

The RLS Club News



Issue No 51

Autumn 2018



Amateur Emigrant voyage on board the Waverley

IT is 124 years since publication of *The Amateur Emigrant* – From The Clyde to Sandy Hook, a year after its author's death. The book that Robert Louis Stevenson's father regarded as disreputable and sought to suppress recalls how in 1879 Louis travelled down the Clyde on a 'Clutha' or small passenger steamer to Greenock.

There he would join the emigrant ship *Devonia*, raising steam to take him second class to a new life in the Land of the Free (or at least more free than 17 Heriot Row and his distraught father).

But it wasn't his first trip on the Clyde, which since Roman times had been transporting folk from the heart of Scotland to its uttermost isles.

Thus the youthful Louis had travelled in 1870 from Glasgow's Broomielaw to Fingal's Cave on Staffa and onward via Oban and Mull



All hands on deck: Club members enjoying themselves aboard the Waverley

to tryst, although he did not know it yet, with the literary Fates on the Isle of Erraid, later immortalised in *Kidnapped*.

And so it was that at ten on the morning of June 23, the good ship *Waverley* cast off for'ard and aft at the BBC Quay in Glasgow to take a party of intrepid Stevensonians in the wake of RLS as far as Tighnabruaich. Rex

Homer had done all the work of arranging the day, even engaging an ethnic guide, who took us past shipyards present and defunct, Dumbarton Castle and distant Ben Lomond and eventually to Greenock, where *Waverley* tied up on her first scheduled stop.

Stevenson biographer and club member Jeremy Hodges had provided

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Inside: Stateside for RLS Day, a postcard from Japan, Club Events and RLS on film



From Paris to the States

ROBERT Louis Stevenson Day is fast approaching, with the Club playing a crucial role in continuing the annual celebration of Louis's November 13 birthday, in his home city and beyond.

Our own all-day readings from his works and letters will be on the theme Stevenson And The States, from his Paris romance with Fanny Osbourne to the Amateur Emigrant and Silverado Squatters, plus essays and the vivid accounts in Louis's letters. If you would like to take part, please email jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk

Individual RLS Day events will be promoted online by participating bodies including Edinburgh Napier University and the City of Literature, with the full programme appearing over the next few weeks on the RLS Day website, rlsday.wordpress.com

RLS to Rossini at Rosslyn

WHEN RLS visited Rosslyn Chapel in the summer of 1870, he would have never have guessed that members of a club formed in his honour would be there 148 years later, listening to Rossini's La Scala Di Seta ('The Silken Ladder'). They were invited to attend by Club member Ailene Hunter, who is Honorary Patron of the Raucous Rossini company.

Stevenson in Europe

THE European Network In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson will hold its AGM in Noyon, France, on November 15-18. Unfortunately this is the same weekend as the RLS Annual Luncheon but Club delegates Ian Gardiner and Elizabeth Baird will attend.

Sponsor a new member

MEMBERSHIP renewal forms enclosed with this Newsletter include the opportunity to sponsor a project to widen awareness of the Club and its activities to attract new members. We hope you will consider taking part. On the form there is also a space to enter or update email addresses, to ensure you receive our circulars.



Paddling with Louis

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us with appropriate readings for each pier and the ethnic guide could exercise unbridled exhibitionism in regaling the faithful with extracts from Stevenson's letters to his mother, memoirs and, of course, the Amateur Emigrant.

Halfway between the south bank and the north is a ship, now capsize for decades, that lies more or less where the Devonian must have ridden at anchor.

Little did we think that only a month after our trip our 1946 vintage paddler would meet her own watery Nemesis and break down midstream with boiler problems around the same spot.

At Helensburgh we were joined by other Stevensonians who had made their way from Edinburgh by train. Then on to Dunoon and Hielan' Mary in effigy, looking eternally towards Greenock where she and reputedly the infant daughter of Robert Burns lie buried.

On to the more bracing waters of the Firth, past the Holy Loch and starboard helm into the Kyles (narrow channels). Miraculously we had sun the whole day, so we must have made a fine sight for the heli-



Turning point: The Waverley tied up at the quayside at Tighnabruaich

copter that accompanied us right up to the House on the Bank, better known in Gaelic as Tigh na Bruaich. It's a pity they built Tighnabruaich so far from the jetty. People seeking refreshment had only time to walk in and walk back.

But those of us who stayed by the boat were rewarded with the most magnificent long-shot vistas of the Mull of Kintyre. Back on board and

someone seemed to have explained to the passengers the Glasgow expression: 'We're just goin' doon tae ha'e a look at the engines.'

And so it was that, suitably refreshed and in a spirit of bonhomie towards the whole world, but particularly towards Rex, our group of day trip Emigrants sailed back up the Clyde and tied up at the BBC Quay.

DENIS FRIZE.



A postcard from Japan to celebrate the voyage

A UNIQUE record of the voyage was made by our talented artist friend from Japan, Kumiko Koiwa, who also followed in Stevenson's wake to Erraid – which she described in a postcard to Dora and Jon Cossar:

'On that small island I've spent most of the time alone, wandered around on the hills, beaches and valley. Except for the old cottages and just one farmhouse, Erraid still seemed "all virgin and the world shut out".

