakespeare (and elsewhere in the novels to Latin, lyric poems, French verbs and even a fragment of Spanish) the Death and Glories are out of their linguistic comfort zone in the presence of the solicitor who in effect tries them for the alleged crime of setting boats adrift. Norfolk dialect is clearly of interest to Ransome, yet equally he is aware that it is a handicap.

The outstanding Ransome source for Norfolk dialect is the fragments of his novel now known as *Coots in the North* (the title is not Ransome’s but an editor’s) which includes extensive dialogue between the three Death and Glories, forming an example of the Norfolk dialect as really spoken in the 1930s. This appears to be an honest reflection of the dialect as actually spoken. The generation represented – born perhaps in the late 1920s – may be regarded as the last with a true Norfolk dialect. The characters exemplified by Ransome’s Joe, Bill and Pete would have had their dialect modified by contact with other forms of English through Second World War military service. This shift along with the media explosion of the twentieth century and much greater mobility to and from Norfolk means that even the generation born in the 1920s are not speaking as they spoke in the 1930s. Ransome is keen to stress that his Death and Glories have not been far from home. In *Coots in the North* he specifies that they have been no further than Norfolk and Beccles, and therefore that they have scarcely left the county of Norfolk (Beccles is just outside Norfolk, in Suffolk). Their unsuccessful efforts to identify places they are passing through on their journey north stress their ignorance of geography.

Ransome offers in *Coots in the North* some direct comment on dialect. For example he explains in a footnote the adjective “bonkka” and bird name

“buttle”: “Bonkka or banker is an East Anglian word meaning ‘very large’, or ‘a big strapping person’; it is frequently applied, says the dictionary, to young girls. Buttle is Norfolk for ‘bittern’ (see *The Big Six*, chapter III).” He also comments on the Norfolk use of “old” to refer to a specific item: “‘That old cruiser’s going to see something,’ said Joe. He called her old though the paint was hardly dry on her, not because he did not know she was new but because he was a Norfolk boy who would talk of ‘that old cake’ even if it was still warm from the oven.”

PHONOLOGY

The sound system of Norfolk is distinctive. Unlike almost all other regional English dialects, Norfolk does not show h-dropping. Initial /h/ sounds are consistently pronounced as in Standard English. Indeed the standard language’s use of initial /h/ may have its origin in Norfolk dialect. Many Norfolk vowel sounds differ from those in the standard language. Vowel lengths differ from Standard English – frequently stressed vowels are lengthened and unstressed vowels are shortened. Ransome rarely seeks to represent these differences in his writing. He does however show the intrusive vowels that are found in the vicinity of nasals, as *worrams* (*worms*) and *hellum* (*helm*).

Consonants are sometimes changed:

- /n/ to /l/ *chimbley* (*chimney*) – additionally the first syllable is emphasised;
- /st/ to /ss/ *breakfusses* (*breakfasts*);
- /t/ to /r/ *shurrap* (*shut up*).

More common than change of consonants is the elision of consonants:

- /f/ *o’ (of)*;
- /g/ *doin’ (doing)*; *weedin’ (weeding)*;
- /n/ *had to ope’ (had to open)*; and /ent/ *differ (different)*;
- /t/ *kep’ watch on* (*kept watch on*);
- /th/ *‘em (them)*.

There are also elided vowels as ‘twas (*it was*), though these are much less common. With many of these elided forms it is not clear whether they are specifically Norfolk or commonplace to less educated forms of British English. For example *pennorth* (*pennyworth*) was widespread in pre-decimal Britain and may even have approached classification as the Standard English usage. What is specific to Norfolk is the elision that is not found, that of initial /h/.

Ransome only rarely indicates unusual stress, as for example in *rathER*. There is nothing about this to suggest that it is specifically Norfolk. The form *apurpose* (*on purpose*) probably suggests very weak stress on the first syllable.

