

UPDATE

The Robert Louis Stevenson Club June 2015



Bell Rock ahoy!

WE always knew we were taking a risk with the weather for our Bell Rock sea safari. After all, it is one of the most wave-lashed lighthouses in Europe. Even Ralph the Rover, who long ago reputedly removed the bell from that murderous rock to spite the Abbot of Arbroath, came to gurgling grief among its roaring breakers.

The day before our visit, the forecast looked grim. As Robert Southey put it in his accurate description from the Inchcape Rock:

*So thick a haze o'erspreads the sky,
They cannot see the sun on high.*

But on our day the wind dropped, the sun shone. Thunder squalls were all around, massive cloud formations gave the sky drama all day, but for members of the RLS Club, led by Dr Mitchell Manson, all systems were go.

As we neared Arbroath some of us glimpsed what looked like a tiny upright white pencil near the horizon and a little thrill went through the bus. Our mission was to examine Robert Stevenson's 1811 masterpiece of engineering up close. We were steeped in what the historians and RLS had written about it, but we wanted to see the iconic light in its own watery wilderness for ourselves.

Clad in waterproofs, bright red outer jackets and life vests, we were in the capable hands of Andrew Spence, a coxswain of the Arbroath lifeboat, who piloted our 12-seater rigid inflatable, powered by twin engines and generating a 40 knots-an-hour thrust, and in anticipation of a rough ride many Stugeron seasickness pills had been consumed on our bus.

It is 11 miles to the Bell Rock from Arbroath. We did it in less than half-an-



hour. This was the Bell Rock by rocket, flying over the waves.

Then we saw it. It would be easy to become poetic about the Bell Rock Lighthouse. Against the vastness and power of the sea behind it, the killer rocks below, the ferocity of the storms that hammer it, the Bell Rock Lighthouse is indeed iconic. Perhaps it is enough to say that it rivets the eye as befits the oldest sea-washed light in the world and is, above all, a thing of beauty.

We were not prepared for the seals. About a dozen, up close scrutinising us, diving under the boat, fishing below the light. We stopped the engine and listened to the sounds of the sea, then slowly circled so that we saw the Bell Rock from every angle. We thought of storms and Robert Stevenson's skill and courage.

Some of us felt that touching the lighthouse was important and Andrew took us in gently so that this was also

achieved. Then we were off again to allow other Club members the same unforgettable experience.

As one group was on the sea, the other was watching an excellent BBC film about the building of the lighthouse while enjoying Anne Spence's home baking, and others visited the Signal Tower Museum. We hope to share the BBC film with other members soon.

IAN NIMMO



July 11 The Annual General Meeting

THE Annual General Meeting of the Robert Louis Stevenson Club will be held 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 John Macfie, it will include the election of a new chairman. The AGM is your opportunity to air your views and ideas for the Club's development. The RLS Club is always looking for new ways to celebrate and promote the life and works of RLS. Do try to come along.



Success: The Stevenson network team at the rowing club in Brussels where RLS was welcomed on his Inland Voyage

Brussels welcomes RLS

HE has long been one of the world's best-loved writers, with a life story spanning the globe from Scotland to the South Seas.

Now 120 years after Robert Louis Stevenson's death, all Europe will be following in his footsteps in a cultural coup for his native land.

A new network linking places that inspired the author of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and *Travels With A Donkey* has won accreditation as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. The routes demonstrate how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared cultural

heritage, from the music of Mozart to the Santiago de Compostela religious pilgrimages.

Thanks to the efforts of RLS Club committee members Ian Gardiner and Elizabeth Baird, Ian Logan of the Stevenson Way and our friends in Bristol, Belgium and France, accreditation was achieved at a meeting in Brussels for the new European Network In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson, linking a series of places associated with the author's life and works. Fittingly, the meeting took place at the Royal Sport Nautique de Bruxelles rowing club where Louis and Sir Walter Simp-

son were welcomed on their Inland Voyage into Europe by canoe in 1876.

The new route links Edinburgh, the Club's headquarters and Stevenson's biggest formative influence, with his childhood second home in Colinton, now featuring an RLS statue and walk, and his boyhood seaside holiday paradise of North Berwick.

The great Highland hinterland that inspired *Kidnapped* is represented by the Stevenson Way walking route and the Stevenson Adventures programme to help disadvantaged young people through encountering nature.

The route heads south to Bristol, from which the good ship *Hispaniola* sailed for *Treasure Island*, and where the Long John Silver Trust today promotes Bristol's literary and maritime history.

In Belgium and France, various organisations along Stevenson's canoe route keep the spirit of adventure alive today. And in the enchanted forest of Fontainebleau that was his destination and destiny, meeting Fanny Osbourne, the Association Robert Louis Stevenson de Barbizon a Grez organises forest walks through their old haunts.

When Mrs Osbourne had to return to California, Stevenson took himself off on a long walk through the Cevennes mountains in southern France, which he wrote up as *Travels With A Donkey*. Today the Association Sur Le Chemin de Robert Louis Stevenson welcomes literary tourists who follow in his footsteps, with or without donkeys.

On a journey of international friendship, Cultural Route accreditation is a key step and the Club looks forward to forming closer bonds.

Your club events programme

SEPTEMBER

BRIDGE OF ALLAN

SCENE of many a happy childhood holiday for RLS, whose parents rented large villas in the Stirlingshire town, Bridge of Allan may also have played a part in the creation of *Treasure Island*. A small cave on Stevenson's favourite riverside walk allegedly inspired Ben Gunn's hideaway. Date and time to be arranged – interested parties should give contact details to Margaret Wilkie on 0131 447 6738 or email wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk

OCTOBER 16

LITERARY LUNCH

OUR annual literary lunch at the Hawes Inn, South Queensferry will feature a screening of the BBC

documentary on the building of the Bell Rock lighthouse, to which members paid a visit in May. The film details the achievement of Robert Stevenson, grandfather of RLS, in building the iconic sea-washed light, and there will be further discussion of the counter claim by John Rennie that he was responsible for the design. Coffee at 10.30am for an 11am start, then lunch. Names to Margaret Wilkie, contact details as above.

NOVEMBER 14

ANNUAL LUNCHEON

THE RLS Club's Annual Luncheon will be held at the New Club in Edinburgh's Princes Street. This is always a popular event and early booking is advised. Full details and a booking form will be sent to members nearer the date.