

# UPDATE

The Robert Louis Stevenson Club June 2019



## An RLS Odyssey

CLUB members Mitchell Manson and Rex Homer entertained a good-sized, appreciative audience in the attractive surroundings of Edinburgh's Stockbridge Church with an illustrated talk on their visit to Samoa last Autumn.

Sharing their experiences about a pilgrimage that took them to California, Singapore, San Francisco and ultimately Samoa, Mitchell and Rex, in their own inimitable way, delighted us with a unique travel diary.

Superb slides traced the challenging journey the Stevenson family made, the interesting people and friends met along the way. They even encountered the Grizzly Giant in Yosemite!

In particular we got an up to date look at Vailima and its popularity as a tourist destination. And of course Mitchell and Rex stood by Stevenson's grave with a spiritual gift (Glenlivet, I imagine). After tackling the steep climb to the summit of Mount Vaea the fitness levels of our intrepid duo and the serendipitous nature of their chance encounters with friends of RLS were a delight and may well have inspired Stevensonians to follow their lead and 'travel hopefully' to Samoa.

A moving postscript was a picture of the tribute to RLS by the Stevenson Society of America at the Stevenson Cottage, Saranac Lake: 'His genius was so universal, his philosophy so boundless that no country can claim him; he belongs to the world.'

**JOHN SHEDDEN**

### Stevenson on song in Samoa



RLS show: Neil and Judy

AMONG the friends encountered by Mitchell and Rex at Vailima were Australian folk duo Neil Adam and Judy Turner, performing their musical journey through the life of RLS at his last home in the Pacific.

The pair plan to bring Sing Me A Song: The Robert Louis Stevenson Show to the Edinburgh Fringe this August at the Scottish Storytelling Centre in the High Street from August 1-11.



Vailima Gathering: Mitchell Manson and Rex Homer, left, with RLS fans on the verandah of his home and, above, his grave on Mount Vaea

### June 22 Annual General Meeting

THE Annual General Meeting of the Robert Louis Stevenson Club will be held on Saturday June 22 in the Mackenzie Building of the Faculty of Advocates, Old Assembly Close, 172 High Street, Edinburgh, at 11.00am (Coffee from 10.30am), conducted by retiring chairman David Reid.

The committee is delighted to announce that the distinguished journalist and author Alan Taylor has accepted its unanimous nomination to become the Club's new chairman, subject to members' approval.

The AGM is also your chance to air your views and ideas for the Club's future development, so do put the date in your diary and come along.



*Atmospheric: All that remains of the house on the Cammo Estate*

# Could this ruin be what's left of David Balfour's House of Shaws?

WHAT could have been a disaster when the Club's planned walk from Cramond in the footsteps of David Balfour had to be called off due to inclement weather turned into a very pleasant lunch at the Hawes Inn, from which David is abducted in *Kidnapped*.

The talk there turned to the House of Shaws near Cramond, David's rightful inheritance denied him by his wicked uncle Ebenezer. Was there a particular Scottish house on which Stevenson based his memorable chapter in which David narrowly escapes plunging to his death from an unfinished stair in the dark?

Various possibilities have been put forward over the years, including Old Glassingall, a former laird's house near Dunblane – nowhere near Cramond, but Stevenson knew that part of Perthshire well. A little more likely is Cramond House, whose central part dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

But a prime contender nearby is Cammo House, built for John Men-



*Kidnapped: At the Hawes Inn*

ties in 1693 but latterly allowed to fall into a very atmospheric ruin. Could this be where Ebenezer Balfour lived his miserly existence, eking out by gruel?

In fiction, of course, anything is possible and Stevenson may have been inspired by all three.

Members' views on the subject will be welcomed in due course when the Cramond walk is reinstated as a future Club event.

## New writers inspired by Stevenson

OUR annual creative writing competition for schools will culminate on June 14, when ten young people will have the memorable experience of taking part in a writers' Master Class with the distinguished author Louise Welsh.

Edinburgh Napier University, our partners in the enterprise, will provide the venue in their Merchiston facility and the hospitality for the reception afterwards for the young writers, their parents and teachers, where Louise Welsh will announce the individual prizewinners.

We thank once again Professor Linda Dryden and her colleague Duncan Milne for their vital roles in facilitating the competition, and most of all Louise Welsh for judging it and for the unique opportunity she gives to the aspiring writers.

## European seal of approval for Louis

THE Club is delighted to learn that the European Cultural Route 'In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson' has been successful in its bid to get re-accredited by the Council of Europe for the next three years.

Club representatives look forward to attending the route's AGM this year in the German spa town of Bad Homburg, which the young Louis visited with his parents in the summer of 1862.

## CONTACTS

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