



## An RLS garden of friends

IN late July, around 20 Club members arrived at the Edinburgh home of Professor Linda Dryden for a garden party in honour of Robert Louis Stevenson.

We were welcomed into Linda's fine Georgian town house and shown through into her lovely garden, with a variety of trees and an extensive lawn for strolling.

Carefully placed shrubs and flower beds create more intimate corners, allowing remarkable privacy in a part of the city well-known to RLS in his student days.

In addition to sharing a love of Victorian literature with numerous students at Edinburgh Napier University's Centre for Literature and Writing, Linda has contributed greatly to RLS studies over the years.

She has been inspirational in the creation of the incomparable RLS Website at [robert-louis-stevenson.org](http://robert-louis-stevenson.org) and has promoted the development of the Stevenson archive within the university.

Linda was the driving force behind an annual master class for selected young writers inspired by RLS, led each year by a distinguished Scottish author, and has recruited eminent key-



*Convivial company: Sharing the spirit of RLS in Linda's fine garden*

note speakers for the annual RLS Day celebrations.

She was also a member of the editorial team for the Club's *Fortunate Voyager* centenary anthology, for which her skills as an artist supplied a sketch of RLS for the frontispiece. But

her talents as a hostess were to the fore as she made her guests welcome with a generous buffet enjoyed by all, despite changeable weather – with occasional showers that failed to dilute the liberal supply of wine procured by Jim and Margaret Wilkie.

## Brash origins of Rankeillor

GUESTS arriving at the garden party may not have realised the shop on the corner of Clerk Street and Rankeillor Street was once a favourite haunt of RLS and his friend Charles Baxter.

And when RLS wrote *Kidnapped*, dedicated to Baxter, there are no prizes for guessing where he found the unusual surname for David Balfour's lawyer. The

Rankeillor Street shop was then a bar run by Thomas Brash, a sour-tempered wine and spirit merchant who hated students and resented selling them drink.

The young Stevenson and Baxter found this hilarious and in later life a nostalgic RLS penned a series of comic poems entitled *Brasheanna*. It tells how the pair would wend their way down Clerk Street

for an evening of silly mischief:

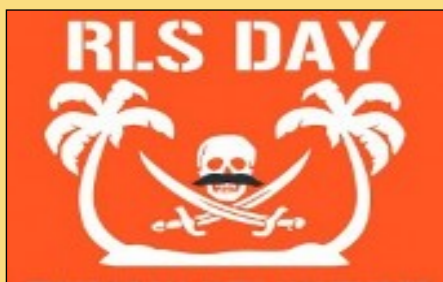
*In the foot-haunted city, in the night,  
Among the alternate lamps, we went and came  
Till, like a humorous thunderbolt, that name,  
The hated name of Brash, assailed our sight.*

*We saw, we paused, we entered, seeking gin...  
If only stones could talk.*



*Rankeillor: Played by Miles Malleon in the Disney film Kidnapped*





## Celebrate RLS Day

OUR Club event to mark Robert Louis Stevenson Day 2023 will be RLS - A Life in Letters, with selected passages from his wonderful correspondence. If you would like to read at the event at the Writers' Museum in Edinburgh on Sunday November 12, email [jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:jeremy.hodges@blueyonder.co.uk) For the full RLS Day programme visit <https://rlsday.wordpress.com>.

### In memory of Palema



AT Vailima he was known as Palema, a favourite cousin of RLS and his family, with whom he stayed for two years. Sir Graham Balfour now lies buried in Birkenhead, where his gravestone has been restored with Club members' support and plans to mark the RLS connection.

### Membership matters

AFTER long years of service Tom Murison has stood down as Membership Secretary with grateful thanks for all his hard work managing the membership database and subscriptions, and we welcome Dora Cossar as his successor.

Subscriptions will rise this year for the first time since 2015, and Ten Year Membership has been discontinued – see enclosed subscription notice for details. Please review any standing orders to reflect the increase and, if possible, move the payment date to October-December, when most payments are received.

The Newsletter and other documents will be sent by email to those who have provided an email address, along with paper copies unless you have opted to go paperless. Occasional Club emails will be sent also to update members on events. To let us have your current email, contact [rlsmembership@gmail.com](mailto:rlsmembership@gmail.com)

# Following the Education of an Engineer

LOUIS Stevenson was just 17 when in the July of 1868 he arrived at Cunzie House in Anstruther where, as part of the education of an engineer, he was to observe the construction of the east harbour breakwater by the family engineering firm.

Already aware that his life would be short, he was desperate to create a literary legacy in the time he had and hopelessly frustrated at the futility of his daytime hours being spent ineptly recording the progress of the works.

