



## Happy birthday, Louis

THE 168<sup>th</sup> birthday of Robert Louis Stevenson on November 13 was celebrated in style with a string of events in and around his native Edinburgh.

As the Club takes on more responsibility for co-ordinating the annual RLS Day celebrations on a near-zero budget, it was heartening to find over a dozen events in the 2018 programme.

The Club took over part of the Central Library in Edinburgh for Stevenson In The States, an afternoon of readings featuring Louis's reports from his emigrant voyage to New York and wild west train journey to California in pursuit of Fanny Osbourne, plus his Silverado Squatters account of their honeymoon.

Each RLS Day sees a special event at Stevenson's home in Heriot Row, by courtesy of John and Felicitas Macfie, and this time it was a musical treat from folk duo Neil Adam and Judy Turner on a visit from Australia.

Mrs Stevenson's drawing-room echoed to the sound of their singing and stories in a performance telling the tale of her son's life and adventures from Scotland to Samoa.

For the energetic there was a favourite Stevenson walk along the Forth from South Queensferry, led by



*A life in song: Neil Adam and Judy Turner in Mrs Stevenson's drawing-room*

Ian Logan, while Colinton Community Conservation Trust director Duncan Campbell led a less taxing guided walk along the RLS Poetry Trail to the RLS statue by the parish church.

Authors again featured in RLS Day events, with Liz MacRae Shaw (*No Safe Anchorage*) and Jeremy Hodges

(*Mrs Jekyll & Cousin Hyde*) discussing Stevenson and the historical novel at the Writers' Museum, while at Blackwell's Bookshop Lachlan Munro shared his findings about Kidnapped in *The Scenery of Dreams*.

There was also a celebration of Stevenson silliness at Typewronger Books, publisher of a new edition of *The Misadventures of John Nicolson*.

Students again played a part in the celebrations, with an Edinburgh Gothic event at Edinburgh university, while budding actors, directors and playwrights at Edinburgh Napier university staged an evening of performances inspired by *Songs of Travel*.

For schools there was an event based on the poem From A Railway Carriage at North Queensferry Primary, while for a more international perspective Jeremy Hodges addressed a Royal Over-Seas League lunch on the subject of Stevenson Overseas.

Overall, RLS Day remains a great way to achieve the Club's objective of furthering interest in Stevenson's life and works - and good fun, too.

### A Pacific pilgrimage

AHEAD of RLS Day, Club members Mitchell Manson and Rex Homer made a pilgrimage to California and Samoa, where Stevenson's birthday is still celebrated.

They visited his grave on Mount Vaea with our Australian friends Neil Adam and Judy Turner, who then gave a concert at Vailima.



*Graveside gathering: Neil, Mitchell, Rex and Judy*

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Judging the Appin Murder

MURDER seemed unlikely in the gracious surroundings of Glasgow's Western Club last month, but it was on the agenda when the retired Scottish judge Lord Stewart gave a talk on the central theme of Stevenson's pair of novels, *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*.

A longstanding and distinguished RLS Club member, Angus Stewart is formidably well qualified to examine the Appin Murder, in fact and fiction, through his knowledge of the law, the history and traditions of Clan Stewart, and his understanding of Stevenson.

Thanks to our committee member Dr Jon Cossar, Club members were invited to join those of the Western Club to enjoy Lord Stewart's vivid portrayal of the times and circumstances of the murder, deepening his listeners' sense of the historical context and of the real characters who inspired RLS.

But who committed the murder? It still remains a mystery.

### Change the future

CHANGING circumstances mean two vacancies on the Club Committee from July, including the post of Minutes Secretary, and we will welcome interest from any Club member who might like to be involved.

The committee meets three times a year, in addition to the AGM, to organise events and activities and to shape the future policy and development of the Club.

Any new member will become part of a friendly and supportive group and the essential qualification, beyond our shared enthusiasm for RLS, is a readiness to carry the Club forward as we enter our second century with fresh ideas and initiatives.

The role of Minutes Secretary is straightforward and well supported: to prepare and distribute the Agenda of a meeting, draft the Minutes, then circulate them in consultation with the Chairperson. It does not involve dealing with correspondence.

Anyone interested should contact David Reid, details below.

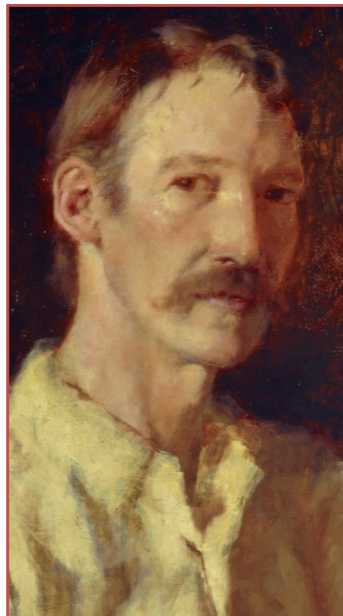
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Stevenson & Son: Louis by GP Nerli, Thomas by George Reid

## Like father, like son?

MEMBERS were treated to a unique insight into the relationship between RLS and his father when Dr Patricia Andrew addressed a lunchtime meeting at the Royal Scots Club.

