



Bringing RLS to book

PLANS for a book to mark the Club's centenary next year have borne fruit with contributions from more than 50 Stevenson lovers worldwide, showing how RLS has inspired their work and lives.

Some 65,000 words have been submitted so far, with contributors ranging from First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to best-selling authors, eminent academics, actors, judges and others from many different walks of life, all feeling a personal connection with Scotland's best-loved author.

Readers will learn how Ian Rankin believes that, without *Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Inspector Rebus would not exist. Val McDermid and Michael Morpurgo were both inspired by *Treasure Island*.

Stevenson is loved worldwide, and contributions have come in from Cevennes, California and Samoa. His merits as a writer are discussed by professors including Linda Dryden in Edinburgh and Barry Menikoff in Hawaii, while journalistic contributors range from Magnus Linklater to Ian Nimmo.

And many more tell how Stevenson will always have a special place in their heart, enriching their childhood with *A Child's Garden of Verses*, exciting their imaginations with *Kidnapped*, or offering solace in bereavement through *Travels With A Donkey*.

The next step is to find a publisher to bring Louis to book next year. Watch this space.



Full steam ahead at Colinton

STRANGE things are happening underground in the village where Robert Louis Stevenson spent many a happy childhood summer.

People in Colinton, where young Louis stayed often at his grandfather's Manse, are engaged in a crea-

tive venture to turn a disused and almost forgotten railway tunnel into a community art project and tourist attraction designed to boost the local economy.

And it's all thanks to RLS – discover why inside this issue.

Reinventing Louis for the 21st century

WHEN a famous writer dies, there is a danger his or her reputation and popularity will die with them. Time is a brutal culler and the writers no one now reads are legion. For every Jane Austen and Charles Dickens there are many whose books lie unopened, unloved in library stacks.

For the past hundred years it has been one of the Club's missions to keep Robert Louis Stevenson's flame alive. It has done a sterling job, but nothing can be taken for granted and there is no guar-

antee that, a century on, the initials RLS will have the same allure they do now.

Without readers, writers are like stand-up comedians telling jokes to a mirror. With this in mind, and in the hope of encouraging the next generation of Stevensonians, I have proposed a new edition of Louis's work, and Edinburgh-based publisher Polygon has produced a prospectus, included with this newsletter.

A set of 20 books – the titles (and contents) are not set in stone – encompassing

the gamut of RLS's oeuvre is outlined. These will be affordably priced, beautifully designed and with introductions by some of our best writers.

Achieving this requires financial support, some idea of which is detailed in the prospectus. Do get in touch if you'd like to know more. This, I hope, will reinvent RLS for the 21st century – which is no less than the nation's greatest writer deserves.

ALAN TAYLOR



When I spit blood I write verses...

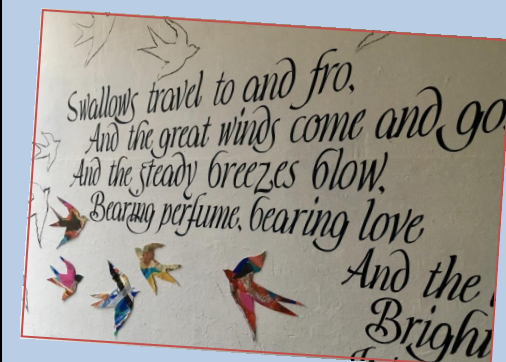
ROBERT Louis Stevenson was modest about his poetic talent, normally reserved for when he was too ill to write novels. As he put it: 'When I spit blood I write verses.'

Yet the enduring success of *A Child's Garden of Verses* and the undoubted quality of poems such as *Requiem* belie the 'minor poet' label accorded him by his detractors.

For this year's RLS Day celebrations in Edinburgh on November 13, our club event will focus on the many fine RLS poems with which most people are unfamiliar. Anyone who would like to read should email jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk

The keynote event, organised by Professor Linda Dryden of Edinburgh Napier University, will feature *Dead Man's Chest* author Nick Rankin, talking about RLS and H. Rider Haggard, whose brother Bazett was Louis's friend in Samoa.

Events are now being added to the online programme at rlsday.wordpress.com



One summer does many swallows make

A FLIGHT of swallows has landed on the Robert Louis Stevenson mural in his childhood holiday haunt of North Berwick. Inspired by Stevenson's poem, not published until 1916, they are a handsome embellishment to the original mural in Cat's Close, created in 2009-10 by a team of volunteers led by the late June Douglas-Hamilton.

At the same time the original mural is being restored by volunteers including Nicky Fox, Andrina Wright and Tina Guy.

Robert Louis railway

140 metres of poetry in locomotion

IT BEGAN as a dark and dreary cavern, blackened by the smoke from centuries of coal-fired railway engines – but now the Colinton Tunnel is a work of art, fuelled by the poetic power of Robert Louis Stevenson.