'All afternoon in the office trying to strike the average time of building the edge work,' he wrote. 'I see that it is impossible...' To retrieve lost time he worked long



A mark in time: The plaque on the wall of Cunzie House

hours into the night to 'pour forth literature, at such a speed... as I now look back upon with wonder'.

He was then working on an extended verse monologue, a historical novel and a tragic drama – none of which would survive that desperate summer. By the end of

the month he was writing: 'I am utterly sick of this grey, grim, sea-beaten hole.'

Yet this did not deter a band of Club members who on July 18 embarked on the X60 bus from Edinburgh to explore Anstruther and its Stevenson history.

For a sense of the engineering works which so frustrated the youthful RLS, we gathered on the eastern breakwater where Club member Ian Logan gave a clear account of the undertaking, enhanced by his own illustrations of the stages of construction to create a safer entrance to the busy harbor.

We then followed in Louis's daily footsteps to Cunzie House, where he was lodged with the depressingly teetotal Bailie Brown. The present owner, Ann Bann, was more welcoming as she pointed out the plaque erected by the Browns after Louis's death, featuring lines dedicated to his muse Fanny Sitwell.

*Not one quick beat of your warm heart  
Nor thought that came to you apart  
Pleasure nor pity, love nor pain  
Nor sorrow, has gone by in vain.*



Lodgings of an engineer: The young RLS stayed at Cunzie House

The Club is in discussion with Ann about putting up a blue board explaining the history of the plaque and we hope to secure Historic Scotland's support.

At the Town Hall, local historian Kevin Dunion gave us a deeper sense of the town as RLS would have known it, his presentation illustrated with an archive of historic photographs.

Then, by way of narrow, twisting vennels which long predated Louis's time, we arrived at the

award-winning 'Wee Chippy' by the harbour, for a convivial fish supper to conclude a varied and well-organised event.

The company included Anna Kamahoaokaiulani Donaldson, whose middle name, given to her by friends in Hawaii, means 'fellow canoe companion of Ka'iulani' – the Hawaiian Crown Princess who became Louis's friend, and who would later visit Anstruther with her Scottish father Archibald Scott Cleghorn.

## 'I fear vin d' Anstruther'

THE Brown family did not approve of strong drink, and Louis was soon writing home to his mother, begging her to bring him some wine when she came to see him: 'I fear vin d' Anstruther, and having procured myself a

severe attack of gripes by two days total abstinence on chilly table beer, I have been forced to purchase Green Ginger ('Somebody or other's "celebrated"'), for the benefit of my stomach, like St Paul.'



Quayside: Anna Kamahoaokaiulani Donaldson and Susan Gellaitry

## Tunes enjoyed by the other Rabbie

MEMBERS enjoyed a visit to the Edinburgh Fringe to hear our own John Shedden's commentary on The Fiddle and Robert Burns, featuring a series of the Bard's favourite melodies played by leading fiddler Alastair Savage.

Alongside the music, John regaled us with what Burns had to say about these tunes in his song notes, tour journals, commonplace books and letters – all in a performance that 'other Rabbie', RLS, would have loved.



## Hyde side of toilet humour

STRANGE Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde was the inspiration for ceramic artist Lindsey Merrick's exhibition *Sh\*-faced* at Bonnington House Steadings outside Edinburgh.

Her take on Stevenson's gothic morality tale explored her own love/hate relationship with alcohol and her own dual personali-

ty, 'the Drunk Me and the Sober Me'. Focusing on the dark Hyde side of today's binge-drinking lifestyle with subversive, self-deprecating humour, it moved from the glitzy surroundings of a ballroom to a nightclub toilet nightmare, pictured left.

Whatever would Louis have made of this?

## EVENTS PROGRAMME

### NOVEMBER 12

#### RLS – A LIFE IN LETTERS

JOIN Club members and friends for an hour of readings from some of Louis's finest letters to celebrate RLS Day. From 2pm at the Writers' Museum, Edinburgh. To take part, see opposite page.

### NOVEMBER 18

#### ANNUAL LUNCHEON

TO be held at The New Club, Edinburgh. Full details in accompanying papers.

### DECEMBER 6

#### COFFEE AND MINCE PIES

MEMBERS are invited to Valvona and Crolla, Elm Row, Edinburgh for an informal gathering from 10am–12 noon.

### JANUARY 18

#### RLS IN MENTON

A TALK by Martin White following his attendance at the AGM in Menton of The European Cultural Route In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson, featuring the poetry of Stevenson and of Katherine Mansfield, another literary exile in the town. Meet at The New Club, Princes Street, Edinburgh for coffee at 10.30am. Cost £10. Optional lunch afterwards at a bistro in nearby Rose Street.