NOUNS

Personal names show the short forms regular to Standard English rather than particular Norfolk forms: Joe, Pete, Bill, Tom. Surnames can be used without titles to refer to someone, as Tedder for the policeman Mr Tedder, though the title is used for direct address. Again this is unremarkable. Forms of address for children can include young, as *young Pete*; *young Rob*, and are used by the children themselves as well as by adults.

Names are chosen with care. The surnames of the Death and Glories are given in Ransome's notes (though not in the novels) as Joe Southgate, Bill Jenkins and Pete Woods. The surname Southgate is characteristic of East Anglia. Woods is more widespread in the British Isles but with a strong focus in Norfolk. Jenkins bucks the trend – it is associated most clearly with South Wales.

Place names are unchanged in Ransome's representation of Norfolk (with the exception of the shortening of Potter Heigham to Potter). The alternative name for the River Bure, the North River is used. This contrasts with the practice of the Swallows and Amazons of creating their own place names for the area of the lake in the Lake District, and for Hamford Water (in *Secret Water*). A few Norfolk terms for geographical features are used: *staithes*, *mere*, *broad*, *water*, *rond* (for bank). These are used alone but they are also part of place names.

It is striking how few distinctively Norfolk nouns are used by Ransome. Aside from the proper nouns and landscape features (above) there are clusters within specific discourse areas as fishing, weather, boating and birds (considered below) but otherwise almost nothing. The few nouns that do appear can be regarded as special cases. Thus *turmot* is at first glance *turnip* but is used not in this way but as a form of address to a child. This appears to be more a debased set phrase than a straightforward dialect noun (presumably the phrasal contrast is between small turnips and large swedes for children and adults, comparable for the traditional London description of a child as a *half pint*).

PRONOUNS

Characteristic of Norfolk is the use of an animate pronouns for inanimate objects: as *we got him* (we have the rope), *wicked he were* (the rope was stiff) and *you take him* (*you take the box*). In the use of relative pronouns the opposite change is found, with an inanimate pronoun being used for an animate, as *the bloke what bung the brick* (the man who threw the brick).

The interrogative pronoun *why* is sometimes replaced with *for why*: *and for why?*

VERBS

Many of the variations shown in verbs are primarily phonological. *Ope* for *open* (*I ope the stove*) is elision of /n/; *tie* for *tied* elision of /d/. Auxiliary verbs may be greatly reduced, as similarly *scarey* for *scared* is replacement of a dental with a vowel. Vowels are moved towards top-back position (towards /u/), so *dussen't* for *dare not* (which also shows a consonant change, /r/ to /s/).

Verb concord is frequently not that of Standard English, a feature Norfolk shares with many dialects, with both number and tense ambiguities: *she were* (*she is*), *they was* (*they were*), *he've* (*he has*), *he don't* (*he doesn't*), *if they don't it don't matter* (*if they don't it doesn't matter*), *leave go my arm* (*let go off*). This feature in Norfolk as in all dialects may be regarded as regional, or may be regarded as a feature of careless speech. The failure of subject and verb to agree does lead to a potential ambiguity. Context shows *he've* means *he has*, but the form could be analysed as *they have*, or even (in a dialect where *he* sometimes stands for *it*) *it has*.

Strong verb forms are not fully realised. The strong verb present can be used instead of the preterite, so *see* (*saw*), *tread on* (*trod on*), *go* (*went*). A strong verb can be conjugated as if weak, so *seed* (*seen*), *waked up* (*woken up*), *tread on* (*trod on*). Weak verb forms can be further reduced by having the -ed ending removed, so *bung* (*bunged*, ie threw) and *that thing fair blind me* (*blinded*). Phrasal verbs can be replaced by a simple verb form, so *outed* for *taken out*. Prefixed verbs can be reduced, so *become* is elided to *come* in *till it come dark*. Phrasal verbs can be reduced, so *watch for* (*watch out for*).

