

UPDATE

The Robert Louis Stevenson Club June 2020



Louis in Lockdown

CLUB activities have been hit hard by the current coronavirus pandemic but our mission to promote the life and work of Robert Louis Stevenson remains undiminished.

Acting Club Chairman Mitchell Manson said: 'I'd like to express the disappointment of the Club's Executive Committee that we feel obliged under the difficult times in which we find ourselves to cancel, or possibly postpone, many of this year's planned events.

'Our hope is that in the meantime most of our members have remained safe from the effects of the coronavirus. I am aware of one family all of whom were unfortunate enough to catch Covid-19 – I am pleased to report that all have recovered although it proved an anxious time for all of them.'

The committee has managed to meet three times online and regrettably came to the conclusion that this year's AGM scheduled for Saturday June 20 could not take place.

Instead the full set of accounts, having been approved by the Trustees will be submitted to HMRC. Members anxious to inspect these can request a copy from the Club Treasurer James Wilkie, wilkiejl@blueyonder.co.uk to be sent to them by email.

It has also been concluded reluctantly that both the Garden Party in July and Song Recital and the North Berwick event in September should be rescheduled, the latter to 2022. We still



Strange days: What would Louis have made of the crisis?

retain some hope, depending on how successfully we exit from the coronavirus lockdown, that the events planned for Robert Louis Stevenson Week, including the special Centenary Luncheon on Saturday November 14, can go ahead, but no one can say at this stage if holding these will be free of risk.

Your committee has agreed to meet again in August, when a final decision will be made, bearing in mind all relevant considerations.

Dr Manson added: 'The times we are living through are often quoted as being unprecedented, but it is worth noting that there was a catastrophic world influenza pandemic from May 1918 which lasted until April 1919, the year

been book-ended by two disastrous plagues. Suffering from the significant symptoms of "cabin-fever", I have frequently wondered how RLS might have coped with the lockdown.

'I suspect, accustomed as he was as a boy to hours of loneliness in a large New Town Edinburgh house, he would have kept himself amused. Remembering, of course, the plaintive line in his poem, *The Lamplighter*, depicting the lonely child looking out the house window in the darkness,

*'And O! before you hurry
by with ladder and with
light,*

*'O Leerie, see a little
child and nod to him
tonight!*

'I also tried, unsuccessfully, to find a quote from Stevenson's writings suitably apt for the present times. I suggest that anyone who can identify an appropriate quote should post or email their suggestion to the Editor by June 30.'

The Editor's decision on the best suggestion is final and the winner will receive a copy of Karen Steele's latest book about RLS and Fanny, *The Love Affair*.

Still inspired by RLS

PLANS to publish the Club's Centennial collection of essays to mark its 100th anniversary are forging ahead, despite the coronavirus crisis forcing cancellation of an agreement to publish it in November.

Talks are under way with a new publisher and the book is now due to come out next year when life returns to normal.

The Club is delighted with the range and quality of submissions by people from all walks of life, telling how Stevenson and his writings have inspired them in so many ways, and we look forward to an excellent volume of required reading for all RLS fans.



Visitor from Scotland: The Club's Ian Nimmo at the Saranac cottage

Keeping the roof over Louis's head

WHEN crisis struck Louis's one-time Saranac home, the Club was quick to respond to an appeal for funds to repair the roof of the Stevenson Memorial Cottage.

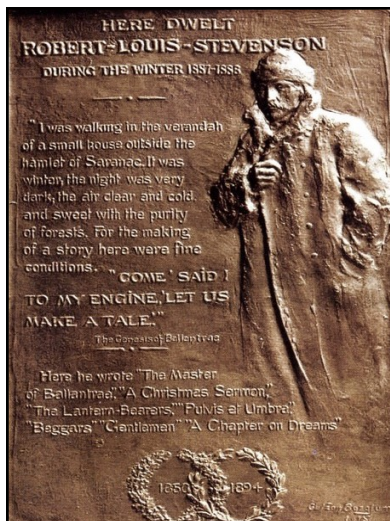
The Club committee authorised our treasurer James Wilkie to send a £1,000 donation, to which Rabbi Rita Leonard, President of the Stevenson Society of America, responded: 'This is wonderful and so very kind... it brought tears to my eyes this dawn atop the mountain.'

The Memorial Cottage is the former Baker's Cottage in which Stevenson, Fanny, her son Lloyd and Stevenson's recently widowed mother spent the winter of 1887/8.

The Society acquired the cottage and in October 1915 unveiled a plaque on the verandah. Ever since, the cottage has been a shrine to RLS and a museum, open to the public from July to September.

The memorial plaque is a bronze-relief by the sculptor Gutzon Borglum and commemorates Stevenson writings while staying at Saranac. These included one of his best essays, 'The Lantern Bearers' set in North Berwick, but most notably the genesis of his great work, *The Master of Ballantrae*, which he was to complete on the beach in Hawaii!

The cottage was considered an apt cause to support in this our Club's Centenary Year, mindful of our association with the Society in the past. In 1925 the then President of the Society, Col. William Scott, travelled to Edinburgh, taking with



Memorial: The Saranac plaque

him a bronze plaque which he presented to the Club to adorn the outside wall of Stevenson's birthplace at 8 Howard Place.

The plaque bore the inscription: 'Robert Louis Stevenson was born in this house, November 13, 1850. Presented by the Stevenson Society of America.' To our great shame and regret it was removed by persons unknown and replaced with another making no acknowledgement of the original donor.

So our apology to the Society and instead we extend to them our encouragement and best wishes in their aim to 'leave the shrine to RLS in its original independent and wondrous state... before we are all gone from this wondrous earth'.

MITCHELL MANSON



RLS Down Under

STEVENSON'S global travels led to a string of memorial plaques worldwide. This one, embedded in the Writers Walk in the shadow of Sydney Opera House, commemorates Louis's four visits to Australia. The photograph was sent to Club member Nigel McMurray by his globetrotting friend Andrew Wright. Meanwhile our Australia-based musician friends Neil Adam and Judy Turner are planning a CD of Stevenson's Vailima Prayers set to music, and would welcome any financial support.

Monterey greetings

GREETINGS have been received during the lockdown from the RLS Club of Monterey, whose President Ruth Anne Krotzer writes: 'Remembering RLS and Fanny on their May 19, 1880 Wedding Anniversary... God bless you all!'

Pleasures deferred

THE Academic Conference planned for Bordeaux and the set of Network events in the Cevennes, all for summer 2020, have been postponed to 2021. The 2020 AGM of the European Network In The Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson will now be a Zoom AGM held online during the RLS Birthday Week in November.

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