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The Bottle Imp

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Robert Louis Stevenson is Celebrated at
Edinburgh Napier University
Linda Dryden

In 2008 The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland awarded Professor Linda Dryden, Director of Edinburgh Napier University's Centre for Literature and Writing, a grant of £34,500 to develop a website for Robert Louis Stevenson (RLS) in collaboration with the Universities of Stirling and Edinburgh. The team appointed a Research Assistant for the website, Dr Hilary Grimes, and a web designer, Mr Callum Egan. Work began on the site in September 2008 and it was launched in 2009 on the anniversary Stevenson's birthday, 13 November, amid much media attention at the National Library of Scotland. The site is now maintained remotely by the originator of the first Stevenson website, Professor Richard Dury in Bergamo, Italy, with technical assistance from Callum Egan, and under the overall editorship of Professor Dryden.

Much has happened in the intervening years to make the website the most popular and widely visited internet site for Stevenson. It has won a *Talking Hands Award* for usability and has been included in the NINES project at the University of Virginia that provides links to the best electronic resources for nineteenth-century studies. The website now occupies the top spot for Stevenson on Google, proving even more popular than Wikipedia. One note of warning though for would-be visitors to the site—do not type RLS into Google as that will take you to the website for Restless Leg Syndrome! Stevenson would have been amused. The URL is as follows:

www.robert-louis-stevenson.org

The site contains pages of interest for the lay Stevensonian and academics alike. One generous gift to the site is the photographic archive of Stevenson and his family for which

permission was given by The Writers' Museum and Capital Collections in Edinburgh. There is a page for school children, an RLS timeline, and illustrated features on Stevenson's travels so that you can read all about the places he visited, including Edinburgh. The RLS Club have now joined the site and their own pages can be viewed there.

A really useful feature on the site is the link to the Internet Archive where you can access all of Stevenson's works in virtual books with page-turning and search facilities, making Stevenson accessible to anyone in the world with access to the internet. It was always the intention of the web team that the site would bring Stevenson to remote audiences and enable school children in developing countries to learn about his work. The link to the Internet Archive has enabled us to realise this ambition and thus to promote Stevenson to a new generation of readers.

Traffic on the site has increased considerably: it now has around 13,000 visitors every month, with over a million individual page views and 200,000 separate visitors from 200 different countries. On Stevenson's birthday in 2011 over 22,000 people visited the site. This is a phenomenal success and testimony to the enormous popularity that Stevenson enjoys in the 21st century.

The site regularly acquires new features. Back issues of the *Journal of Stevenson Studies*, edited by Professor Rory Watson of Stirling University and Professor Dryden, are now freely available on the site. News about RLS activities is updated as it appears, and Professor Dury continues to migrate his extensive RLS website archive material to the site. One recent addition is a facsimile of Stevenson's death certificate, kindly donated by the Registrar General for Scotland.

The benefit that this site has brought to Stevenson studies should not be underestimated. Due to its profile, Edinburgh Napier University acquired the Gellius Leopold library, an extensive collection of Stevenson print items collected by Mr Gellius Leopold's father and grandfather since the turn of the twentieth century. Mr Leopold very kindly brought his car over from Holland, filled with boxes of books and print items to donate to the University. Our international profile means that researchers and the media are now frequent visitors to the site allowing Professor Dryden to give detailed information for publication in the press and on the radio and television. We have found that Stevenson's name always sparks

media attention and thus the site has become a catalyst for journalists whenever there is a potential news story.

Another exciting recent acquisition that is entirely due to the site and its location at Edinburgh Napier is the Ernest and Joyce Mehew Library. Ernest Mehew, the editor of Stevenson's letters, sadly died recently and the author Nick Rankin, acting as executor, has donated Mehew's entire RLS Library to Edinburgh Napier, with Mehew's journals and other papers being lodged at the National Library of Scotland. This archive amounts to over 2000 books and journals and other items related to Stevenson and his family. The collection is currently awaiting the completion of renovation work at Edinburgh Napier's Merchiston Campus before it is catalogued, shelved and made publically available in a specially designated Robert Louis Stevenson Room within the Library at Merchiston. This will be a tremendous resource for scholars and visitors to the city who want to research RLS.

Last, but by no means least, is the inauguration of RLS Day in the city of Edinburgh, a development that would not have happened without the existence of the website. RLS Day was launched in 2011 as a collaboration between Professor Dryden and the UNESCO City of Literature Trust. Stevenson quotations were chalked on the streets of the city and free books were distributed. In the evening a special panel session with Ian Rankin and the actor and author Nigel Planer was chaired by the University's Vice Chancellor, Dame Professor Joan Stringer at the City Arts Centre. News of RLS Day spread quickly and congratulations and messages of 'Happy RLS Day' came flooding into the website.

Following this success RLS Day will now become an annual feature in the city of Edinburgh on Stevenson's birthday, 13 November. With Nigel Planer as its patron, a host of writers and celebrities lining up to offer their services, and as the opening event for *Previously...* Scotland's History Festival, RLS Day is set to become an international event. The day has just been endorsed by City of Edinburgh Council's Culture and Sports division, so it is now an official Edinburgh event. In 2012 Nigel will share the stage with John Sessions, more quotations will appear on the streets and Edinburgh will host events like pop-up theatre, flash mobbing, day-long readings, lectures, and even a Stevenson lookalike wandering the city's highways and byways. Anyone who wants to join in the general

celebration is urged to wear velvet on the day in honour of RLS's signature jacket and to look out for free badges being distributed on the city streets. More activities are planned and it is hoped that RLS Day will grow year by year to become another major Edinburgh festival.

None of this activity would have been possible without the generous grant from the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland and on behalf of the website team, Professor Dryden would like to thank them for their support. Please do visit the website and contact Professor Dryden if you have any suggestions for improvements or any further inclusions for the site, and, wherever you are, do celebrate Stevenson on 13 November 2012!



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