The meaning of verbs can be extended. *To fare* is mostly archaic in Standard English and with the meaning *to travel*. Here it is used as a verb whose meaning is determined by the context, thus *fare to light* (*catch light*), *fare to clear* (*intend to clear*), *fare to be easy* (*likely to be easy*) or *that fare to be a coffin* (*that looks like a coffin*). *To go* can imply a past tense: *I go and leave* for *I left*. It can be emphatic in *I'm to go bolting*. *To get* can mean *to go away*, the meaning carried by a preposition as *he tell me to get further*. *To learn* is used with the meaning of to teach (as well as to learn), as is the case also in London and South-East England usage, so *learn him* for *teach him*. Irregular verb forms are not fully realised. *They go away* is used for *they went away*.

Completed action, something akin to perfective aspect, is implied by verb forms. Verbs can be prefixed, *a pushing of the Catchalott off of the bank*, with the initial a- reinforcing the sense of *to push off* (rather than just *to push*). The construction *be + -ing* is also used to stress completion: *I'll be taking the old bike back to Bill's* and *be cutting up that loaf*. This is a feature that Norwich shares with other Southern dialects of English (for example it is present in Surrey) but is not a feature of Standard English. The construction gives additional information and is therefore a practical feature of the dialect, in

contrast with other verb forms noted above which may perhaps be regarded simply as mistakes.

NEGATIVES

Norfolk displays the use of double negatives as intensifiers, rather than the cancelling out that occurs in Standard English, as *that's not the lot neither, he won't never* and *never not*. Some statements are negative that would not be negative in Standard English: *we hadn't only one* and *I'll lay a coat on quick as nothing*. There's one example of an elided negative: *make a noise dropping him* (*don't make a noise dropping it*). Here the context so strongly suggests a negative that the negative isn't needed.

PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions show variation in form and function. *Afore (before)* may be regarded as primarily a phonological variation, with an unstressed first syllable both reduced and modified. However *without* has a clear semantic change (*unless*), as does *whiles (before)*, and *the shed against Tom Dudgeon's* has the meaning *the shed at Tom Dudgeon's*.

INTERJECTIONS

Many of the interjections stand in lieu of swear words. It is possible that Ransome is using innocuous forms which are appropriate for books for children. Dr Dudgeon uses a classically inspired *by Jove*, which may of course reflect the speech of a classically educated man born in the reign of Queen Victoria, or may simply be acceptable in a way that “*by God!*” wouldn't be. The Death and Glories use *gee whizz!* and *gee whillikins!* These may be Norfolk forms or may be more widespread (they are certainly found in New England); presumably Ransome was aware that *gee whizz!* is Jesus Christ! and *gee whillikins* is a (considerable) contraction of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

DISCOURSE AREAS

Ransome correctly observes the tendency for dialect forms to be preserved in areas which relate to specific activities.

One such area is fishing terms. Bait can be *worram* (worms) or a *bab*, a ball of worms knotted together used for eel fishing. Live bait can be described as *waked up* (and therefore more likely to be taken). Eels that have bitten into a *bab* have *fanged* it (and so can be lifted). An eel can be called a *warmint*. The word is related to Standard English “vermin”, derived through Old French from Latin *vermis*, a worm, here a worm-like fish. Ransome reports

the form *liggering* (for pike), seemingly a Norfolk variant of ledgering, fishing using a line weighted with a ledge bomb.

Weather terms include *sea roke*, a sea mist, and Roger (which Ransome gives a capital) and defined by Ransome: “A Roger is a Norfolk name for a sudden squall which makes a loud hissing noise as it comes sweeping over the reeds.” There’s no reason to think the term is related to the proper name and therefore no need for a capital. Indeed a Norfolk variant spelling is *rodger*.

Boating terms are mostly part of a boating discourse community that is far wider than just Norfolk. However the verb *to quant* (to pole a boat along) and noun *quant* (a long pole for quanting) are defined by Ransome suggesting that he perceived them as regional forms. In neighbouring Cambridgeshire the form is *punt* – Cambridge students go punting on the River Cam using a punt – and punt is part of Standard English.