Dr Andrew based her introduction on the painterly GP Nerli portrait of Louis and Sir George Reid's fine traditional likeness of Thomas Stevenson.

We were invited to study the portraits carefully to examine father and son in depth, with Dr Andrew indicating points to better understand their characters.

This resulted in a lively discussion among members, led by Ian Nimmo.

Was Thomas, as some biographers suggest, so utterly unpleasant to Louis, a controlling skinflint embroiled in constant rumbling and sometimes thunderous rows with his son? Or have biog-

raphers been blinded by RLS's best-selling celebrity status and his vivid life, and have exaggerated small, meaningless incidents, taken out of perspective, to give a skewed picture of the whole Stevenson family?

Perhaps ultimately Thomas was indeed the benevolent figure described by Louis, who wrote: 'Few men were more beloved in Edinburgh, where he breathed an air that pleased him; and wherever he went, in railway carriages or hotel smoking rooms, his strange, humorous vein of talk, and his transparent honesty, raised him up friends and admirers.'

In the end, chairman David Reid had to step in to end the debate as we had run out of time, but one thing was certain – Thomas and RLS were each an enigma.

IAN NIMMO

## Voyage into Europe in Louis's wake

IN 1876 RLS undertook a canoe trip from Antwerp to Pontoise and published his account of the journey as *An Inland Voyage*.

The European Network In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson followed his trail when we held our AGM in Noyon, northern France, in November 2018.

Club committee members Elizabeth Baird and Ian Gardiner were warmly welcomed by our hosts, the Communauté des Communes des 2 Vallées, who are part of the Association which promotes the *Inland Voyage* route.

In addition to workshops on the future development of the Network and the RLS European Cultural Route, we had the pleasure of talks from two authors.

Françoise Sylvestre, who has collaborated with other authors to write a book while staying at the Stevenson lighthouse on Bressay in Shetland, spoke about her biography *Robert Louis Stevenson, Les Chemins de la Liberté*.

Jean-Jacques Greif told delegates about his new French translation of *Treasure Island*, inspired by the need to make the language of the pirates less sophisticated than the way they speak in other renditions.

Our hosts arranged an excellent programme of guided visits including a tour of Noyon Cathedral, of which RLS wrote: 'I have seldom looked on the east end of a church with more complete sympathy.'

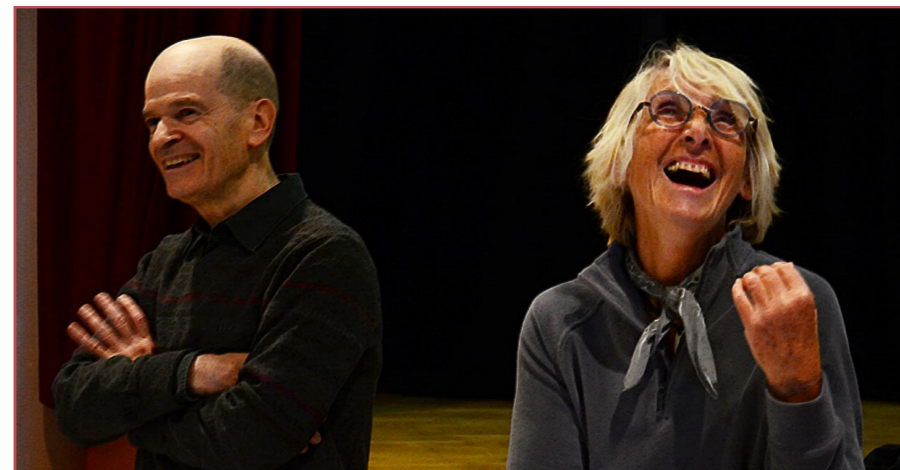
In keeping with the *Inland Voyage* theme we visited the Cité des Bateliers (the Town of the Boatmen) at Longueil-Annel where we learned about the life of the families who lived and traded on the rivers and canals, described in Stevenson's little book.

At the museum there the Fontainebleau group planted an RLS rose, and we then took a boat trip to historic Compiègne, viewing the magnificent facade of the town hall which RLS described in detail.

This area of France saw action in World War One and we visited a limestone quarry at Carrières de Montigny which served during the conflict as habitation for soldiers, some of whom had carved an altar in the stone.

Once again it was good to see RLS enthusiasts from the network's member countries – now including Germany – joining together to share their love of the author and to follow in his footsteps.

