

The RLS Club News



Issue No 48

Spring 2017



Royal welcome: Louis was honoured with songs and fireworks as Network delegates met at the Chateau of Fontainebleau

Fantastic Fontainebleau

THE charm of Fontainebleau is a thing apart, as RLS wrote in his essay on the French Bohemian idyll where he lived and loved in his youth, and the European Network in the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson discovered the truth of his words in November during its AGM weekend.

Hosted by the Association Robert Louis Stevenson de Barbizon à Grez, the event's programme took us to various places visited by RLS in the Fontainebleau region, with the AGM itself held in the prestigious surroundings of

the Château of Fontainebleau, once the hunting lodge of French Kings.

Visiting speakers addressed us on topics relevant to our status as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, and member territories gave updates on their activities in 2016.

In the Highlands, the Stevenson Way had welcomed a group of teenagers from the Inland Voyage route for hiking, history and a ceilidh. In Bristol, home port of the good ship Hispaniola, the Long John Silver Trust had developed its Treasure Island sensory trail. In Belgium and

France, the Association Sur les Canaux du Nord in Belgium had been consolidating its route and had held a wealth of RLS-related exhibitions.

The Forest of Fontainebleau extended its territory with a hiking route to Châtillon-sur-Loire, as featured in last year's Summer Update, while in the Cevennes the Association Sur le Chemin de RLS had hosted hikers and students on the Travels with a Donkey trail as well as many artistic events. Meanwhile in Scotland, the Robert Louis Stevenson Club

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Inside: Club Events, RLS remembered in Edinburgh, Colinton and North Berwick

Look who was coming to dinner...

A UNIQUE memento of the birth of the Robert Louis Stevenson Club has been brought home to Edinburgh.

On November 13, 1920, the newly-founded club held its first Commemorative Dinner to mark Stevenson's birthday, with his friend the poet Edmund Gosse as guest of honour.

During the proceedings at the North British Station Hotel, a copy of the printed menu card was signed by several eminent members present.

These included Gosse himself, the literary scholar and critic Sir Herbert Grierson, the artist John Henry Lorimer and James Young Simpson, Professor of Natural Science and great-nephew of the famous gynaecologist.

A chance discovery in a miscellaneous auction lot in the south of England gave the RLS Club the opportunity to purchase the menu, designed by Lorimer and signed also by the Club's chairman, the poet and author Sir George Douglas.

This rare memento is now in the Club's hands and we hope to see it properly mounted and eventually put on display, quite possibly in Edinburgh Napier University's unique Stevenson collection.

Inspired to write

THERE is still time for students in S4-6 to enter the Robert Louis Stevenson Creative Writing Competition for Schools, run by the Club in conjunction with Edinburgh Napier University.

There are prizes of £100 for each winner in four categories, Fiction, Reflective Writing, Poetry, and Writing in Scots in any of these categories. The best entrants will also be invited to a Writing Masterclass with leading Scots writer Louise Welsh.

Full details and entry form at www.robert-louis-stevenson.org/writing-competition

The closing date is April 28, by when all entries should have been sent with an entry form to Duncan Milne at Edinburgh Napier University, email D.Milne@Napier.ac.uk

An Edinburgh walk with RLS

AN autumn walk saw a group of Club members exploring a series of sites in the east end of Edinburgh associated with Robert Louis Stevenson and his family.

Led by Dr Mitchell Manson and with readings by John Shedden, the walk last



Wreath-laying: Chairman David Reid

September began at the vault in the New Calton Cemetery where Louis's parents lie buried, along with his grandfather Robert Stevenson and other members of the lighthouse-building dynasty which he founded. In the 'grated cell, where the rain erases and the rust consumes', as Louis put it, 'hard by the house of kings repose the dead'.

Chairman David Reid hung a wreath on behalf of the club at the front of the vault, which also houses the remains of RLS's much-loved cousin Bob and his sister Katharine, sadly alienated from Louis by the quarrel with Henley.

Club members were concerned at the poor internal state of the vault, but delighted to find that another building with strong Stevenson connections is being given a new lease of life.

Pausing to inspect the Regent Arch, created by Robert Stevenson to enable



Home of the Balfours: The group at Pilrig House, visited by David in Catriona

the present eastern approach to Princes' Street, the party came to Robert's family home in Baxter's Place, extensively refurbished and opened on December 28 as a Marriott Courtyard Hotel with a bust of the famous engineer unveiled by his great, great, great grandson James Will.

On the opposite side of Leith Walk the group paused at the still clearly recognisable shop on the corner of Antigua Street where the young RLS would purchase 'penny plain and twopence coloured' sheets for his cardboard Skelt's

Juvenile Theatre. And so onwards 'down the walk' as far as Shrub Hill, past Pilrig Church where the young Stevenson played at churches with Walter Blaikie, son of the minister there, the Rev Dr William Blaikie.

