

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 47

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SUMMER 2012

## A visit to the House of lords



Late in April and before the end of the last parliamentary session, Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, past president of the Society, entertained four Bhutanese students at the Palace of Westminster. After a tour around some of the principal rooms – including the Royal Gallery with its enormous paintings by Daniel Maclise of two of Britain's triumphs in the Napoleonic wars and the Robing Room with its paintings of chivalric virtues by William Dyce – the party enjoyed a discussion over a 'real' afternoon tea before listening to the debate in the House of Lords. By happy chance Jamyang Choden, Barun Subba, Sonam Tshering Dorji and Nawang Gyeltshen saw not only a

discussion about a recent achievement by the Lords - an amendment to a Bill proposed by the Lords and accepted by the Government - but also a division on another amendment which came up with a very rare tie between the Contents and the Not-Contents.

**Andrew Sutton**

### **Forthcoming Meeting**

**Environmental Conservation in Bhutan – the Middle Path to Happiness?**

**7pm Tuesday 3 July 2012  
Speaker: Nawang Gyeltshen**

Nawang Gyeltshen will speak about Bhutan's vision for conservation, the political commitment, the sacrifices involved and the challenges faced.

With seven years of experience in forests and conservation, Nawang Gyeltshen is currently studying for an MPhil in Conservation Leadership at Cambridge University. He plans to return to the Bhutan and work on the development of sound and practical conservation policies. He is particularly interested in sustainable livelihoods and environmental governance.

**Meeting will be held at The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE**

*Drinks will be available from 6.30pm*

### **September Diary Dates**

*The dates of both the Society's AGM and the Society's Annual Dinner have been confirmed*

#### **The AGM**

*The AGM will take place at The Travellers Club in London on 19th September and will be followed by a talk from our Chairman, Michael Rutland, on "Recent developments in Bhutan".*

#### **The Annual Dinner**

*This will be held at Brooks's Club in London on 28th September.*

*Further information on both are enclosed*

# SOCIETY NEWS

## *A BIG THANKS.....*

Some twenty years ago a former student of mine from the George Abbot School Guildford came to Bhutan as an assistant to a group of international millionaire hot-air balloonists – the first ever to visit the country. Their appearance above the fields of the Bumthang Valley caused some panic among the villagers, who were convinced the Gods were descending from Heaven – not surprising, since one of the balloons was the Robinson Jam Golliwog Balloon!! That was the first and the last hot-air balloon expedition allowed in the country!!

However, the unexpected result of Helen Lee's unusual experience was that her parents, Robin and Elizabeth Lee, became respectively Honorary Treasurer and Membership Secretary of the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom. Their support and commitment was all the more significant because neither had ever visited Bhutan, and yet they took on these two crucial roles with enormous enthusiasm and dedication. Ten years ago, on the resignation of the late Nicholas Rhodes, Robin took on the financial role, and has monitored and guided the financial circumstances of the Society with acumen and wisdom, with the result that the Society is in a very sound financial position and well-placed for the future.

A few years later, Elizabeth agreed to be the Membership Secretary, which is, of course, a key role for the sustainability of a Society such as ours. Elizabeth immediately set about the difficult job of chasing up unpaid subscriptions and dealing with the many and varied enquiries that came to her – in many instances nothing to do with membership! During her time we have seen the membership of the Society gradually but consistently increase in part due to her charm and diligence in dealing with membership enquiries, and her efficiency in dealing with the administration of the membership database. Between them, Robin and Elizabeth have devoted over a decade and a half's totally voluntary service to the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom, and we all owe them sincere and heartfelt thanks. Now they both feel it is time to retire, but we hope they will continue with their connections with the Society and we look forward to seeing them at our functions for a long time to come.