A handful of Norfolk bird names are used, and this variant vocabulary is directly commented on with Dick Callum (from outside Norfolk) writing them down in his note-book. Birds include *beardies* (*bearded tits*), *buttle* and *rond* (both *bittern*). The heron is called both *harnsey* and *frank*, the former an affectionate diminutive from the English archaic form *hern*, the latter onomatopoeic.

IDIOMS

It is difficult to distinguish metaphors which may be used on one occasion or as idiolect (quirks of one person’s speech) from established idioms. However there are a handful of idioms used in a context which suggests Ransome regards them as characteristic of Norfolk:

- Going to the bad, straight as the New Cut;
- Yarmouth sharks’d grab the bottle from a baby;
- Worse than Breydon in a nor-east buster;
- I ain’t the Jonah; I ain’t no Jonah;
- The way that talk do fly
- He ain’t got a head on him no better’n a squashed frog.

The first three reference local places (the New Cut, the straight canal between the rivers Yare and Waveney; Great Yarmouth with its hustlers; Breydon Water with tide and mud-flats making for tricky sailing for small boats) and would need modification to be used outside of The Broads. Jonah is a Bible reference. Ransome seems keen to avoid references to Christianity. In an age when everyone went to church on Sunday his whole Swallows and Amazons series is without reference to church attendance, even for the “martyrs” in *The Picts and the Martyrs*. His inclusion of this phrase suggests he regarded it as a regional idiom. The final two may in theory be more

widely spread than Norfolk, though I've been unable to identify them elsewhere.

There's a curious example in *The Big Six* of a Standard English idiom that is not understood by the Death and Glories:

- Has your ship come in?
- We just tie her up.

The reference is ultimately to Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, with the idea of coming into money, yet the response given shows that the literal meaning has been understood.

SET PHRASES

Among the most resilient features of any dialect are set phrases. Ransome uses many of these. They are chunks of language which have been used wholesale. Most have a meaning which is clear without further explanation.

- rum 'un;
- rightly it's too late already (strictly speaking);
- fare to me (it seems to me);
- fare to rain (likely to rain);
- bat quiet;
- made sure (thought);
- something awful (badly);
- wallop the hides off of 'em;
- clem cold;
- rapscurry-hurrying;
- that ain't no matter;
- how go? (How are you? – a greeting);
- to go plumb mad;
- gaumless dickup;
- squeak out (shout a warning).

LEXIS

The rarity of distinctive nouns in Ransome's Norfolk dialect indicates just how decayed Norfolk dialect was in the inter-war years. Today there is an extensive lexicon of nouns which are not those of Standard English found in Lowland Scots and Irish English. These dialects are far better preserved than the Norfolk of eighty years ago, and perhaps better than the Norfolk of several centuries ago.

Non-Standard verbs are a little better represented:

- patched (blamed);
- gaping (yawning)
- scotching (killing);

- not clammed (not bothered);
- chirp up (speak up);
- nonnacking (horsing around).

All save *nonnacking* I've been able to find outside of Norfolk.

A very few Norfolk adjectives are recorded, including *a plenty* (*many*) and *wicked* (*stiff*). Pete's father (also called Pete) defends his son's reputation calling him a *plucked lad*, meaning honest. This may be a set phrase.

It should be stressed that the distinctive features of Norfolk dialect as noted by Ransome were not in the area of lexis.

CONDITIONAL CLAUSES

Ransome offers some unusual conditional constructions, all from *Coots in the North*:

- Good thing birds don't nest in August. Did, they wouldn't have a chance.
- May find something there. Not, there'll be someone in trouble at Acle Bridge.
- You ought to have called a Coot Club meeting before we do a thing like this. Had, we'd be talking yet.

The conditional construction omits the *if+pronoun*. Ransome's comma after the verb of the conditional clause (or the *not*) suggests a pause. The result is a concise and effective way of expressing a conditional and a good example of Ransome's observation of Norfolk dialect.

