



Adventures with Louis in Clubland



LONDON saved Robert Louis Stevenson from the dark time in Edinburgh when religious conflict with his parents drove him to the brink of a nervous breakdown. It was a place where he enjoyed the companionship of a growing circle of friends and could always find a second home.

Following in his footsteps, 21 members of the RLS Club made a trip 'up to London' at the end of June to become better acquainted with the places (and people) that Louis loved to visit. Our base was Beit Hall, part of the Kensington Campus of Imperial College, where we enjoyed the comfortable ensuite bedrooms normally occupied by the students.

Day one began with a tour of the National Portrait Gallery's Victorian collection to meet some of RLS's friends and contemporaries. Some influenced his writing, some he influenced, and some were his close friends.

Ian Nimmo introduced us to portraits or busts of Louis's early mentor Syd-



Grand company: Club members at the Savile Club, second home to RLS, inset

ney Colvin, his piratical friend WE Henley, the poet Edmund Gosse, the painter John Singer Sargent, authors Rudyard Kipling and Thomas Hardy, the actor Henry Irving and composers Edward Elgar and Gilbert and Sullivan. We also

studied Sir William Blake Richmond's fine portrait of RLS, the painted cigarette smoke curling upwards forever. It was painted at Richmond's house in August 1886, in jovial company including Colvin, the artist Edward Burne-Jones and his daughter Margaret, who recalled: 'They discussed suicide; compared notes as to their feelings towards policemen; told ghost stories; and most of the time Mr Richmond painted, and Mr Stevenson sat easily talking, smoking and drinking coffee.'

After refreshments in the portrait gallery's roof-top café with its panoramic views over the city, we made our way across town to the house at 48 Doughty Street, in High Holborn, once home to Charles Dickens and his young family from 1837 to 1839, where two of his daughters were born and he penned part of Pickwick Papers, all of Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby.

The house was saved by the Dickens Fellowship and opened as a fascinating

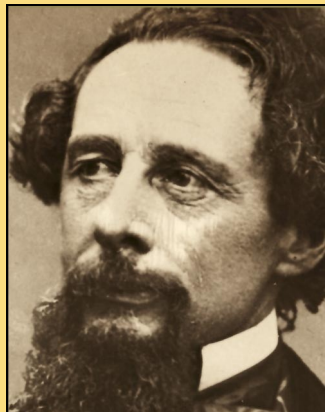
Continued on Page Two

A Dickens of a good time

LOUIS loved Dickens, and characters such as Sam Weller or Dick Swiveller were as real to him as his own creations.

After reading Dickens's Christmas stories, he once exclaimed: 'O what a jolly thing it is for a man to have written books like these books, and just filled people's hearts with pity.'

Dickens's conviviality lives on at the Charles Dickens Museum, where RLS Club members had a very agreeable time and viewed many interesting artefacts, including the author's desk from Gad's Hill and this fine portrait.





THE RLS Day celebrations on Louis's November 13 birthday go from strength to strength, with the theme this year being Stevenson on Stage and Screen. The club will again be to the fore, staging **From An Original Idea by RLS...** at the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

Hollywood has never wearied of giving Stevenson the big screen treatment, but how do its dramatisations compare with the original works of imagination? Readings by members and friends of the RLS Club will allow audience members to enjoy classic Stevenson in the theatre of the mind before seeing what the movie-makers did with the story.

To take part in this all-day, free event, email your name and when you can be available to jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk.

ONCE again, John and Felicitas Macfie are hosting an afternoon event at Stevenson's home. **Tea and Drama at Heriot Row** will feature tea and cakes before Jeremy Hodges lifts the curtain on Stevenson's formative dramatic experiences - Skelt's Juvenile Drama and his amateur performances in the Jenkin Theatricals. Tickets £16.55, including tea and cakes, book online at www.eventbrite.co.uk

THE club's own John Shedden is starring in two one-man plays produced and directed by Mark Taylor. **Robert Louis Stevenson: Laird of Samoa** is a pilgrimage through the life of RLS, from childhood in the cold Edinburgh of pillars, prostitutes and prejudices, to maturity in America and finally the South Sea islands. Shedden's acclaimed performance of John Cargill Thompson's script brings us a living, breathing Stevenson, passionate, freedom-loving and international. Scottish Storytelling Centre, Thu Nov 12, 2pm & 7.30pm, tickets £11 (£6 age 12 and under), book online at www.tracscotland.org/scottish-storytelling-centre or by phone on 0131 556 9579.