The tunnel is being transformed by his poem *From A Railway Carriage*, bringing together Colinton's heritage and the various groups and individuals that make up today's local community.

The railway line to Colinton and Balerno from the Caledonian Railway's Princes Street Station was opened in 1874, the year Louis turned 24. It supplanted an old cart road that served the various mills – paper, porridge oats and snuff – along the Water of Leith, and as he passed by in the train it may well have inspired the lines:

*Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill, and there is a river:
Each a glimpse and gone forever!*

The whole poem will eventually be spelled out along one side of the 140 metre tunnel, with the various scenes illustrated on the other side by top Scottish muralist Chris Rutterford, assisted by dozens of young artists from four local schools – Colinton Primary, Bonaly Primary, Firhill High and Merchiston Castle.

Various adult groups are also involved, including regiments from the two local barracks, whose crests will feature beside the line about 'charging along like troops in a



battle'. Around £100,000 has been secured for the first half of the tunnel, with support from the City of Edinburgh Council, the Armed Forces Covenant and the Sustrans cycling charity.

The mural is progressing rapidly, with a panel featuring RLS himself due to be added at a special event on RLS Day, with perhaps a mass reading of *From A Railway Carriage*.

Colinton Tunnel Project chairman Mike Scott, pictured right, says: 'Chris Rutterford's design, using RLS's short poem, gives a wonderful visual description of how a rail trip from the city to the country might have felt to a child. It connects amazingly well to our community's history.'



Discovering RLS in the Library...



A FIRST edition of *Kidnapped* and a leather-bound 1753 edition of *Trial of James of the Glens* were among rare books perused by Club members on their visit to Innerpefferay Library near Crieff.

Founded in 1680, the library includes a collection of Scottish gems donated by the American bibliophile Janet Burns St Germain, including a copy of *RL Stevenson Memories*, given to Annie Ide in 1915 by her brother-in-law Sir Shane Leslie.

The daughter of Samoan Chief Justice Henry Clay Ide, Annie was famously given another birthday present by RLS in 1891 – his November 13 birthday, as 12-year-old Annie was upset that her own fell on Christmas Day.

Sir Shane made reference to this, and to Annie being bridesmaid when he married her sister Marjorie, by amending the book's title on the flyleaf to read: 'To Anne for her RL Stevenson birthday with *Memories of 1911*.'

Also attached to the flyleaf is an invitation card to a dance at Vailima, sent by RLS and his wife Fanny to Annie's father in February 1894.

On June 17 the Club's Stevensonians converged on the Perthshire hamlet of Innerpefferay, from as near or far as Pitlochry, Freuchie or North Berwick. We were greeted

by Lara Haggerty, Keeper of Books, who gave us an introductory talk on this bibliophile's cornucopia from the original munificence of the Duke of Perth, who allowed his people to borrow his books for free provided that they signed them in and out.

Then up an appropriately House of Shaws-like staircase to where Lara had laid out everything major of an RLS nature on a cushioned background.

Memorable moments included *Kidnapped* expert Ian Nimmo's learned conversation with Lara about RLS's own copy of the 'Trial' and Mitchell Manson's reading to us from *Cummy's Diary* with RLS's own assertion that his grandfather was the 'only gentleman who spoke in the old Scots tongue'.

We then enjoyed, for a modest sum, a repast of taste and variety with Lucy, one of the library's helpful volunteers, before being taken to see the original library in the Collegiate Church of Saint Mary, dating back to 1325.

The Innerpefferay complex stands on an eminence above running water, and we finished with an afternoon stroll along the new path down to the Earn... where an obliging salmon stuck its head up to greet us at the end of a perfectly harmonious day.

AUTUMN EVENTS

OCTOBER 9

LOUIS AT THE NLS

JOIN James Mitchell, Rare Books Curator at the National Library Scotland, for an enthralling look at some of the RLS-related items in the library's collection, including some interesting editions of Stevenson's unfinished masterpiece *Weir of Hermiston*. This will be followed by a viewing in the Advocates Library of the portrait of Lord Braxfield, the 'Hanging Judge' who was the model for Archie Weir's father in the novel. Meet in the Library front entrance in George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, for a 2.00pm start. Names beforehand to Margaret Wilkie no later than Saturday October 5.

NOVEMBER 9

ANNUAL LUNCHEON

A DATE for your diary, the highlight of the Club's year. Full details and order form in papers accompanying this issue.