APPENDIX ONE: DIALOGUE OF THE COOTS

The plot of *Coots in the North* is around a new cruiser built by a Horning boat-yard that is to be delivered by road to the lake in the north where many of the "Swallows and Amazons" series is set, Ransome's composite of Lakes Windermere and Coniston. Joe decides that the three Death and Glories should stow-away aboard the cruiser and travel north with her. The conversation of the three is set within a traditional novel format, yet the density of their reported speech is such that it is practical to present it as a dialogue, as in here. Ransome has created a dialect text of over two-hundred lines which can be analysed for linguistic features of 1930s Norfolk dialect, in effect the final years of the dialect.

- Bill Good thing birds don't nest in August. Did, they wouldn't have a chance.
Joe [Looking at the new motor cruiser in Jonnatt's boatyard being prepared for delivery to the Lake District.] Wish we was going with her.

- Pete My dad's going.
 Bill Your dad ain't us.
 Bill [about coats of paint on the *Death and Glory*] She needs 'em.
 Joe That old cruiser's going to see something.
 Bill Different from the North River.
 Pete That Dick say there was mountains. Higher'n Household Heath he say.
 Bill Wish we was going.
 Pete That Dick'll see her maybe. He won't never guess she come from Horning.
 Joe [A yacht bumps the *Death and Glory*.] Hey, where are you going?
 Bill They never think to leave room for their sterns to swing when they go about.
 Joe No damage. She'd a been sunk long ago if we hadn't a put them fenders.
 Pete That's the old lorry coming.
 Bill Oh come on. They can't stop us looking in from the road.
 Pete My dad say "Clear off".
 Bill Well, we clear. Natural he don't want you nonnacking round under the old cruiser come they let her drop.
 Pete My dad's never not let one drop yet.
 Joe He don't want you under the first. And we ain't leaving the old *Death and Glory* without no one to fend off with the river cracking full of boats... Look out! Here come another...
 Yachtsman
 It wasn't our fault. It was that other boat wouldn't get out of our way.
 Joe They was on starboard tack. You was on port. It was you had to get out of the way.
 Yachtsman
 She wouldn't do what I wanted.
 Joe Not likely with your topping lift set up hard and the luff of your jib all slack... All right. Lie against our fenders. Come on Bill. Peak halyards twisted too. Lower away the jib. Bring the mainsail down. Down she come. Pull on the luff rope. Wonder she were sailing at all. Easy with the topping lift. Mind your heads.
 Yachtsman's wife
 I thought they didn't look right.
 Joe She'll sail all right now. Tiller to starboard. THIS side.
 Yachtsman's wife
 Thank you
 Bill She know more about it nor what he do.
 Joe You'd think that were worth a sixpence. Salvage ain't what it were.
 Bill Fair wind for Thurne Mouth. May find something there. Not, there'll be someone in trouble at Acle Bridge.

Pete Or we might go up to Potter.
Bill Start tomorrow early. Day's more'n half gone. Let's wait to see her loaded. Here's another. Look out! I say, let's get her out of this.
Joe Wilderness Dyke. Stand by for engines. Half astern, port engine. Full ahead, starboard!
Pete They've lift her.
Joe See her swing?
Visitor What are they taking all that wood away for? It'll have much further to fall.
Bill Hear that?
Pete They fare to clear the floor proper.
Joe Have to. The lorry'll go in under her.
Pete There's my dad.
Bill They'll be lifting her a lot yet.
Pete's father Out of here.
Joe I'd like to see her start.
Lorry driver You'll be in bed then.
Bill Not till night?
Lorry driver Less traffic on the roads.
Pete Have you been there before?
Lorry driver Never in my life, but I know the road up to Settle, and we'll have daylight after that.
Pete You'll want that for the mountains.
[Lorry driver laughs.]
Bill I wish we were going with her.
Joe That's why them chocks was all bolted.
Pete I know that soon as Dad tell me where she were going.
Foreman Up she go.
Joe She fare to come up again the blocks and then what?
Foreman Another six inches. She'd clear now, but better with another six.
[The lorry is reversed beneath the boat.]
Joe Good driving, that.
Foreman Lower away.
Mrs Barrable Hullo, you three. More salvage?
Joe Jonnatt's new cruiser.