AN Evening with Robert Louis Stevenson, on RLS Day itself, is at his old haunt the Hawes Inn at South Queensferry. It is 1886 and Louis has come out from Auld Reekie to get peace and quiet to write his latest novel here. But his thoughts are disrupted by noise from the building of a new rail bridge outside, so he pops down to the bar for a wee nightcap and ends up giving an impromptu recital from his latest novel... Kidnapped! Hawes Inn, Fri Nov 13, 8-9pm, tickets £4 (over-18 only), buy in advance from www.queensferrytours.com/tickets

THERE'S also a free **Kids Treasure Hunt** at South Queensferry on Nov 13&14. Maps from Caledonia Scotia Kilt Shop, Newhalls Road.

In London with RLS

Continued from front page

Dickens museum in 1925. The newly-refurbished museum has an outdoor seated area where we were graciously entertained by members of the Dickens Fellowship.

On Day two, Rex Homer with local guide Pauline Folkes led us on a visit to one of 'London's Hidden Secrets', the Middle Temple, part of the Inns of Court, off Fleet Street. It was to the Inns of Court that RLS was planning to seek admittance in the autumn of 1873, to study for the English bar and escape family rows over religion at Heriot Row. He asked Colvin to find two barristers to sponsor him but, on arrival in London, his nerves were so shattered that Dr Andrew Clark forbade him to sit the admission exam and ordered him south to rest and recover at Menton on the Riviera.

In the Middle Temple's magnificent, ancient timbered hall, we enjoyed an excellent lunch. But the great surprise was the discovery of two separate armorial shields set into a large stained-glass window – one for Sir Nicholas Hyde, the other for the Rt. Hon Joseph Jekyll. In a separate room we found two large oil portraits of the distinguished Jekyll and Hyde themselves.

Could these really be the source for the names of Stevenson's famous literary characters? He did eventually qualify as a lawyer in Scotland and on his many visits to London may have dined here frequently and absorbed the names along with the excellent claret and port.

Some members also took in an organ recital at the nearby Temple Church, before we returned to our own hostelry in South Kensington to freshen up. We emerged



The Rt Hon Joseph Jekyll and Sir Nicholas Hyde

A STEVENSON short story has been adapted by Scottish novelist Louise Welsh as her first full-scale opera. **The Devil Inside**, a modern reworking of *The Bottle Imp* with a score by Stuart MacRae, will be unveiled by Scottish Opera in Glasgow and Edinburgh in January.

As a curtain-raiser to the opera, which tells the story of James and Catherine whose lives fall apart because of a supernatural bottle, Welsh and MacRae will take part in a free RLS Day discussion at 4pm at St Augustine's Church, Edinburgh.

Meanwhile in Glasgow, not one but two Stevenson stories are being brought to the stage by students at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Aerial performance, live music, and dance will be used to reimagine the story



THE DEVIL INSIDE

of *Kidnapped*, creating a joyous, unself-conscious overload of noise and action, while a new version of *Jekyll & Hyde*, devised by the ensemble, offers a fresh view of Stevenson's dark psychological fantasy for our times.

Various times, Nov 3-6, details at www.rcs.ac.uk/box-office



Agreeable people: Friends of RLS at the Savile, where his portrait was presented to Julian Malone-Lee

in our best attire to enjoy a pre-arranged dinner at the Savile Club in Mayfair, Stevenson's old club, which he declared was his 'London headquarters'.

We were greeted by Savile Club secretary Julian Malone-Lee, who gave us a warm welcome and showed us the entry in the Club Register of RLS's nomination and acceptance as a member in June 1874. On his return from the Riviera, Louis had made peace with his family and been given an allowance of £84 a year, on which he could afford membership of the Savile, his name put forward by Colvin and his Edinburgh friend Fleeming Jenkin.