DECEMBER 7

MARGARET STEVENSON AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

FOLLOWING upon our event examining the relationship of Stevenson and his father, Club members Alison Reid and Ailene Hunter will lead our consideration of the influence of his mother. Gather at 10.30am for tea/coffee before an 11am start at the Mackenzie Building, Faculty of Advocates, Old Assembly Close, 172 High Street, Edinburgh. Names to Margaret Wilkie by Saturday November 30.

JANUARY 17

RLS AT THE MOVIES

JOIN Club members for an afternoon at the movies at the Hawes Inn, scene of the abduction of David Balfour in *Kidnapped*. Michael Caine stars as Alan Breck in the film of the book, and also in our second movie *The Wrong Box*. Meet 2pm at the Hawes Inn, South Queensferry, reachable by a No 43 bus or train to Dalmeny. And afterwards why not stay on for a meal at the inn? Names to Margaret Wilkie by Saturday January 11.

BOOKING

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

Inspired by Stevenson

IN June our annual Creative Writing competition brought together gifted young writers whose original and ambitious entries inspired by Stevenson earned them places in a Writers' Master Class conducted by author Louise Welsh.

Afterwards the nine pupils, parents and Club members enjoyed a pleasant reception hosted by Edinburgh Napier University, which runs the competition in conjunction with the Club.

Emily Williams and Susannah Nicol of Banchory Academy won the Fiction and Reflective Writing awards, with a commended prize for Iona Adams. The George Addis Memorial Trophy for the best overall entry went to Jenny O'Gorman of George Watson's College in Edin-

burgh. Of her winning poem, she said: 'I was inspired to write *Up to the Crow's Nest* when I discovered Robert Louis Stevenson suffered from poor health for much of his life. This led me to imagine how writing could be an escape for him.

'In a way, he could disappear into a vividly painted world of his own imagination, so despite the burden of his illness, I like to think he felt completely free.'

The Club, as always, is indebted to Professor Linda Dryden and her colleague Duncan Milne in running the competition, and to Louise Welsh for leading the Master Class, engaging with the young people in a way which can only have enhanced their sense of being writers with worthwhile things to say.



Worthy winner: Jenny O'Gorman
Up To The Crow's Nest

*Each night my quill curves across the pages
Like a moon-silvered line, scattering
The hush of pebbles in commas,
Here the side door is open to the wind and
Sealight wanders from room to room, revealing
The Admiral Benbow Inn with men like tugboats
drifting in,
Unfolding maps with creases
Burgeoning in their hands like nuns over ancient
orisons
And Billy Bones's black spot stains the underside
of clouds
In the gloaming.*

*Onboard as John Silver plots to murder and
steal
Breathless pirate voices will call 'You're Out!'
Like rounders played at dusk, and a dark
spinning ball of death
Is tossed upon the growing gloom, the adventure
has begun.*

*In my lonely room I see the drab curtains as
Hispaniola's
Shy white sail, amber with light and green with
Straggled tapes of kelp,
The pail of water on the wrought iron grate filled
Half with stars is the tempest
That smashes the ship's wooden teeth on slates
And all the while I climb to the crow's nest;
A rickety ladder up my neck to the brain,
Far away I see the wet window shutters of hills
Dripping in the mirrored sea,
Looks like Treasure Island to me.*



Flowering accord: Marked by the exchange of rose trees at Bad Homburg

Return to Germany

THE Cultural Route In The Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson reached Germany when European Network delegates held their AGM at Bad Homburg near Frankfurt, visited several times by RLS and his parents or with his friend Sir Walter Simpson.

Club delegate Martin White and members Ian Logan of the Stevenson Way and Mark Steeds from the Treasure Island Trail in Bristol enjoyed highlights including meeting 95-year-old local historian Gerta Walsh, who was instrumental in raising awareness of RLS in Bad Homburg.

The event was marked by an exchange of roses – a Robert Louis Stevenson rose for planting in the German spa town, while a Bad Homburg rose has since been planted in a new Parc RL Stevenson in Fontainebleau.

A gala dinner was held at the Bad Homburg Casino, and some delegates had the privilege of witnessing the presentation of the Friedrich Hölderlin prizes for literature, the foremost ones in Germany. The final day

featured an open air event at which the German actor Sebastian Koch, star of Homeland and Bridge of Spies, gave a reading in German from Treasure Island, to a standing ovation from an audience of at least a thousand.

It was great to see RLS so well appreciated in a country where he is less well known. There is much to build on as we look forward to further events in Fontainebleau, the Cevennes and Bordeaux in the coming year.

PAUL HENDERSON SCOTT (1920-2019)

A CELEBRATION of the life of former Club chairman Paul Scott will be held at the New Club, 86 Princes Street, Edinburgh, on Monday November 4 from 3pm to 6pm. All wishing to attend should RSVP to Laura Scott at 33 Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh EH3 7RN, tel 0131 2251038 or email scott.fiore@virgin.net



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