Bill She's going away tonight.

Mrs Barrable

Voyage by road. Is she going far?

Pete That Dick and Dot'll be seeing her.

Mrs Barrable

If they know where she comes from it'll be like getting a message from the Coot Club. I'll tell them to look out for her next time I write. Pity you can't make the voyage in her. Come along, William.

Bill Come on. Best have our grub and we'll come back and see her start.

Pete Dick put his address on that card they sent us. We could write and tell them to watch for her.

Bill *Bonkka*. They'll wonder what her name mean.

Pete They know enough Norfolk for that.

Bill They don't. Why when they come here they don't know what a rond be, and that Dick he out with his book and write it down when I tell him the other name for a buttle.

Pete Waste a whole day we have. If we'd a gone we'd be at Thurne mouth before now, and fishing.

Bill You can catch old bream any old day. And we never see a cruiser lift like that before.

Pete Pity we can't send them a message with her.

Bill We can send them a postcard of Homing and tell them to look out for her.

Pete I'd better run back before post office shuts.

Joe You don't. Not till you eat your grub. We eat our grub and then we go back.

Bill They'll maybe let you in to buy a card. And if they don't, it don't matter. Post tomorrow.

Joe We'll want the address. You start that old Primus, Bill, and boil that kettle quick. Pete, you better be cutting up that loaf. [Pete drops the bread.] Pete, you gaumless dickup! Another three. [Slices of bread.]

Bill We'll never eat all that. And what'll we do away at Thurne tomorrow if we eat all up tonight?

Joe Oh, shurrup.

Pete Can I light the fire? That'll warm up whiles we come back.

Joe No. Hurry up now. They'll maybe start before we think.

Pete Not till dark. I hear the chap with the lorry say he don't want to start till dark with less on the roads.

Joe This ain't June. Sun's down already. Oh, come on.

Bill Washing up.

Joe Leave it. Come on now [Mr. Tedder, the policeman, is seen digging in his garden.]

Joe Can't he leave the worrums alone a minute... Good... Now then, come round this side between the lorry and the wall.

Bill See her better here.
Joe Come round this side. Pete. You squeak out if there's anybody stirring.
I'm going up. Get up on the chock and that fare to be easy... Come on,
Bill
Pete Someone coming
Visitor 1
Nice little craft. Sending her up to the lakes, they say. Wonder how
she's fitted out inside.
Visitor 2
Brooke engine.
Visitor 1
Bet it's a Morris.
Visitor 2
Easy settle that. We'll get aboard and have a look
Visitor 3
Don't be a couple of fools. Only get into trouble. Can't you see they've
left a boy to watch her.
Visitor 1
Nice boat. Where are you sending her?" [Pete tells them. They thank
him.]
Joe Narrow squeak. Go on. Get up on the mudguard. They fit her out
beautiful.
Bill They never done a better. Hurry up, Pete, and have a look. We want to
be getting out before some more come along.
Pete Beat the old *Death and Glory*.
Joe Wouldn't beat her sailing.
Bill Different sort of boat. Jonnatt's make a good job of her.
Joe You sit tight. Back in a minute. Don't you stir whiles I come back.
Bill What's up wi' Joe?
Pete Just gone funny.
Bill Fare to me we'd best be moving. Easy now with no one about, but a
lot of Jonnatt's chaps may come down to see her start.
Pete Joe say 'Sit tight'.
Bill Sit tight sound easy. But what if some-body climb up to have a look?
Wish he'd hurry up.
Pete I never try the post office for that card.
Bill You can't now.
Pete They may never know she come from Horning.
Bill Who?
Pete That Dick and Dot.
Bill We'll send them a postcard tomorrow.
Pete I see one that show the old staithe. Pity it don't show our ship. We'll
send that, and tell them to look out for her. We'll tell 'em we see her
built, and see her start. We'll tell 'em we been in her

