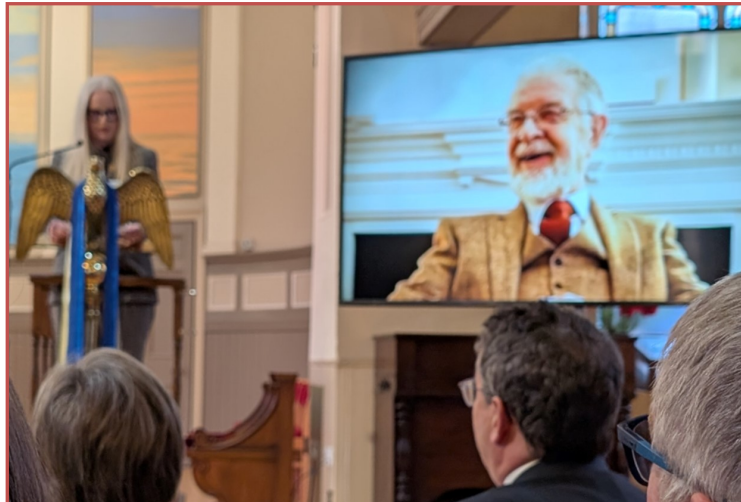




A true friend to RLS



Memorial service: In Mitchell's beloved Stockbridge Parish Church

FOR years he was an inspiration and a driving force within the Robert Louis Stevenson Club – and many members turned out for Mitchell Manson's memorial service in Edinburgh.

Stockbridge Parish Church was filled to hear tributes from friends at the church where he served in various roles, family members, university colleagues in the Department of Agriculture and, of course, the RLS Club.

The Club tribute was given by Mitchell's friend Rex Homer, who recalled his first appearance on a Club adventure to California. Transport needed to be arranged, from Monterey to San Francisco and the wine paradise

of the Napa Valley – and up stepped Mitchell. 'I know all about California,' he said. 'All the places where Stevenson stayed and travelled and wrote in detail. I did my doctorate there. What you need is a 16-seater coach. I can organise it for you as well as drive it.'

This can-do response to problems was evident on subsequent Club adventures – up the American west coast then later down the east coast, from New York to Saranac Lake, then following the hooves of Modestine on the 150-mile Travels With A Donkey in The Cevennes trail, with Mitchell again behind the wheel. Sadly this was the last big adventure for Muriel, Mitchell's beloved wife.

An Inland Voyage trip from Antwerp all the way to Paris culminated in a fine dinner in the French equivalent of Sandhurst, with Club members kilted for the occasion – but Mitchell had already declared his nationality throughout Europe, kilted all the way. In Bristol, on a Long John Silver sail aboard the Hispaniola, guess who went furthest up the mast – in his kilt?

'And in Grand Central Station, New York,' Rex added, 'Mitchell walked over a ventilator and "did a Marilyn" as his kilt went whoosh, skyward!'

Back home in Scotland, Mitchell gave sterling service on the Club committee and eventually became an out-



Kilted: At Bakers Cottage, Saranac

standing chairman, seeing the Club through the trials and tribulations of the Covid pandemic and arranging a glittering lunch at the Balmoral Hotel to mark the Club's 100th anniversary.

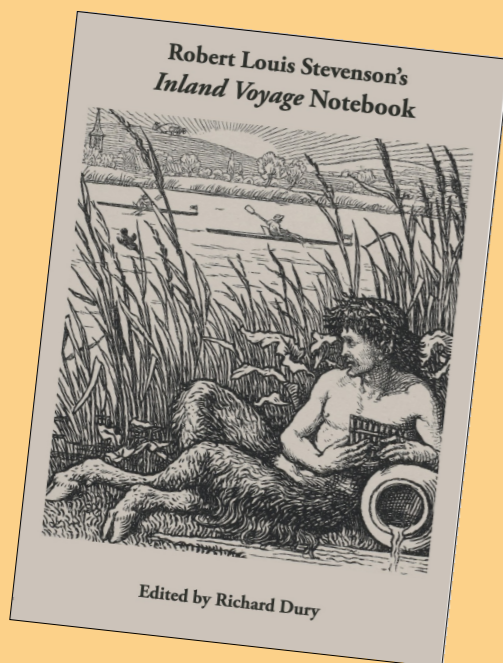
Aside from the Club, Mitchell went on independent RLS adventures with Rex for company, making their own way to New Zealand and Samoa, then Hawaii and Monterey again, with excursions to concerts by the rock band Garbage featuring Shirley Manson – 'my daughter, the singer'.

'Mitchell was very special,' Rex concluded. 'He was a man who made things happen, who aimed high and achieved, and was a true friend. And a Stevensonian through and through.'



Ice cream and wine: Rex Homer and Shirley Manson enjoying two of Mitchell's favourite things

Secrets of an Inland Voyager



WHAT did Robert Louis Stevenson not tell us about his journey by canoe from Antwerp to Compiègne in the latter half of 1876?

Previously unpublished extracts from Stevenson's notebook, which he used for writing drafts for *An Inland Voyage*, now add to our enjoyment of a boating classic.