### JANUARY 13-27

#### JEKYLL REINVENTED

VISIT The Royal Theatre in Edinburgh to enjoy Gary McNair's take on the Jekyll & Hyde story in this captivating and comic Reading Rep Theatre production, a one-person play turning the Stevenson classic on its head. Make your own booking and choose your own date – or join up with other Club members on January 16 by contacting Lynne Hainsworth beforehand, [lynnehainsworth@gmail.com](mailto:lynnehainsworth@gmail.com)

### MARCH 16

#### LOUIS ON THE BEACH

JOIN Ian Gardener for a walk from Dirleton via Yellowcraig along the beach to North Berwick, past Louis's childhood holiday haunts including the Treasure Island of Fidra and scenes from *Catriona*. Meet 11am at the Castle Inn, Dirleton.

### MAY 9-12

#### EDUCATION OF AN ENGINEER II

AFTER Anstruther, follow RLS on his next work experience trip to the family firm's harbour works at Wick, where he stayed in 1868. Expressions of interest are sought now, by contacting Margaret Wilkie, to enable accommodation to be arranged.

BOOK all events at least a week beforehand with Margaret Wilkie, [wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk)  
0131 477 6738 or 07815 845586



# Tusitala on the Fringe



*Tusitala: Portrayed by Sia Figiel, inset*

SAMOANS called him Tusitala, and Sia Figiel's compelling solo performance introduced us to Robert Louis Stevenson as we had never seen him before.

Her self-penned Edinburgh Fringe show, *O Tusitala: Tellers of Tales*, brought us Stevenson's life in Samoa through the eyes of the islanders who were close to him in his household and around the island.

A series of monologues revealed the initial Samoan curiosity and a degree of bewilderment about the nature of the distinguished stranger, then took us through the establishment of his house at Vailima, the rhythm of life there and the relationships he formed.

The journey was not straightforward, with Stevenson presented in terms of the islanders' cultural assumptions and their sometimes critical perceptions.

At the conclusion we saw him established in Samoan terms as a Matai, a chief protective of his household and of the islanders more widely; but we heard his own voice only briefly, very near the end, as

just one character in a complex Samoan world.

Samoan dramatic convention influences the structure of the play and the frequent passages of narrative delivered in song as Sia Figiel held the audience with a glittering eye in an intense and compelling performance. After the morning performance at the Royal Lyceum, a number of the audience 'returned' from Samoa to Stevenson's Edinburgh home at 17 Heriot Row, where John and Felicitas Macfie hosted a question and answer session with Sia.

The company was an eclectic mix, including Samoan family members and associates of Sia, Club members and friends and Professor Emma Sutton of St Andrews University who had a significant role in the initial conception of the play. This guaranteed a stimulating range of ques-

tions for Sia, who gave frank and penetrating answers, seasoned with irreverent wit.

The buffet reception allowed further enjoyable exchanges around the generously laden table, while for any of us familiar only with a European view of Stevenson in Samoa, the experience challenged us to listen to voices we had never heard before.

**DAVID REID**

## Introducing our lunchtime guest

OUR guest speaker for this year's RLS Club Lunch is the Scottish playwright, poet and novelist Chris Dolan. A winner of the Robert Louis Stevenson Award in



1999, he admits that one of his favourite literary works is *Kidnapped*, and his plays broadcast by the BBC include *The Master of Ballantrae* and his four-part take on *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

## Land of Counterpane

STEVENSON'S famous poem from *A Child's Garden of Verses* gets a musical airing at Stockbridge Church, Edinburgh on Saturday October 14 at 5pm. The music is by Howard Blake of *The Snowman* fame with singers from Edinburgh Academy and Stockbridge Primary.

## Menton here we come

THE final programme for Menton's RLS celebrations is taking shape, with various buffets and meals included, courtesy of the Town of Menton.

The weekend begins on Friday November 10 with the AGM of the European Cultural Route and a visit to an exhibition about writers including Stevenson and Katharine Mansfield at the Odyssee Library.

On the Saturday there will be city walking tours in the morning and afternoon, while the Sunday will feature a walk around the places with Stevenson memories, followed by a Stevenson

and Mansfield poetry event with commentary by Ainsley McIntosh.

Monday, RLS Day, will feature the presentation of a Stevenson rose and a replica of the proposed RLS commemorative plaque, while author Jean Pierre Naugrette will give a lecture on Stevenson and Menton.

For travel advice and to notify the Town of Menton you are coming, contact Martin White as soon as possible at [martiniwhiter26@gmail.com](mailto:martiniwhiter26@gmail.com)

### CONTACTS

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