



Footsteps on the sand

FROM the Forest of Fontainebleau or the Cevennes mountains in southern France to the windswept sands of North Berwick was quite a cultural leap, but our friends from the European Network In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson rose to the challenge.

The day in Louis's seaside childhood haunt was part of a programme of entertainment laid on by the Club last November once the serious business of the Network's AGM was concluded in Edinburgh.

This included a review of progress since the Network achieved accreditation as a European Cultural Route in 2015. The Council of Europe undertakes three-yearly reviews of the Routes to ensure they continue to meet the criteria and a significant task for the coming year will be the Network's response to this review.

The two days of RLS-related visits began when Professor Linda Dryden, committee member of the RLS Club and co-editor of the Journal of Stevenson Studies, welcomed us to Edinburgh Napier University where we viewed the extensive collection of RLS works and memorabilia built up over many years by Ernest Mehew, editor of RLS's letters.

There was also a trip to Colinton where young Louis made regular visits to see his grandfather and parish minister, the Rev Dr Lewis Balfour. The Colinton



Windswept drama: North Berwick member Vincent Guy entertains our guests

Community Conservation Trust showed us the RLS Poetry Trail and the sculpture of Louis as a boy which they had installed in the village. We were welcomed by the current minister, the Rev Rolf Billes, who spoke to us about the church

and showed us the manse where RLS's grandparents lived, and the garden where the future author of *A Child's Garden of Verses* liked 'to go up in a swing, up in the air so blue'. The swing and the yew tree on which it hangs have recently been restored by the Trust and the church.

After a chilly afternoon out of doors we were glad to warm ourselves over dinner followed by a ceilidh of Scottish country dancing, before braving the elements next day at North Berwick.

The surrounding area inspired the location of a number of Stevenson's works, from *The Pavilion On The Links* to the scene of David Balfour's imprisonment on the Bass Rock in *Catriona*.

The local RLS group guided us on a walk through the town and along the beach in the footsteps of RLS and to the Museum of Coastal Communities to study the excellent Stevenson exhibition before delegates returned to Edinburgh for a warming glass at the closing evening reception.

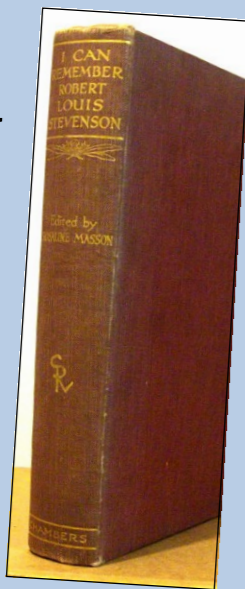


Stevenson on the shore: Delegates dressed for the occasion at North Berwick

ELIZABETH BAIRD

Inside: RLS Day the French way, Centenary plans, Club events and Louis afloat

After a century can we bring RLS to book again?



The original book

OUR Club's Centenary is not far off and some ideas are already taking shape for our celebrations in 2020.

The Robert Louis Stevenson Club came into being on November 13, 1920, when a group of notable figures in art, literature and Edinburgh civic life held the first Commemorative Dinner. We still have the eight course menu, autographed by the principal guests and performers.

For 2020 one thought is to publish a commemorative book. One hundred years ago, Rosalind Masson marked the Club's beginning with *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, a fascinating collection of reminiscences by people who had actually known RLS.

Contributors to the volume ranged from Miss Masson's sister Flora, who shared vivid memories of the Jenkin theatricals and Louis's final departure from Scotland, and Sir James Barrie who, despite never having met Stevenson, invented a whimsical encounter with him in an Edinburgh pub.

The people who met the man are now long gone, but Stevenson the writer has continued to be a living, inspirational force in the imaginations of readers worldwide, including some of the greatest writers of the 20th and 21st centuries. A hundred years on, a diverse selection of accounts by those he has influenced in literature or life would be a tribute which would also vividly reflect why his achievements have stood the test of time.

Another proposal comes from James Mitchell, who represents the National Library of Scotland on our Committee. An exhibition in the Library to mark the Centenary, drawn from its superb RLS collections, would be another very significant contribution.

We have other ideas we may develop, but we will also welcome thoughts and suggestions from you, our international community of members. It is not too soon to start drawing up our plans.

DAVID REID

Un jour de Louis

THE 167th birthday of RLS was made special by the presence in Edinburgh of our visitors from the European Network. In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson, who were the Club's guests during the 2017 AGM weekend.

On the eve of RLS Day the Network's Scottish and European delegates, including for the first time one from Germany, gathered for a splendid closing party at the Edinburgh home of Professor Linda Dryden and her family – just around the corner from where Louis and his friend Charles Baxter could often be found drinking at the pub run by the cantanker-

ous Thomas Brash, later immortalised in a series of comic sonnets by Stevenson.