*Michael Rutland*

*Chairman of the Bhutan Society*

## **New Committee Members**

### **Membership Secretary**

You will recall in the last issue we mentioned that Chris Watt had very kindly stepped in to handle membership matters on an interim basis and we thank him for his great help on this. Chris will continue with his role of webmaster of the Society's website but has now been able to hand over the membership reins to the new Membership Secretary – Rosie Glazebrook. Rosie (ne: Rosie Bowes Lyon) has had Bhutan flowing through her veins since her birth as the eldest child of Simon and Caroline. Her accepting the role of Membership Secretary is therefore highly appropriate, and we are very grateful to her for continuing the family link. Rosie, with her husband David Glazebrook and their three young daughters, recently visited Bhutan and on their return journey had the excitement of being caught up in the flight chaos resulting from floods (or was it snow or volcanic ash) over Europe!! Her contact details are: Mrs R. Glazebrook, 82 Sterndale Road London W14 0HX E: [rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com)

### **Treasurer**

When Robin told us of his planned retirement as Treasurer of the Society, it was time to look for another safe pair of hands to manage the money and accounts of the Society. So we are delighted to welcome back in that role a member many of you will already know - Lucy Hornberger. For many years Lucy was the Editor of the Society's Newsletter until she handed over to Sylvia Robert-Sargeant in 2009. Now she will take over from Robin as the new Treasurer of the Society. Lucy can be contacted as follows:

T: 01707 256 249

E: [lucy@globeflower.com](mailto:lucy@globeflower.com)

We are delighted to welcome them both on to the Committee.

*Michael Rutland*

*Chairman of the Bhutan Society*

# MEETING REPORT

## State of Affairs of Archaeology in Bhutan

Much of recorded Bhutanese history begins in the 7<sup>th</sup> century of the general era with the construction of *Paro Kyichu* and *Bumthang Jampa Lhakhang* by the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. Nothing regarding the country is recorded before that period nor has there been any intentional search for knowledge for any earlier period. While written records of certain aspects of the Bhutanese experience, in particular its religion and religious figures are rich, major pockets of obscurity occur even within the historic epoch of the country. Furthermore historical records are often infused with fantastic supernatural events. In this regard, archaeology, with its unique advantage of uncovering physical records of events and people with little discrimination, can help us understand who we really are, beyond religion and landmark events, and how we got here.



***Drapham Dzong, Chhoekhor Toed, Bumthang***



***Caves, Upper Thimphu Valley***

The Bhutanese Government is keen to develop Bhutanese archaeology. In 1999, a salvage excavation at a construction site in Bumthang became the country's first archaeological project. In 2008, the second archaeological excavation commenced at the ruins site of *Drapham Dzong* in Bumthang. There is no dearth of architectural ruins and potential archaeological sites in the Bhutanese landscape but a lack of legislation and clear strategy at present have inadvertently placed archaeology under those dealing with conservation of architectural heritage. Unsurprisingly, emphasis on Bhutanese archaeology so far has been on the study and conservation of architectural ruins. For balance, proposals for the study of limestone caves (upper Thimphu), burial mounds (Bangtsho), and highland lake sediments are being developed by a few of us in order to be executed in the near future.

***This is a summary of a talk given by Kuenga Wangmo to the Society at our meeting in May 2012.***

### ***NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE.***

***During 2012 there will be three issues of the Society Newsletter with the third issue being published at the end of September. Notices of any Society meetings not included in the Newsletter will be notified directly to members via e-mail. Please make sure that the Membership Secretary, Rosie Glazebrook, has your latest e-mail address. She can be contacted as shown on page 8.***

# NEWS FROM THE

## Young drinkers are at risk

### **Alcohol remains the top killer in Bhutan and alcohol liver disease (ALD) caused 169 deaths out of the total 1102 recorded in health facilities across Bhutan in 2011.**

The annual Health Bulletin confirms that more than half of Bhutan's active alcohol drinkers are below 24 years and about 40 percent of alcohol consumers are females. The Bulletin stated that, "of late, alcohol consumption has become (more of) a substance abuse than a social drinking habit for many youth, because of its cheap availability and lesser social stigma."