Crossing the Boundary Bar (marking the divide between the old city of Edinburgh and the port of Leith) the walk concluded at Pilrig House, long-time seat of RLS's maternal Balfour relatives and visited by David Balfour in Louis's novel Catriona.

Journey through the enchanted forest



Forest walk: With donkeys following in Stevenson's footsteps

Continued from front page had been exploring the Catriona Trail devised by Club member Ian Gardiner.

The AGM weekend saw the Network's first formal academic session where we were privileged to have the participation of Professor Linda Dryden of Edinburgh Napier University and Professor Jean-Pierre Naugrette of l'université Sorbonne-Nouvelle.

In a fascinating session at the Hôtel Chevillon in Grez-sur-Loing, which in the 1870s played such an important role in RLS's life, the two professors talked about the current state of the Stevenson studies and re-

flected on the reception of his works since his lifetime.

Our hosts spared no efforts in their hospitality. We rekindled friendships over an opening buffet in Ian and Sophie's lovely home in Grez.

At Recluses we renewed our acquaintance with musician François Éberlé who moved us with his homage in song to RLS, followed by a lavish dinner produced by the Fontainebleau team of traditional poule au pot, pâtisseries which were the stuff of dreams and, of course, Modestine wine.

Modestine's memory was alive during a walk in the Forest of Fontainebleau ac-



Au revoir: Laura Leotoing

companied by donkeys. Local members told us about the history of the royal domain and hunting forest and Geneviève, their own Tusitana, captured our imaginations

with tales of an enchanted forest. Back at base with the donkeys, we enjoyed a musical performance by the group Raven who hiked the Travels with a Donkey route in 2016, giving concerts along the way.

Our one regret was the departure of Laura Léotoing, the Network's dynamic coordinator who is moving on after making a huge contribution to the Network and our European Cultural Route. We shall miss her greatly and wish her well for the future.

This year the European Network will come to Scotland for its AGM in Edinburgh on November 10-12.

Club Events

MARCH 18 BAXTER'S PLACE

ENJOY an RLS panel discussion chaired by David Reid at the Marriott Courtyard Hotel in Baxter's Place, once the home of Robert Stevenson. Coffee from 10.30, followed by lunch around 12.30 for a fixed price of £18. Book by March 4.

APRIL 29 LOUIS IN PEEBLES

VISIT the sites associated with RLS in Peebles where he spent childhood holidays with his parents. Meet at 11am in the forecourt of the Tontine Hotel in Peebles, served by the X62 bus from Edinburgh Bus Station. The event will include a walk along the banks of the River Tweed to Neidpath Castle. Book by April 22.

MAY 19 RLS FILM ARCHIVE

VIEW six short films relating to RLS during a visit to the Moving Picture Archive at the National Library of Scotland's new Kelvin Hall premises in Glasgow. Meet 10.30-11am, Kelvin Hall main entrance.

JUNE 1

ISLE OF MAY

SAIL to the Isle of May, where Louis's grandfather Robert Stevenson first built a lighthouse in 1816. Board the May Princess, Anstruther Harbour at 11.25am. Early booking essential, www.isleofmayferry.com or ring 07597 585200.

BOOKING

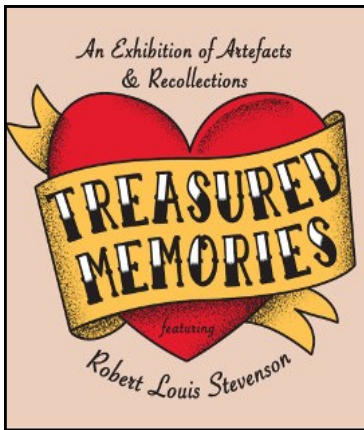
To book an event contact Events Secretary Margaret Wilkie at wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk or ring 0131 477 6738

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Treasures from the sands of time



ROBERT Louis Stevenson spent many happy childhood summer holidays in North Berwick, exploring the beaches and headlands and sailing to small islands offshore.

Those early expeditions would inspire his writing, including Treasure Island, Catriona, The Pavilion on the Links and The Lantern-Bearers, recalling holidays with his parents and cousins in the East Lothian town.

Now a new exhibition in North Berwick's recently restored and extended museum will celebrate the town's links with the Scottish writer known and loved throughout the world. Treasured Memories will take visi-

tors on a journey around Louis's childhood, sharing his memories which he viewed as 'a fairy gift which cannot be worn out in using.... the little sun-bright pictures of the past still shine in the mind's eye'.

Even at age 12, the young RLS made excellent use of his North Berwick memories in articles for his schoolboy magazine. And in his final years in Samoa, penning the Bass Rock scenes in Catriona, he was still drawing on this reservoir of knowledge from his youth.