ELIZABETH BAIRD



Joie de vivre: Jean-Jacques Greif and Françoise Sylvestre celebrate Stevenson



Admired by Stevenson: The Town Hall at Compiègne

## EVENTS

MARCH 9

### STEVENSON AND SAMOA

VOYAGE into the Pacific with Joseph Farrell, Professor Emeritus of Strathclyde University, who will give a talk based on his book about Stevenson's time roaming the Pacific and building a new life for himself and his family in Samoa. City Arts Centre, 2 Market Street, Edinburgh, 10.30 for 11am, £4 per person. Register by March 4.

APRIL 10

### PACIFIC PILGRIMAGE

STEVENSON'S presence is still very much felt in Samoa, as Club members Rex Homer and Mitchell Manson discovered on a pilgrimage to the Pacific last autumn. They'll be sharing their experiences at 2pm at Stockbridge Church Hall, Saxe Coburg Street, Edinburgh (close by Edinburgh Academy). Price £2, register by April 1.

MAY 18

### A STEVENSON WALK

FOLLOW in the footsteps of RLS on a guided walk beside the Forth from Cramond to South Queensferry. With an option to book for lunch at the Hawes Inn, South Queensferry, scene of David Balfour's kidnapping in *Kidnapped*, for those registering by May 1. Assemble 10am at Cramond Brig Hotel car park.

JUNE 15

### INNERPEFFRAY LIBRARY

YOUR chance to visit this hidden gem, escorted by local Club member Denis Frize. Scotland's oldest (1694) public lending library is in the hamlet of Innerpeffray, four miles from Crieff, and contains an incredible collection of Mediaeval and Early Modern literature. Numbers limited to the first 15 persons registering by June 1. Assemble 10am at Dunblane railway station.

JUNE 22

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

A DATE for your diary. Come along and share your views on the Club. More details nearer the day.

### BOOKING

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

# Thoughts on RLS's Sermon at Christmas

STEVENSON wrote in his Christmas Sermon: 'If your morals make you dreary, depend upon it they are wrong. I do not say "give them up", for they may be all you have, but conceal them like a vice, lest they should spoil the lives of better and simpler people.'

There was nothing dreary when members attended Stockbridge Church, near St Stephen's in Edinburgh where the Stevenson family worshipped, for a discussion of the sermon Louis penned at Saranac Lake in the winter of 1886/87.

Taking on the mantle of RLS, John Shedden delivered the sermon from the pulpit with Club member the Rev John Munro supplying an illuminating commentary.

The sermon includes words engraved on the Portsmouth Square monument to RLS in San Francisco's Chinatown: 'To be honest, to be kind – to earn a little and to spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not to be embittered, to keep a few friends but these without capitulation – above all, on the same grim condition, to keep friends with himself – here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy.'



*Sermon and commentary: John Shedden and the Rev John Munro at Stockbridge Church (Picture: Rev Dr John Cowie)  
Rex Homer was at the Stevenson memorial in San Francisco*

## Inspired by Stevenson

OUR Commemorative Book project to celebrate the Club's centenary is progressing, with impressive contributions received from or promised by an international company of writers, journalists, figures in public life and Stevenson scholars.

But just as important are personal contributions from Club members – all combining to show how Stevenson is very much alive and inspirational in our contemporary imaginative world, as well as reflecting the very different pathways which bring readers to him.

We are now ready to discuss the project with potential publishers, while retaining the option of self publication. Further contributions of up to 1,000 words can be sent to David Reid not later than April 30.

### Creative endeavour

THE deadline for entries to our annual Robert Louis Stevenson Creative Writing Competition for senior pupils in Scottish secondary schools is April 18.

Success in the competition, run in partnership with Edinburgh Napier University, offers the unique opportunity to take part in a writers' Master Class led by the acclaimed novelist Louise Welsh.

There are also substantial cash prizes for the best Prose Fiction, Poetry, Reflective Writing and pieces in Scots. The competition is open to any pupil, not restricted to those studying RLS in class.

Further details can be found at [www.robert-louis-stevenson.org](http://www.robert-louis-stevenson.org)

## A Vailima mystery solved

WE were intrigued by the mystery object found in the grounds of Stevenson's last home at Vailima by Club member Neil Adam – a cast iron plaque depicting a lighthouse.

Various theories were put forward and the Northern Lighthouse Board in Scotland was contacted as a link to Stevenson lighthouse builders seemed likely.

But Neil's fellow musician Catherine Strutt recognised the 'plaque' as a section of a Beacon Light cast iron stove – once a familiar fixture in homes across Australia.

Yet there may still be a Scottish connection! The firm of Metters, which made the stoves, used foundries in Australia, the USA and Scotland – and it was from Scotland that a shipment was unloaded at Sydney harbour in 1890.



*Beacon: Neil Adam and Samoan friend*