Louis wrote to his mother: 'I like my club very much; the *table d'hôte* dinner is very good; it costs three bob: Two soups, two fish, two *entrées*, two joints and two puddings; so it is not dear; and one meets agreeable people.'

One of the Savile Club's walls is devoted to photographs and drawings of past famous Savilians, with a

notable omission – no picture of RLS. So the Robert Louis Stevenson Club presented the Savile Club with a framed photograph of Louis which has now taken its proper place among the distinguished expired members.

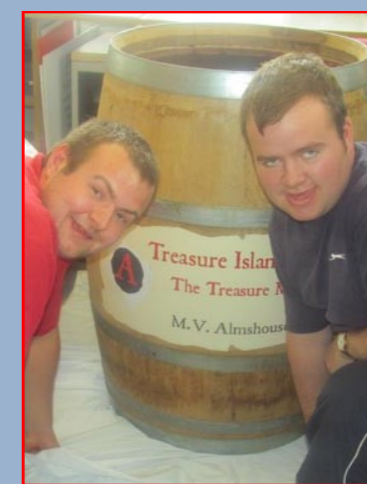
We moved into the elegant dining room to enjoy a splendid dinner, accompanied by two excellent wines from the Club's cellars, which doubtless RLS would also have enjoyed on many an occasion.

After dinner, Ian Nimmo recounted the Savile Club's history, and told us about RLS's many friends there. Professor Michael Slater, past chairman of the Dickens Fellowship and author of a biography of Charles Dickens, then reminded us of Dickens's links with Edinburgh, which conferred the Freedom of the City upon him in 1841.

A final toast and farewells ended an altogether revealing and memorable visit to London.

Barrels of fun on the treasure trail

THE Treasure Island Trail around Bristol Docks has taken a big step forward with new markers in the appropriate shape of barrels! The recycled Bordeaux wine barrels fitted with information collars and mounted on innovative cycle stands were unveiled on September 19 – International Talk Like a Pirate Day – by our Long John Silver Trust friends. Planted with palm trees, the barrels will make the trail a reality and give RLS a permanent presence in the Hispaniola's home port.



Club Events

OCTOBER 23

BRIDGE OF ALLAN AND DUNBLANE

BRIDGE of Allan was a favourite haunt of RLS and we travel there by coach from Edinburgh to meet local club member Denis Frize who will act as our guide as we explore the area, including Stevenson's favourite walk along the Allan Water, where it is said he found the model for Ben Gunn's cave in Treasure Island. After one such a walk he wrote to his cousin, Bob: 'Where I chiefly long to be is at the immediate exit from the wood, where the river splashes through some rapids dewing with spray the over-hanging trees, and you see it bearing away its taches of foam in a slow brown stream...' Denis will introduce us to the remarkable Bishop Leighton Library in Dunblane, where a soup and sandwich lunch will be provided in the Cathedral Halls. Coach from the south side of Waterloo Place, Edinburgh at 9.15am. Cost, including lunch, £20. Names to Margaret Wilkie by October 10.

NOVEMBER 14

RLS CLUB LUNCHEON

THE guest speaker at this year's Club Lunch at The New Club is the novelist and playwright Catherine Zerkawska, who will speak on the theme of *Dramatising Stevenson: An Enduring Friendship*. Please see enclosed letter and booking form.

DECEMBER 5

THE STEVENSONS AND THE BELL ROCK LIGHTHOUSE

FOLLOWING our venturesome boat trip out to the Bell Rock lighthouse in May, we meet at 9.45am at the Royal Scots Club, 30 Abercromby Place, Edinburgh, to review the BBC documentary on the building of the lighthouse with a talk from Professor Roland Paxton, author of *Dynasty of Engineers*, published by The Northern Lighthouse Heritage Trust – copies on sale. Cost including tea/coffee and biscuits, £6. Names to Margaret Wilkie by November 27.