After alcohol, the next health condition causing deaths in Bhutan is cancer, which killed 92 of the 980 cases seen last year. The number of people attending health facilities is on the increase with nearly 72,000 cases of injuries and trauma. Work-related injuries at nearly 28,000 topped the list of other cases followed by 8,140 accidental falls, 1,942 transport accidents, 5,913 dog bites and 3,698 other bites and stings.

With a total of 1,352,243 sick cases seen at health facilities last year, it could mean that all 700,000 people in the country had visited a health centre at least twice last year. However these figures also include health care of 75,000 foreign workers, who may also use these services free of charge. One area of concern is the sudden increase in the number of young children suffering from diarrhoea with figures going up nearly 300% from 6,167 in 2010 to 18,492 in 2011. Yet sanitation has improved for nearly 60 percent of the population.

While there are still many causes for concern, there was also a decrease in mortality in some health related diseases. For example, deaths from tuberculosis reduced to 17 last year from 38 in 2010; malnutrition deaths dropped from 11 to 5, and deaths from pneumonia from 102 to 55.

## New protected species

Six birds have been added to the list of protected wild animals in Bhutan under the Forest and Nature Conservation Act. They include the white-bellied heron, chestnut-breasted hill partridge, white-rumped vulture, beautiful nuthatch, blyth's tragopan and satyr tragopan. This, forestry officials said, was the first change since the Act's introduction in 1995, taking the total number of protected wild animals to 30 different species. The birds are



***White bellied heron***

spread all over the country with white-bellied heron found in Wangduephodrang, Punakha, Dagana, Sarpang and Zhemgang. The beautiful nuthatch is found both in the eastern regions of and in the west. Blyth's tragopan is found only in Trashigang and likewise the chestnut-

breasted hill partridge is found only in Mongar. The White-rumped vulture is a very rare bird and is found only in the southern foothills, whereas the satyr tragopan is found in good numbers in most eastern regions.

Forestry officials say that the global population of these birds had dipped with loss of habitat. Conflicts with humans, such as poaching and forest fires, were other reasons. The addition of species to the list, a Cabinet press release stated, was proposed in view of the growing importance of these species both at the national and international context and the necessity for legal protection status to be made for the species.

### **Diplomatic news**

His Majesty the King recently granted an audience to senior government officials appointed as ambassadors. Foreign Secretary, Daw Penjore, is the ambassador to the Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva and Sonam Tshong, Director General of SAARC with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the new ambassador to Belgium. Kesang Wangdi, Director General of Tourism Council, has also been appointed as the new ambassador to Thailand.

Myanmar has recently established diplomatic ties with Bhutan at ambassadorial level. A joint statement on the establishment was signed between the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations and his Bhutan counterpart in New York on Feb 1. The diplomatic establishment with Bhutan has brought the total number of countries in the world with which Myanmar has such links to 106 since it regained independence in 1948.

# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## Import of non-essentials curtailed

As the economy gets used to rationing of INR (Indian Rupee) by the central bank, the Ministry responsible for economic affairs has now indefinitely suspended import of over 5,000 non-essential items from countries other than India, as another means to plug loopholes and no new import licences would be issued for the time being.

Included on this non-essential item list are goods such as olive oil, biscuits, jams, fruit jellies, iced coffee, perfumes, shampoos, powders, manicure and pedicure items, deodorants, luxury furniture and tableware, kitchenware and toilet items. Cigarettes, motorbikes and alcohol beverages are also included as non-essential items.

Import licences, trade officials say, are employed as a means of restricting outflow of foreign currency, to improve a country's balance of payments position, control entry of dangerous items, such as explosives, and to protect the domestic industry from foreign competition. "The recent notification to suspend import licences, however, is mainly concerned with the outflow of foreign currency that is USD," a trade official said.