The spirit of camaraderie continued the following day when the Club's RLS Day performance of readings was for the first time a bilingual affair. RLS: The French Connection featured readings in French and English from *A Child's Garden of Verses*, plus extracts from *An Inland Voyage*, *Travels With A Donkey*, *Forest Notes* and an abridged *Treasure of Franchard*, set in Grez-sur-Loing.

Our venue at Augustine United Church was packed as more delegates arrived after visiting the War Poets Collection to

mark the fact that the First World War poet Wilfred Owen was killed in 1918 at Ors on the route of the Inland Voyage where his life and works are commemorated.

It was wonderful to hear Stevenson's poetry in his second language of French and being able to share our common love of RLS in this way was a great pleasure to all concerned.

There was a significant change to RLS Day in 2017, as the Club took over the coordinating role hitherto undertaken by the City of Literature. This involved the creation of a new RLS Day website with the invaluable assistance of Szymon Fiuk, a Polish web design student at Edinburgh Napier University.

With the encouragement of the Club's RLS Day co-ordinator Jeremy Hodges, a programme was put together reflecting all aspects of Stevenson. Afternoon Tea at 17 Heriot Row, hosted in Stevenson's former home by John and Felicitas Macfie, featured a talk by Kevin MacNeil, editor of a new RLS anthology.

This year saw a good crop of events by authors and poets, from Sian Mackay (*The House On The Chine*) and Jane Bonnyman (*Embers From The Fire*) to Anthony O'Neill (*Dr Jekyll and Mr Seek*) and Jeremy Hodges (*Mrs Jekyll & Cousin Hyde*). Award-winning novelist Jane Rogers, who dramatised *The Ebb Tide* and *The Beach of Falesa* for Radio 4, gave the central keynote lecture staged by Edinburgh Napier University, while at the



Connecting: Michel Legros and Jeremy Hodges perform a poem from *A Child's Garden Of Verses*



Liberté, égalité... camaraderie: Elizabeth Baird, Christian Brochier, Ian Gardiner, Linda Dryden and Michel Legros share the spirit of Stevenson

20 years of the write stuff in Stevenson's memory

AS a Club our aim is to foster interest in the life and works of RLS, and an important part of this is the work done by members each week at the Writers' Museum in Edinburgh.

Visitors to the museum can enjoy a collection ranging from Louis's boots and hat to the Deacon Brodie wardrobe from 17 Heriot Row and items from Samoa, including a portrait of RLS at Vailima by Count Girolamo Nerli.

For more than 20 years Pat Watt and Mona Imlach have served as volunteer guides in the Stevenson Room and their recent retirement was marked at their last guides meeting by a presentation and farewell drink with Gareth Jenkins, the City Museums Volunteers' Co-ordinator. Meanwhile the work continues at the Writers' Muse-

um, where Museums and Galleries Edinburgh are looking for new Stevenson enthusiasts to join the team.

Volunteers spend time (usually weekly or fortnightly) at the museum, where they are at hand to talk informally to visitors about Stevenson, his life, his books and the exhibits in the room.

If you would be interested in sharing your passion for Stevenson with the public, the Writers' Museum would love to hear from you!

For more information, contact Club chairman David Reid at davidalison.reid@gmail.com, tel 01592 204645, or you can contact Volunteer Co-ordinator Gareth Jenkins directly at Gareth.jenkins@edinburgh.gov.uk or phone 0131 529 2193.



Farewell: Mona Imlach and Pat Watt with Gareth Jenkins

Writers' Museum writer and actor Michael Daviot used Stevenson's poems to tell the story of his life from Edinburgh to the South Seas.

Events for children included a visit by author Cathy MacPhail (*The Evil Within*) to Oxfangs Primary, which boasts a door signed by RLS with a record of his height, and a Kidnapped Parrot Hunt and Pirate Fun Day at South Queensferry, where for

adults there was also a walk in Louis's footsteps along the Forth led by Ian Logan of The Stevenson Way.

Edinburgh University released a new LitLong app allowing people to explore Stevenson sites around the city - and last, but by no means least, a lunch at the Royal Overseas League featured a talk by our chairman David Reid on Stevenson And The Devil Inside.

Network's rosy future

A ROSE by any other name might smell as sweet, but nothing could be more special than a new variety created in the enchanted forest where Louis fell in love with the woman who became his wife.

The new Robert Louis Stevenson rose, developed by a local grower of traditional varieties, was launched by the Fontainebleau group of the European Network.

It is hoped that future sales of the rose will make a contribution to the Network's budget.