Edited by Richard Dury and transcribed with the help of Elaine Greig and Mafalda Cipollone, the new book is soon to be published by Robert-Louis Abrahamson's Lamplight Press.

It includes an entertaining contretemps with an uncooperative customs official at Antwerp docks when Louis and his friend Sir Walter Simpson arrived with their canoes, and portrays more clearly their embarrassment in the company of the enthusiastic, physically fit and knowledgeable members of the Royal Sport Nautique.

Stevenson also gives full rein to the comic potential of his bohemian clashes with officialdom, soon resolved by the gentlemanly bearing of his baronet companion.

And the book restores some typical Stevenson touches, such as his description of the downpour that forced them to stay an extra day at Landrecies: 'It blew a whole gale of wind; it thundered; and if it did not exactly rain, at intervals it discharged solid masses of water onto the town, which blew through the carriage entrance of the Hotel in a thick white smoke, and rattled on window and wall.'

To pre-order copies, price £10 plus postage, contact thelamplightpress@gmail.com

From Scotland to the world

IT was 175 years since Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, yet his memory was still celebrated across the world.

Events to mark RLS Day 2025 were held from Scotland to the South of England and from France to California.

Two events focused on the time Stevenson spent as an invalid confined to a Bournemouth villa called Skerryvore. It was one of his most creative periods, producing such masterpieces as *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Kidnapped*.

A full house at the Edinburgh Writers' Museum enjoyed a

series of readings by Club members bringing to life Louis's struggles with pulmonary disease, turning out page after page despite being bed-bound and forbidden to speak for fear of triggering a fatal haemorrhage.

Readings revealed also the attempts by servants such as Valentine Roche and their neighbour Adelaide Boodle to keep Louis entertained and protect him against invasion by inquisitive fans.

His wife Fanny lived in constant fear of infection and guarded her husband in the same way that vulnerable individuals had



Skerryvore: Where *Kidnapped* and *Jekyll & Hyde* were written

to be safeguarded during the Covid pandemic. Visitors to Skerryvore had to produce clean handkerchiefs before admission to show they were not suffering from a cold.

In Bournemouth, club representatives including Mark Steeds of the Long John Silver Trust in Bristol attended an evening event staged by the Bournemouth Writing Festival in the garden where the house once stood before it was destroyed by a Luftwaffe bomb in 1940.

Despite torrential rain, a combination of gazebos, umbrellas and firepits allowed the audience to enjoy the night. Historian An-



RLS Night: Skerryvore 2025

attended by RLS, was the setting for a musical journey through Louis's life by folk singer Jeremy Hodges with his own settings to Stevenson poems.

Meanwhile in Paris, lovers of Stevenson gathered for the international network's AGM, held in the French Parliament building and presided over by the Club's Martin White.

Members were entertained by French MPs and the Association from Barbizon to Grez, with visits to RLS-related sites including the former Lavenue's restaurant beloved by Stevenson.

In California, the Monterey Stevenson Club held its annual Unbirthday celebrations, marking the birthday Louis gave away to young Annie Ide, with a talk focusing on the friendship Louis found at Jules Simoneau's restaurant.

And in St Helena, near the scene of *The Silverado Squatters*, poets gathered for a Birthday Bash Open Mic night at the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum.



Early years: The musical event at the former Canonmills School

Your chance to spread the word

THE RLS Club's mission is to foster interest in Stevenson's life and works – and how better to do it than by talking to visitors at the Edinburgh Writers' Museum?

The museum is now seeking volunteers to man the Stevenson room downstairs, pointing out items of interest and answering any questions asked by visitors from all nations and walks of life – including, on one occasion, Jason Donovan's father Terence.

The volunteer system is being restarted after a long hiatus imposed by Covid and anyone who can offer a couple of hours or more, choosing their own day and time, should contact RiaSloan@edinburgh.gov.uk



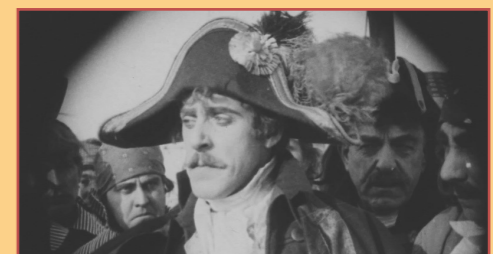
Was Louis fitba crazy?

HE enjoyed many sports, from skating and canoeing to horseriding and even once following the hounds – but was RLS ever a football fan?

Last Christmas Day marked the 150th anniversary of the first derby game in Louis's home town between Hibernian and Heart of Midlothian, imagined by cartoonist Frank Boyle. For fun he drew in Louis as a spectator, far right.

But could Louis really have been there for the game on the East Meadows? At a time when he was frequently in London or Paris, he did spend the Christmas of 1875 at home in Heriot Row – so who knows?