Bill Not on a postcard we don't. Drat that old Joe. We'd be best out of this
 Pete What's that?
 Bill Sh.
 Pete Someone aboard.
 Bill Get into the fo'c'sle.
 Joe Bill.
 Bill It's Joe. It's all right. Joe.
 Joe Gimme a hand. You take him. Quick. [Joe passes up a box.]
 Joe Make a noise dropping him. Let's have him. Hurry up in and get the door shut.
 Pete What is it?
 Bill Funny. Gone funny. Joe've gone plumb mad. He've brought his rat.
 Joe Come on in. Can't you hear 'em. It's old Jonnatt hisself.
 Jonnatt You'll see her in the water, and stay by her for a trial run. Put him in the way of things. Check over the water-cooling before you leave. [A voice answered Mr. Jonnatt.]
 Pete That's my dad. They'll be starting. We got to get out.
 Bill We can't get out not with old Jonnatt.
 Joe We ain't going to get out.
 Bill But we got to.
 Joe Why? You hear the old Admiral. [Mrs Barrable.] She say t'was a pity we couldn't go in her. Well, we can.
 Bill But Pete's dad.
 Joe Pete'll get a whopping, likely, and us too. But it's easy worth it.
 Bill What did you bring old Ratty for?
 Joe Couldn't leave him behind.
 Bill We better get out.
 Joe Shurrup. We can't.
 Jonnatt See you the day after tomorrow. [To Pete's dad.]
 Joe Sit down. We're off... Worse'n Breydon in a nor-east buster. Lemme have them cushions to wedge him. Don't want old Ratty's box skating all over the floor
 Bill All very well you thinking about Ratty. What's about us?
 Joe Plenty more cushions. Saw some in the forrad bunk.
 Bill Cushions. Who wants cushions? Later, maybe when they find out what we done. Look here, Joe. We got to get out of this. We got to stop her. We got to tell 'em to stop. We got to get out...
 Joe Why?
 Bill We just got to.
 Joe Why?
 Bill We ain't gone dotty . . . only you.
 Joe Nobody gone dotty. Why the Admiral her-self...
 Bill She don't say we could. She say 'twas a pity we couldn't.

Joe Well, we can. Who's to stop us? Not till we come there and then it'll be too late.
Bill We got to stop her now.
Joe Why?
Bill We promise Pete's Mum he go to bed early.
Joe He can go to bed now if he want. One boat or another. What's the differ?" ... I got Dick's card. The address where they're at is on it all right. I look. Dixon's Farm. Soon's we get there we'll go find 'em.
Pete That Dick'll be rubbing his specs. He won't believe his eyes.
Bill He won't believe anybody'd be such blame fools.
Joe Oh shurup.
Bill We ain't got any money. We spend the last on stores.
Joe We won't want money. We come back with the lorry. It's our skins'll pay, not money. And worth it, I tell you. And we won't go hungry neither. I got all the chocolate we buy safe in my pockut.
Bill You ought to have called a Coot Club meeting before we do a thing like this.
Joe Had, we'd be talking yet. Leastways you would and time we was ready to go, boat'd be a hundred miles away and all too late.
Bill You don't give us a chance.
Joe Wroxham.
[They heard someone jump down into the road.]
Pete That's Dad.
Pete's dad She's all right.
Lorry-man I tell you so
Joe Go on. You can get out now. Get out, we'll all have to get out with you. And gone no further'n Wroxham. We could have done that in the old *Death and Glory*. We could have done that on a bike. We could have walked it. Go on and get the row over, same as if we gone the whole way.
Pete's dad Jonnatt never turn out a better.
Lorry-man What's she like inside? Let's have a look.
Pete's dad Like any other.
Lorry-man No. No time for that. We've all England to cross by morning.
Joe Go on, Bill. Getting out, we got to get. Put them cushions back. And there's our oilskins in the cock-pit.
Bill I'm staying.
Joe Too late to get out now. Geewhillikins! And who want to anyways?