BOOKING

To book an event or for more information, contact Events Secretary Margaret Wilkie on 0131 477 6738 or wilkiej@blueyonder.co.uk

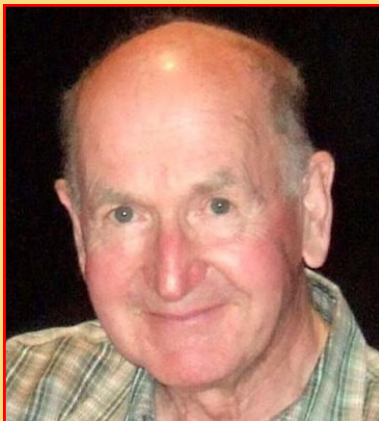
An honest friend in life's travels

WE were all shocked and deeply saddened by the news that Neil Ross had collapsed and died on holiday in July.

Neil's name was familiar to all our members through his ongoing work as the Club's Membership Secretary. In this role he was meticulously efficient in his record keeping and oversight of our procedures, while being constantly sensitive to individual members' circumstances.

For this, as well as for his consistently thoughtful and constructive contributions to our Committee's discussions, we will greatly miss Neil's encouraging presence.

Alongside, but reaching far beyond his formal role, Neil's personal warmth and humanity endeared him to his wide



circle of friends in the Club. He was totally without affectation, engaging with people in a good humoured, natural and open way that drew them in to share his own enthusiasms.

His participation with his wife Cath in so many Club events and excursions enriched the experiences of others joining in and made him a very good companion.

Others with whom Neil was involved in pursuing his remarkable variety of interests will also sorely miss him, as the large congregation at his funeral proved; but it was our good fortune that the R.L.S. Club was a very special part of his life and we have all been the beneficiaries.

CONTACTS

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Winner: Alba Strachan with author James Robertson, right, and John Macfie

New writers inspired by the spirit of RLS

A FAMOUS author has read your work, recognises its potential and wants to help you develop it. He invites you to sit down with him to discuss what you have written.

It sounds like a dream for any budding writer, but on June 12 the dream became a reality for a group of selected entrants to our national Creative Writing Competition for Schools, run in collaboration with Edinburgh Napier University.

The Masterclass was again led by our presiding judge, the distinguished novelist James Robertson, and the young participants, along with their teachers who sat in, responded enthusiastically.

The Club was well represented at the presentations which followed, made jointly by James Robertson and our Chairman John Macfie.

Overall winner of the competition was Alba Strachan, who received a prize of £100 for her short story Driftwood Boats. Banchory Academy therefore retains the George Addis trophy for the winner's school.

Circumstances prevented Leo Robertson Walker of Portobello High School from attending but his consolation was the Commended prize for his story, The Dark Descent.

All the participants received certificates, along with copies of works by

IN this extract from Alba Strachan's winning entry, a mother is watching her children play on the beach where she herself played as a child:

My feet nestle in smooth silky sand. Water pools where the toes press, leaving their small stamp on the world for that brief pause before the tide smooths it flat. I've missed the feel of sand on my skin; I've missed everything – the tang on the breeze, the heavy breathing of the ocean, the secret crannies and pools hiding crabs, limpets, precious shells. What was it my mother used to say? 'We islanders have salty blood; no matter how far we wander, the sea always pulls us home.' Now she is forever home, up behind the Chapel, where her eyes could watch the surf had they not caved into empty sockets, where she could taste the salted wind had her tongue not withered to dust. Time has smoothed her stamp till all that remains is a name on a stone between stones full of names, a leaf on a tree, a grain of sand on a beach. My turn will be next and even my girls – down there splashing and hopping over wavelets. That tide catches up with everyone.

I watch them now, giggling, squealing, careless, and through them three small figures seem to emerge from the spray, running, racing – always a race, down the length of the shore. Alison's winning – of course she is – but I'm a close second...

Stevenson and James Robertson. James is now stepping back from the role of presiding judge after three inspirational years. His place will be taken by the acclaimed author Louise Welsh, who is keen to continue the unique experience the competition offers to aspiring writers.

Thanks are again due to Professor Linda Dryden with her colleague Duncan Milne, for managing the logistics of the competition and hosting the Masterclass and presentations in Edinburgh Napier University's Merchiston Campus.