



## All aboard for Europe in search of adventure



*Buckling a swash: A French corsair in Bristol*

CUTLASSES were drawn and eyepatches *de rigueur* for an international gathering of RLS fans in the piratical surroundings of Bristol, home port of the good ship Hispaniola.

The 2015 AGM of the European Network In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson was welcomed to the city on November 20 by the Long John Silver

Trust, formed more than ten years ago to celebrate Bristol's literary and maritime connections through the medium of Stevenson's Treasure Island.

The trust's Mark Steeds and his crew got the event off to a buccaneering start with a ferryboat tour of Bristol's Floating Harbour, for which all participants, including some bloodthirsty French 'corsairs', were issued with eyepatches by the Network co-ordinator, Laura Léotoing.

A weekend of events relating to Treasure Island and Stevenson's association with Bristol had been organised, including a Travels with RLS exhibition at Bristol Central Library,

telling the story of Stevenson's life and works with reference to the many places visited by him.

The library and the Long John Silver Trust had also prepared displays focusing on Treasure Island, including various editions of the work, artefacts based on the tale and the background to some aspects of it, such as real-life pirates and the origin of Dead Man's Chest in the Leeward Islands.

Members also walked the Treasure Island Trail around the historic Floating Harbour, launched in 2015 with an accompanying app for smartphones. The trail connects eight sites in the historic centre of Bristol – marked ominously with Black Spots!

A set of eight oak planters, made from recycled wine barrels from Bristol's twin city of Bordeaux with palm trees and information plaques, creates a free-to-visit attraction telling not only the story of Treasure Island but also some of each location's history – for a map visit [www.longjohnsilvertrust.co.uk/trailmap.php](http://www.longjohnsilvertrust.co.uk/trailmap.php)

At the AGM itself, all participants in the Network were represented, from the RLS Club, the Stevenson Way, Colinton and North Berwick to the Canals of the Nord and Belgium, the Forest of Fontainebleau (Barbizon and Grez), the Cévennes and, of course, Bristol.

Stefano Dominioni, Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes, presented the Network with its

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*Pieces of eight: Long John Silver with Flint's parrot on the harbour waterfront*



## OPERA

### So devilishly good it should be bottled

THE Devil Inside is a Scottish Opera and Music Theatre Wales co-production, with libretto by Louise Welsh and composed by Stuart Macrae, based on RLS's classic South Seas tale, *The Bottle Imp*.

Louise Welsh is one of Scotland's most exciting contemporary writers, well known as an articulate proponent of RLS, so a number of club members went with high hopes to the January performances in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The opera is a compelling study of individuals tested by the seductive power of the demon in the bottle, who grants every wish to whoever possesses it – but at the threat of damnation for any who cannot relinquish it.

Welsh has given the story a contemporary setting, making its proponents two young backpackers who buy the bottle with their last \$50 and are propelled into the international property market to wallow in riches.

It is an intimate production, with a cast of four portraying just five characters, and deceptively simple stage setting and effects. The compelling narrative is driven with unremitting intensity by MacRae's vividly imaginative music, with effects that distinctly characterise even the invisible imp.

The two young men who enter into the diabolical pact and the innocent girl caught up in it are sensitively portrayed in both libretto and performance, with poignant arias heightening the sense of them as individuals and dramatic foils for one another.

There is a dark strand of foreboding which runs all through *The Bottle Imp* – it is Stevenson, after all – such as when Keawe discovers the deaths of his uncle and cousin have brought him the wealth he wished for.

Welsh's adaptation deepens the darkness. She has retained Stevenson's narrative line, but we are made to see that the process of damnation begins as soon as a character has the bottle in his hands, and even when it has been sold again he is not free of its seductive power.

In Stevenson's ending, the young lovers live happily ever after – in Welsh's powerful conclusion they are confronted by tragedy and we sense that they will not live on unmarked, even as they embrace new hope.

Critics have given five-star reviews to a production which has transfixed its audiences. It is bound to be repeatedly revived and should not be missed by anyone who loves drama, opera, or who simply wants to experience the Stevenson original in a challenging new way.