EVENTS PROGRAMME



MARCH 19

KIDNAPPED WITH A PIANO

JOIN other Club members to enjoy the first screen adaptation of *Kidnapped*. The 1917 silent movie, complete with a live piano accompaniment, is being screened at the 1912 vintage Bo'ness Hippodrome cinema at 2pm as part of the Hippfest silent film festival. Book tickets at £11.30 (£8.80 concessions) at www.hippodromecinema.co.uk/hippfest/ Citylink 909 buses operate hourly to Bo'ness from Edinburgh Princes Street or taxi from Linlithgow rail station.

MARCH 26

THE THREE ROBINS

FROM Vailima RLS reflected upon 'the three Robins who touched the Scottish lyre in the past century' – Burns, Fergusson and himself. Looking back from the Canongate Kirkyard, where Fergusson's grave is marked with a stone erected by Burns and a plaque gifted by Stevenson 'from one Edinburgh lad to another', David Purdie will review the lives, literary careers and legacies of the three Robins, each bilingual in English and Scots and deploying the latter's graphic imagery and verbal firepower in poetry and prose. The event is at the Scottish Arts Club in Edinburgh, price £6 including coffee and biscuits from 10.30am. Optional lunch bookable with the Arts Club.

APRIL 23

COFFEE AND PASTRIES

MEET up at 10.30am for an informal Club gathering in the Scottish Café at the Scottish National Gallery, The Mound, Edinburgh.

MAY 19

A FRIENDSHIP IN LETTERS

THEY never met, but RLS and JM Barrie conducted a warm and entertaining correspondence across the globe, recreated by Jack Johnston and Peter Berry. Event is at the Scottish Arts Club in Edinburgh, price £6 including coffee and biscuits from 10.30am. Optional lunch bookable with the Arts Club.

DIARY DATES: THE Annual General Meeting of the RLS Club will be held on July 4 at the Faculty of Advocates Building in Edinburgh from 10.30am. This year's Club Lunch will be on Saturday November 14, details in our Summer Update .

BOOK events with Margaret Wilkie, wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk 0131 477 6738 or 07815 845586

Stevenson on skates

AMONG Louis's less celebrated accomplishments were his talents as a skater, both on ice and on wheels. He would sometimes be spotted skating solo, or with a young female partner – but was a frozen loch in Edinburgh a scene in a Stevenson romance?

In a letter to Fanny Sitwell he wrote: 'Duddingston, our big loch, is bearing; and I wish you could have seen it this afternoon, covered with people, in thin driving snow flurries, the big hill grim and white and alpine overhead in the thick air, and the road up the gorge, as it were into the heart of it, dotted black with traffic... I stayed on Duddingston till

From 'Duddingston', 1871

*You leaned to me, I leaned to you,
Our course was smooth as flight -
We steered - a heel-touch to the left,
A heel-touch to the right.*

*We swung our way through flying men,
Your hand lay fast in mine:
We saw the shifting crowd dispart,
The level ice-reach shine.*

*I swear by yon swan-travelled lake,
By yon calm hill above,
I swear had we been drowned that day
We had been drowned in love.*

after nightfall... a few people with torches began to travel up and down the ice, a lit circle travelling along with them over the snow.'

Skaters could warm themselves around fires at little booths by the lochside that sold hot drinks, and Louis was amused by one that advertised 'Café au Lait – With or Without Milk'.

In 1871, aged 21, Louis wrote a poem entitled 'Duddingston' about skating on the loch with a young lady – could it have been Flora Masson, to whom he once proposed unsuccessfully before meeting Fanny Osbourne? Half a century later,



Literary figure skater: RLS skating on Duddingston Loch with an unidentified partner, imagined by our artistically talented Minutes Secretary Valerie Pellatt

Flora would recall Louis at Duddingston – but 'skating alone; a slender, dark figure with a muffler about his neck; darting in and out among the crowd, and disappearing and reappearing like a melancholy minnow among the tall reeds that fringe the Loch'.

The skating section of the poem is followed by an 'Apologetic Postscript of a Year Later', with the lines '*Being snubbed is somewhat smart,/ Believe, my sweet;/ And I needed all my art/ To restore my broken heart/ To its conceit. Come and smile, dear, and forget/ I boasted so/ I apologise – regret/ It was all in jest and – yet/ I do not know.*'

Louis did, however, have a different partner when he discovered the new craze of roller-skating, writing in a letter: 'I have another great delight in this wheel skating; I have made great advance in it, of late, can do a great many amusing things (I mean amusing in *my* sense – amusing to

do); so that I can go whenever I am unwilling to do anything else.'

Emma Barclay, daughter of a wealthy corn factor, would always recall RLS, picturesque rather than graceful, wheeling her round on roller skates: 'He wore a velvet cap or turban and a velveteen suit with a sash. He really cared about things, very good natured, not malicious at all, and with a great sense of humour.'

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Fresh RLS insights

A NEW critical biography of RLS explores his life and work. Penned by Glenda Norquay, Chair in Scottish Literary Studies at Liverpool John Moores University, it offers not only a concise biography but also fresh insights into Stevenson's role as a literary innovator and cultural commentator. For a 20% discount on the £12.99 cover price buy online from Reaktion Books using the code RLS26.