Bill Crossed Wroxham bridge.

Joe Chocolate all round when we come ti'other side of Norwich.

Pete Bill, we had a Coot Club meeting, all there is with Tom away.

Joe If Tom been here he'd have voted for going.

Bill Port and Starboard too.

Pete And Dick and Dot. They'd be voting with both hands.

Joe Like to see their faces when we say 'Hullo'.

Bill We never been further'n Norwich.

Joe Beccles. But that's no further. We never been further'n we could get in the old *Death and Glory*.

Pete Across all England

Joe She's a flyer, the *Bonnka*. [A jolt.] Choppy sea. But she don't care nothing for that.

Bill They been mending the road

Joe Got a torch? Battery's dead in mine.

Bill Take it. Where's your hand? [The torch is turned on.] Look out.

Joe They can't see through the back of their heads and then through an inch of good planking. Electric light in her somewhere. Jonnatt'll have charged her up sending her like this.

Bill We can't light it. Not with all them port-holes.

Joe Wait till we get clear of Norwich. There's curtains.

Pete Let's go into the cockpit

Joe Quiet then. And careful

Pete What's that?

Joe Ain't you never seen Norwich? We're coming over Household and down by Thorpe Bridge. Best get back inside whiles we go through... Best get down on the floor. It's only whiles we're under them lamps. We'll be clear in a minute

Bill What's up now?

Joe You keep down, Pete.

Mrs Woods

Later'n you say.

Pete's dad

Evening, Mrs Woods.

Mrs Woods

Here's your tea. You've a rum load this time Will you be back tomorrow night?

Lorry-man

Day after. Better come, too, Mother.

Mrs Woods

I've more'n enough to do at home to want to go travelling with you in that draughty old cab.

Pete's dad

You can travel in the cruiser.

Molly Let's go, Mum.
Joe Drat that kid.
Lorry-man Right O. I'll take Molly.
Mrs Woods Molly wouldn't leave her Mum behind, would you, Molly?
Pete's dad Come, the both of you. She's comfortable enough inside. Electric light. All you want. Climb up and have a look...
Bill We're done.
Mrs Woods Get away with you. I'd sooner travel in a hearse. Molly and me know home's best.
Pete's dad Well, if you won't come you won't, but don't say I never ask you.
Lorry-man Goodnight, Mother. Goodnight, Molly. We've far enough to go.
Pete's dad Goodnight, Mrs. Woods. So long, Molly.
Joe That were a near one.
Pete Can I get up now?
Joe We all can. It's only with them lamps blazing in on us... We're properly off now.
Bill Further'n we ever been
Pete Cockpit. Who's steering?
Joe Navigation. Geewhillikins. Wish I'd brought our old compass.
Bill Old *Death and Glory*, she never go as fast as this, not with a full gale blowing stern.
Pete Lemme steer.
Bill Corner coming. "tarboard your hellum.
Pete Where's her port and starboard lights?
Joe You mind your steering.
Bill Carrying her port light on the stern.
Pete London
Joe Bristol, maybe - or - or - Manchester...
Bill Edinburgh, more like. Capital of Scotland.
[Pete is found asleep in the cockpit.]
Bill You got to go to sleep. You got to go to sleep proper.

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Coot Club (1934)

The Big Six (1940)

Additionally there are fragments of Suffolk dialect in

Peter Duck (1932)

We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea (1937)

Secret Water (1939)

Published 1988, after his death (edited by Hugh Brogan, published Jonathan Cape) is *Coots in the North*, an unfinished fragment, which contains extensive material in the Norfolk dialect.