The RLS Club supported *The Devil Inside* at the development stage with sponsorship of £500. We can only be the more satisfied that it associates us with a production which does justice to Stevenson while being a strikingly original work in its own right.

Louise Welsh is an RLS Club member and this year is taking on the role of Presiding Judge in the Creative Writing Competition for schools which we run in collaboration with Edinburgh Napier University. The deadline for entries from senior school students is Easter – forms and full details on the RLS Website.

**DAVID REID**

## Search party for Ben Gunn's cave

IT was a large, airy place, with a little spring and a pool of clear water, overhung with ferns... Thus RLS described Ben Gunn's cave on Treasure Island.

But sadly the real thing was not filled with 'great heaps of coin and quadrilaterals built of bars of gold' when a club expedition led by local 'native' Denis Frize went in search of Stevenson's inspiration at Bridge of Allan.

It was an area dear to Louis's heart, with family connections dating back to the 1820s when his grandfather Robert Stevenson was engaged to transform the worked-out copper mines into sources of water for the growing health craze of the Victorian spa.

By 1842, the railway had reached the village beneath the Ochil Hills and thus it



*Ben Gunn: Or was it Jack Shedden?*

became a regular restorative sojourn for a sickly wee boy from Edinburgh and his no-less-ill mother.

From boyhood into manhood, RLS spent up to a month each year here and he delighted to stroll along the Darn Walk, the sylvan path which links Bridge of Allan with Dunblane.

Intent on following in his footsteps, thirteen of us gathered on Friday October 23 at Dunblane, where RLS once stayed a month and where we first encountered the Allan Water, as did David and Alan in *Kidnapped* and David himself in *Catriona*. The appropriate passages were read.

We went through the graveyard where RLS had a Hamlet-esque encounter with the gravedigger, and saw the hotel where two of Scotland's three famous literary Roberts stayed. Of course pictures had to be taken at the Andy Murray golden post box and at the house where Bonnie Prince Charlie stayed on his way south.

But nothing had prepared the party for that gem of Scottish intellectual life, Bishop Leighton's Library. The very furniture and fittings are Jacobean originals. But the books!

The 1504 Commentary on the Psalms, the religious cornucopia, a whole wall of first-edition books by every important non-fiction writer between 1700 and 1850 – Gibbon, Captain Cook, Hume, Smith, Doctor Johnson, you name it. But the



*Discovery: The party finds the cave, but no treasure... nor any cheese for Ben*

showstopper was the gestatory drawings made by Robert Adam on his tour of Dalmatia, the *fons et origo* of what became his designs for building Edinburgh's New Town, Bath and Central London.

After feasting on these, we travelled by motor caravan to Bridge of Allan, where the fit and active set out from the Queen's Hotel along the Darn Walk.

Fording dryshod the Cocks Burn, the Allan giving sparkling glimpses beside us, we came to Ben Gunn's Cave, marked with a green plaque and a wooden bench carved with images from *Treasure Island*.

The cave itself is more of a deep indentation, just high enough for a man to enter

standing, and receding about 20ft like a trouser pocket. One is reminded that it was dug out as an adit – a trial bore for one of the many mines that pepper the Hillfoots.

And so back for afternoon tea at the Queen's, where we were shown the upstairs room used regularly by the Stevenson family.

Then it was time for our last stop of the day, at Logie Kirkyard, and a discovery that might have surprised RLS himself. By the gaunt remains of the old mediaeval church we found the grave of a David Balfour... in fact possibly two of them.

Truth, or so they say, is sometimes stranger than fiction.

## Stevenson ahoy!

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certificate of accreditation as a European Cultural Route and led a discussion on the impact of accreditation, emphasising the importance of sharing knowledge throughout Europe and further afield, mutual collaboration amongst Network members and aiding smaller associations.

The President of the RLS European Network, Michel Legros, led a discussion on the future direction of the Network including the expansion of its projects and promotion of Robert Louis Stevenson's cultural inner voice through his life and work.

He also announced that Châtillon-sur-Loire in France, where RLS was arrested on suspicion of spying, was joining the Network and that connections are being developed with Hyères in the

South of France and Davos in Switzerland. During two winters spent in Davos, RLS made friends with the English writer John Addington Symonds, who had also taken refuge in the Alps for health reasons. Symonds was born in Bristol and the Long John Silver Trust had arranged a visit to his family home, Clifton Hill House, with a talk by the former Honorary Consul of France.