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YOUR PROGRAMME OF CLUB EVENTS

MARCH 15

AN IDLE, UNPOPULAR STUDENT GATHER at 1-3 Baxter's Place in Edinburgh, home to the great lighthouse builder Robert Stevenson and now the Courtyard hotel, for lunch preceded by a talk from club member Jeremy Hodges on the eight years RLS spent as a student, eventually abandoning engineering for law. By studiously avoiding lectures and pursuing his colourful interests elsewhere, he laid the foundations for a wide and varied literary career. Price £18, including coffee at 11am and two-course lunch around 12.30pm. Bookings via Margaret Wilkie.

APRIL 11

DR JEKYLL & MR HYDE EXPERIENCE Stevenson's classic gothic thriller in this Touring Consortium Theatre Company production at the

King's Theatre, Edinburgh, starring Phil Daniels: a twisted tale of nerve-jangling horror adapted by award-winning playwright David Edgar.

A group booking for 24 has been made for the matinee performance at 2.30 on Wednesday. Dress Circle tickets in rows B, C and D are at a group discount price of £25 per person. An opportunity to meet cast members after the show is planned. Those interested should contact Margaret Wilkie as soon as possible with payment

BOOKING

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

no later than March 10. Collect tickets from Jack Shedden in the main foyer by 2pm on the day of the performance.

JUNE 23

DOON THE WATTER

FOLLOW in the wake of RLS, detailed below, by taking the paddle steamer Waverley down the Clyde to Greenock, Helensburgh, Dunoon, Rothesay and onward through the Kyles of Bute as far as Tighnabruich, with Stevenson-related talk along the way. Cost £41, leaving 10am from Glasgow Science Centre, opposite the Broomielaw, returning at 8.30pm. Book tickets direct with the Waverley, online or phone 0141 243 2444, but please give your names also to trip organiser Rex Homer, on 01620 895001 or email rexhomer@aol.com. Rex has further details about parking and travel.

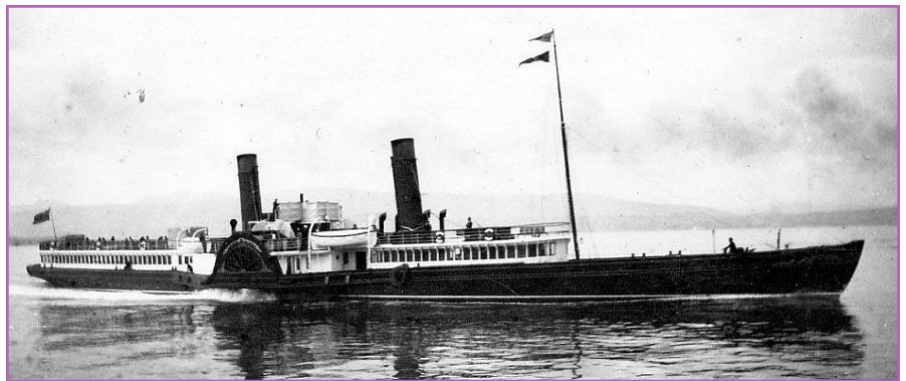
Doon the Watter in Stevenson's wake

STEAMING down the Clyde from Glasgow's Broomielaw on August 7, 1879, 28-year-old Robert Louis Stevenson and his fellow emigrants came to the stretch of water known as the Tail of the Bank off Greenock.

There the Devonia lay anchored, 'her sea-signal flying: a wall of bulwark, a street of white deck-houses, an aspiring forest of spars, larger than a church, and soon to be as populous as many an incorporated town in the land to which she was to bear us'.

The short journey by paddle steamer to join the emigrant ship was the start of an epic voyage that would see Louis reunited with Fanny Osbourne in California, from which he would return a married man embarking on a new life.

It had been foretold nine years previously after another trip Doon the Watter to Dunoon, where in the bar of his hotel Louis met an old crone, in her youth a camp follower with the 42nd Highlanders,



Full steam ahead: At Greenock Louis embarked on the Iona en route to Earraid

who told him 'I was to visit America, that I was to be very happy, and that I was to be much upon the sea'.

Later in the summer of 1870, Louis had again been sailing Doon the Watter, this time from Greenock on the paddle steamer Iona, heading through the Kyles of

Bute and past Tighnabruich en route to Oban, Iona and Earraid, base station for the Dubh Artach lighthouse designed by his father and inspiration for Kidnapped.

Louis enjoyed his trip aboard the Iona immensely, chatting with the family of his engineering professor Fleeming Jenkin, flirting in Fingal's Cave on Staffa with 16-year-old Amy Sinclair, daughter of a Caithness baronet, and discussing books with the brandy-fuelled Bohemian artist Sam Bough, in whose company he attempted to tackle an inedibly tough chicken dinner at a hotel before the final short crossing to Earraid.

The elegant little ship he sailed in was built on the Clyde in 1864 and served for 72 years until broken up in 1936. Last year the Waverley celebrated her 70th birthday and is on course to break Iona's record.



Emigrant ship: At the Tail of the Bank, Louis transferred to the SS Devonia