

The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh on Friday 13th December 1850. His father was an engineer and lighthouse builder. His mother was the daughter of a Scottish clergyman. RLS was largely raised by his nanny, Alison Cunningham; she was a strictly religious woman and a fan of folk-tales and storytelling – she is thought to have been a major source of inspiration to RLS.

In his early life, RLS was often confined to his bed with illness where he suffered terrible nightmares and insomnia. Perhaps this was in part to his religious upbringing – he often dreamed of heaven and hell. He suffered a thyroid complaint too, and this affected his growth – his bones were distended and elongated.

He was an intelligent man who studied law at Edinburgh University, although he chose to become a writer rather than a lawyer. His first books were collections of travel writing, and it was whilst travelling in France that he met Fanny Osbourne – the woman who would become his wife. They married in America, but lived in England.

RLS suffered ill health throughout his life, so the fresh sea air of Bournemouth was supposedly good for him, and it was here that he wrote his most famous works: *Treasure Island*, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and *Kidnapped*.

When RLS's father died in 1887, he inherited enough money to go and live abroad – in search of a climate which would not aggravate his chronic respiratory problems. They eventually settled in Samoa, where he continued to write until his death in 1894. He was killed by a brain haemorrhage.

Glossary

Clergyman: a man who works for the church.

Insomnia:

Thyroid complaint: these often affect the speed at which people grow.

Distended: swollen and bloated.

Elongated:

Chronic:

Respiratory problems: conditions which affect your breathing.