Finally, no visit to the Hispaniola's home port would be complete without a trip to *Treasure Island*, with a screening of the 1950 film classic starring Robert Newton as Long John Silver. A big thankyou to Mark Steeds and his pirate crew for a wonderful weekend.

For information on Council of Europe Cultural Routes you can visit [www.culture-routes.net](http://www.culture-routes.net)

*Pièces de huit: European Network members with eyepatches, a parrot and the all-important certificate*

## Club Events

**MARCH 18**

### RLS IN THE LIBRARY

ENJOY a guided visit to the National Library of Scotland to see a selection of the RLS treasures it contains. Andrew Martin, the library's curator of literature and arts, has kindly arranged this exclusive visit for up to 25 club members divided into groups. Meet at the NLS enquiry desk at 10am.

**APRIL 14**

### ABBOTSFORD

TRAVEL to the home of Sir Walter Scott on the newly reopened Waverley Line from Edinburgh's Waverley station, named after the famous novels by Stevenson's predecessor in the field of historical romance. Meet in the station waiting room at 10.30 am, bringing Senior Rail Passes if appropriate. At Tweedbank we take a 20-minute easy walk to Abbotsford, where ticket prices are £8.95 (£7.70 concessions) for the house and garden or £3.60 (£2.60 concessions) for the gardens only. Lunch can be purchased from the Ochiltree Restaurant.

**MAY 28**

### CATRIONA TRAIL

FOLLOW in the footsteps of David Balfour and Alan Breck on the *Catriona Trail* along the shoreline between Musselburgh and Port Seton. Meet at Musselburgh Harbour, 11am. Following the walk there is a visit to Cockenzie House with a guided tour, cost £6 per person. The house also has a restaurant with a variety of refreshments. Those not up to the walk can join the group at Cockenzie House for the tour around 1.30-2pm.

### BOOKING

To book an event or for more information, contact Events Secretary Margaret Wilkie at [wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk) or ring 0131 477 6738

### CONTACTS

**RLS Club Contact:** David Reid, 20 Beveridge Road, Kirkcaldy, Fife, KY1 1UX. Tel: 01592 204645  
Email: [davidalison.reid@virgin.net](mailto:davidalison.reid@virgin.net)

**RLS Club News Editor:** Jeremy Hodges, 21 Russel Street, Falkirk, Stirlingshire, FK2 7HS.  
Tel: 01324 613072  
Email: [jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk)



*Lighthouse Stevensons: The special event at Trinity House in Leith included talks by RLS Club chairman David Reid*