'I strolled on the very boggy ground (even on the hill), sometimes roused "some old, gray, rain-beaten ram out of a ferny den" but saw no other living things. And I sat on a rock near the summit of the island, looked down the valley, the islets and the ocean as young Stevenson might have done, deeply impressed by the solitary wilderness and soothed by the quietitude of the isle.'

Your Autumn Club Events Programme

OCTOBER 24

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

DR Patricia Andrew will discuss two portraits of Thomas and Robert Louis Stevenson and what they tell us about each other before a discussion where members can express their views. Royal Scots Club, Abercromby Place, Edinburgh, 2pm. Charge to cover hire hall hire, £3 per person. Pre-booking is essential by October 19.

NOVEMBER 17

ANNUAL LUNCHEON

THE highlight of our club year. Full details and order form in papers accompanying this issue.

DECEMBER 8

A CHRISTMAS SERMON

CLUB member the Rev John Munro will engage RLS (aka John Shedden) in a conversation regarding his beliefs, followed by an open discussion on the faith (or lack of it) of RLS. Stockbridge Parish Church, Saxe-Coburg Place, 10.30 for morning coffee/tea. Charge of £3 per person. Pre-booking essential by November 30.

BOOKING

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

CONTACTS

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A Beautiful Adventure

MEMBERS were treated to a sneak preview of plans for a new film about RLS when Tommy Gormley and Sarah Purser of Little White Rose Films gave a presentation at the City Arts Centre in Edinburgh.

A Beautiful Adventure will tell how Life and Death fight the most tremendous battle over one of the world's finest storytellers as he struggles to complete his last and most personal novel. Who will win?

By 1888, Robert Louis Stevenson was the most famous writer in the world. But the author of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Kidnapped and Treasure Island was battling lifelong illness.

For three years, with his adopted family, he searched the South Pacific for a healing climate – and he found it on the beautiful island of Samoa.

There Louis embarks on an epic and perilous adventure into the past as he writes Weir of Hermiston, his tragic tale of forbidden love, murder, justice and revenge set in the land to which he knows he can never return.

But the deeper Louis gets into the story, the faster his health declines, as he begins to cross the boundaries of



Movie adventures Tommy Gormley and Sarah Purser present their film idea

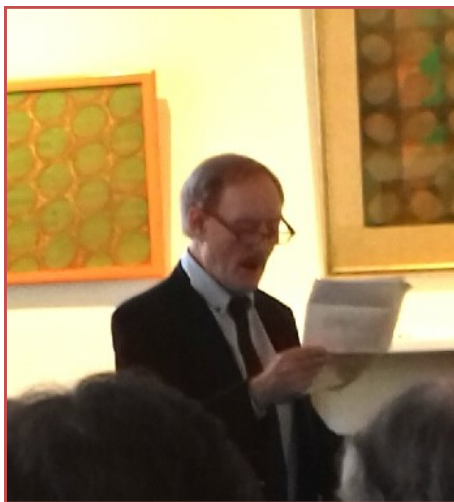
imagination and reality, darkness and light, tragedy and joy. His two worlds collide, past characters come back to haunt him, and the story of his starcrossed lovers, Archie and Christina, begins to take on a life of its own.

As the tale spirals out of his control, so does Louis's life on Samoa – family

life is crumbling around him and the country is descending into civil war.

Torn between two worlds, can Louis keep his beloved family together? Can he bring justice for the Samoans? And will he survive to save his doomed lovers from their fate?

© Little White Rose Films Ltd



Evocative: The Club's Jack Shedden

Putting a stamp on Louis and David's adventures on Erraid

SIX Degrees West are a group of four young artists who recently had a residency on the island of Erraid, the scene of David Balfour's shipwreck in Kidnapped and the place where Stevenson himself spent a summer while his father was building the Dhu Heartach lighthouse.

The group have produced a set of postage stamp themed designs inspired by the Stevenson connection, displayed in the Scottish Arts Club as part of the Edinburgh Art Festival.

The RLS Club were joint hosts, with the Scottish Arts Club, of the exhibition's Launch reception on July 26, when members could meet the artists.

Ian Nimmo, a distinguished and long-standing member of both clubs, was assisted by Jack Shedden's evocative readings in delivering his keynote talk on Stevenson, Kidnapped and the Erraid associations and influences.

Six Degrees West hope to exhibit the designs elsewhere this year, including during RLS Week in November.

Have your say in bringing RLS to book

LOOKING forward to 2020, we have been exploring the possibility of a book to commemorate the Club's Centenary. Approaches to well-known writers, journalists and others have led to some stimulating pieces already in our hands with others promised.

A century ago Rosaline Masson marked the RLS Club's inauguration with I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson, a compilation of live encounters with the man himself. We

hope a century later to show how Stevenson remains a living presence in our imaginative world.

We are now inviting contributions from members which may reflect this, highlighting not just how reading Stevenson at whatever age has been an unforgettable experience, but how he has influenced our sense of ourselves and our world.

It is not only the great or the good who may have captivating, original

individual insights to offer. We now look forward to what may come from you, our fascinatingly diverse members, over the next few months.

Your submissions should be emailed, if possible, as Word documents headed with your name and contact details, to davidalison.reid@gmail.com, or posted to:

RLS Correspondence Secretary, 20 Beveridge Road, Kirkcaldy, Fife, KY1 1UX, United Kingdom.