Treasured Memories opens on April 1 at the Coastal Communities Museum, North Berwick, for details visit www.coastalmuseum.org

Criminally good way to mark RLS Day

MURDER most foul, housebreaking, bodysnatching and a little light terrorism were explored in the Club's contribution to RLS Day 2016, when the theme was Crime in Stevenson's writing.

The Appin Murder and Other Crimes was a day-long free programme of readings by Club members and friends at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh.

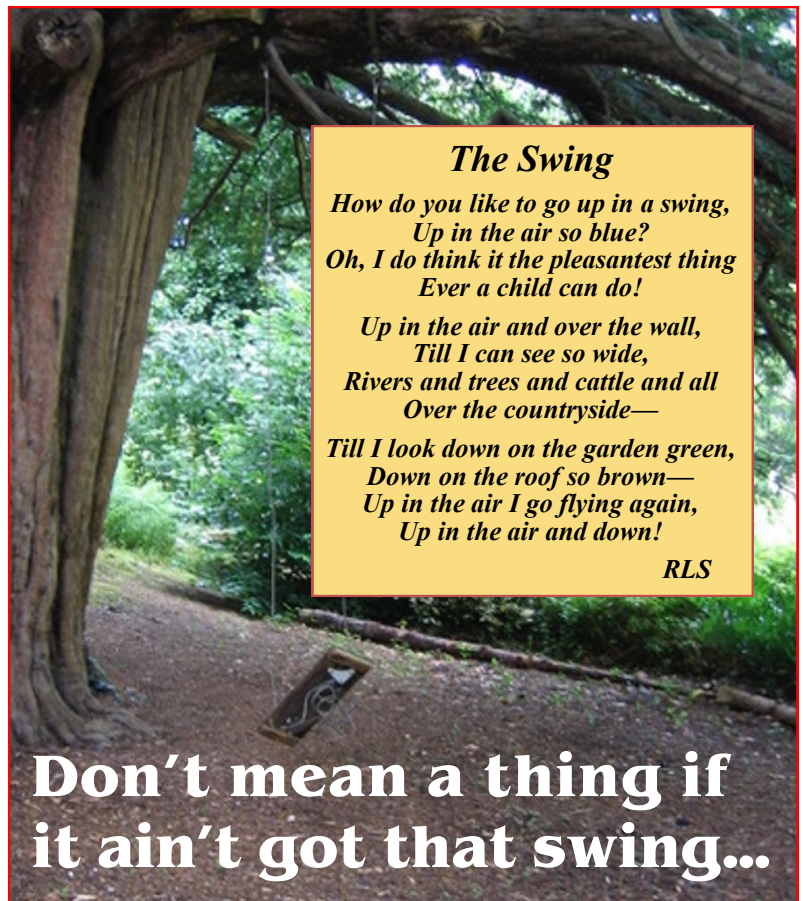
As Kidnapped was celebrating its 130th birthday it was given pride of place with readings focused on the central crime and its aftermath in Catriona.

There were extracts also from A Lodging for the Night, Markheim, Jekyll and Hyde and The Body Snatcher, plus a performance of a scene from Deacon Brodie, while a reading from The Dynamiter ended the event, not with a bang but with laughter.

The Club also staged an event at Heriot Row, hosted by John and Felicitas Macfie, with a talk by Jeremy Hodges about the murderer Eugene Chantrelle, prime suspect as the inspiration for Jekyll and Hyde.

The keynote lecture by Kidnapped expert Professor Barry Menikoff was organised by Professor Linda Dryden of Edinburgh Napier University, while the Club's John Shedden and Peter Berry reprised their popular Evening with Robert Louis Stevenson at the Hawes Inn, South Queensferry.

Throughout RLS week a free ebook by Jeremy Hodges was downloadable online. If you would still like a free copy of Mrs Jekyll and Cousin Hyde, email jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk



The Swing

*How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasant thing
Ever a child can do!*

*Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside—*

*Till I look down on the garden green,
Down on the roof so brown—
Up in the air I go flying again,
Up in the air and down!*

RLS

Don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing...

FOR at least 160 years it has delighted generations of children, including the young Robert Louis Stevenson.

Memories of playing on the swing in the garden of Colinton Manse inspired one of his best-loved children's poems when as an adult he lay ill in bed in the Land of Counterpane, penning A Child's Garden of Verses.

The swing still hangs from its original hooks on the same ancient yew tree but through old age and exuberant use it has become increasingly fragile. Now the Colinton Communi-

ty Conservation Trust has stepped in to have the weakened branch stabilised and the swing rehung on the ancient hooks.

Sadly its swinging days are now over, but visitors will be able to view it and imagine the young RLS soaring 'up in the air so blue'.

The RLS Club has contributed £200 towards the restoration costs, and once again we express our warm appreciation of the Trust's continuing commitment to preserving Colinton's Stevenson heritage.

AND FINALLY: Members paying annually who have not yet responded to the notice sent with the last Newsletter are reminded their subscription is overdue.