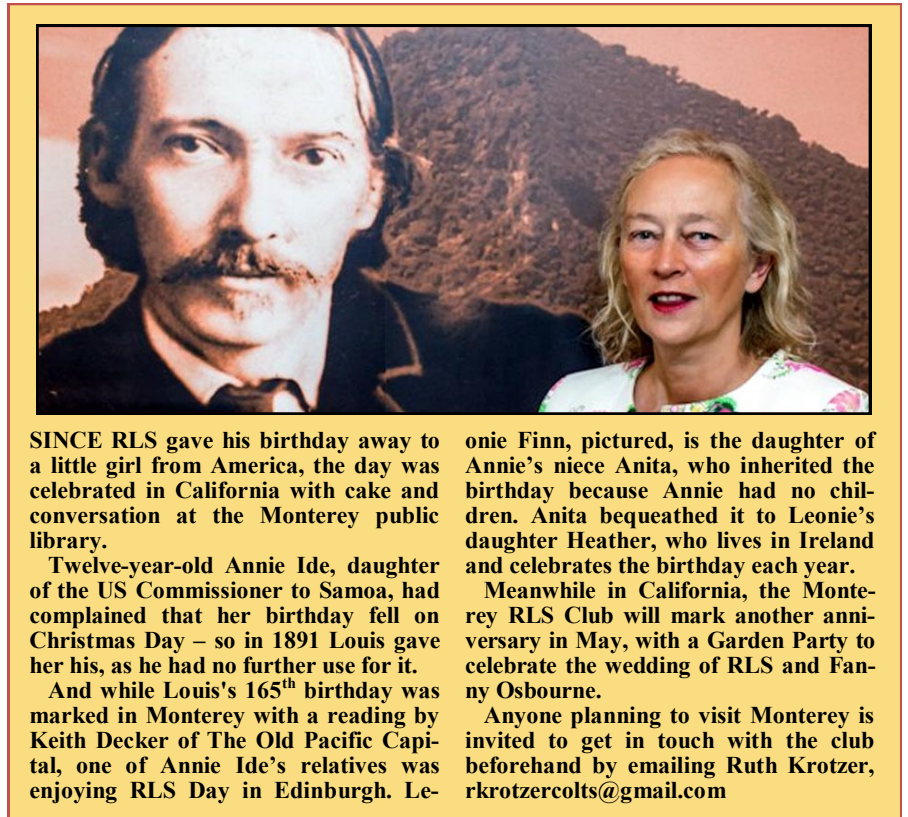
# RLS Day, a truly movie occasion

THE Club took Louis to the movies for its main contribution to the 2015 RLS Day celebrations in Edinburgh, when the theme was Stevenson on Stage and Screen.

The all-day free event at the Scottish Storytelling Centre provided a unique opportunity to compare Stevenson stories and novel extracts, read by Club members and friends, with Hollywood's interpretation of the same scenes, with each film clip screened directly afterwards.

Well-known movies such as the 1950 version of *Treasure Island*, with Robert Newton as Long John Silver, and the 1971 Michael Caine version of *Kidnapped* were interspersed with lesser-known gems such as Peter Cook and Dudley Moore in *The Wrong Box* (1966) or Jean-Marc Barre and Anna Friel in the 1998 screen version of *St Ives*.

Event organiser Jeremy Hodges took time out to talk over tea at 17 Heriot Row



SINCE RLS gave his birthday away to a little girl from America, the day was celebrated in California with cake and conversation at the Monterey public library.

Twelve-year-old Annie Ide, daughter of the US Commissioner to Samoa, had complained that her birthday fell on Christmas Day – so in 1891 Louis gave her his, as he had no further use for it.

And while Louis's 165<sup>th</sup> birthday was marked in Monterey with a reading by Keith Decker of *The Old Pacific Capital*, one of Annie Ide's relatives was enjoying RLS Day in Edinburgh. Le-

onie Finn, pictured, is the daughter of Annie's niece Anita, who inherited the birthday because Annie had no children. Anita bequeathed it to Leonie's daughter Heather, who lives in Ireland and celebrates the birthday each year.

Meanwhile in California, the Monterey RLS Club will mark another anniversary in May, with a Garden Party to celebrate the wedding of RLS and Fanny Osbourne.

Anyone planning to visit Monterey is invited to get in touch with the club beforehand by emailing Ruth Krotzer, rkrotzercolts@gmail.com

about RLS's own theatrical experiences, from Skelt's Juvenile Theatre to the amateur theatricals staged by Fleeming Jenkin.

The keynote RLS Day event, organised by Club member Linda Dryden, included an RLS discussion between actor Nigel Planer, scriptwriter Charlie Fletch-

er and composer Howard Blake, plus a unique screening of Blake's animated song cycle *The Land of Counterpane*, sung by the choir of The Mary Erskine School in Edinburgh.

RLS Day has now grown to a week-long programme, including two dramas from Club member Jack Shedden, poetry walks at Colinton, and a Lighthouse Stevensons event at Trinity House in Leith, with Club chairman David Reid talking about Louis's family of engineers.

The challenge now is to ensure that RLS Day 2016 is even better.



*Storytelling: Followed by screenings at the From An Original Idea by RLS event*

## BOOKSHELF

**DAVID BALFOUR**, a new edition of *Catriona* with the original text reinstated by Barry Menikoff and illustrations by NC Wyeth, is published by the Huntington Library Press in the USA, price \$35.

**STEVENSON'S PARIS**, *Bohemian Days Before Treasure Island*, by Jeremy Hodges, is now a Kindle ebook, price £2.99 from Amazon.