More than 3,000 import licences were issued last year, with goods amounting to Nu 12B imported from these countries. A store employee in Thimphu said their shop was usually full with goods imported from Thailand and India, but with the import licence suspended, the shortage of INR, items for sale would become limited. "Though we still have our old stock at present, we're running out of a few items, mainly cosmetics," he said.

Another shopkeeper said, "There's need for a proper categorisation of essential goods, since what's essential for some may not be essential for others". The Bhutan trade classification list has about 50 plus essential items, such as meat, vegetables, rice, rice cooker, edible oil, medicines, petrol, diesel, kerosene, LPG and raw materials for manufacturing industries and automobiles. "Non-essential items are mainly luxury goods, and import of such goods has soared sharply over the few years," a trade official said.

### **Bhutan Archery at the Olympic Games.**

It has just been confirmed that Ms Sheram Zam will be representing Bhutan at the forthcoming Olympic archery competition. She is currently training with her coach at Warwick University and will move to the Olympic village on 20th July. We wish her well in the competition.



In attendance at the Olympic Games will be HRH Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, President, Bhutan Olympic Committee (BOC), Mr. Sonam Karma Tshering, SG, BOC Mr. Ugyen Rinzin, President, Archery Federation and Lt. Col. Jambay, President, Shooting Federation/ADC to HRH.

*With regards to the Bhutan boxing team, who are also training at Warwick, they are still awaiting an IOC invitational place. If successful, they will move with the archery team into the Olympic Village.*

### **Taa Dzong Museum becomes Trongsa's main attraction**

Since this Museum opened in 2008 it has become one of the popular tourist destinations in the Dzongkhag. According to records, about 30,000 people have visited the Dzong of whom more than 18,000 were tourists.

The Museum houses many artefacts related to the Wangchuck Dynasty and is seen as a good introduction to visitors to Bhutan, as all the exhibits are informative and well displayed. Since opening in 2008 the Museum has generated about Nu. 5 million and by the end of 2012 it is hoped that the money will enable the display areas to be extended with more relics on display.

### **Paro National Museum to remain closed**

One of Paro's major tourist attractions, the National Museum, will not re-open until 2015. The Museum suffered major structural damage during last year's earthquake, rendering it unsafe for public access.

The National Museum Director, Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi, said that renovations are scheduled to begin shortly after structural drawings and other required documentation have been completed. However visitors can still see more than half of the exhibits from the Museum which are now on display in a two-storey building located close to the Museum.

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## Tourist arrivals increase by more than 50 percent

Last year 64,028 high-end tourists visited Bhutan. The figure includes 16,418 regional high ends and 1,728 regional tourists who came by land but stayed in hotels rated three star or above. Officials said this is the highest recorded number of visitor arrivals in the country with a growth of 56.65 percent from 2010. The tourism industry earned USD 47.68M from dollar paying tourists last year, up by 32.52 percent from the previous year. Of this, royalties represent USD 14.89M. Tourism council officials said these earnings do not include revenue from other sectors like airline, handicraft, and out-of-pocket spending.



High-end tourists are those who come by air and pay a minimum daily tariff of USD 250 during peak season and USD 200 during off-season. Tourism council's spokesperson Damcho Rinzin said 10 percent of the tariff is assumed as agent commission and the rest has to be submitted for the VISA endorsement. "After the VISA endorsement and tax deductions, USD 156.8 is returned to the agent for the tourist's accommodation and food, at least in a three star hotel, and also for treks, tours and guide's charges," he said.

The majority of the dollar paying tourists - in descending order - are from the United States of America, Japan, China, United Kingdom, Germany, Thailand, Australia, France, Singapore and the least from Canada. The most visited places are Thimphu, Paro, Dochula, Punakha, temples, and dzongs.

Damcho Rinzin said there are just enough guides today. An induction course for 300 new guides began in April. "We currently have 1,390 cultural guides who also take up trekking and about five of them are community based local guides," he added. "We have very few multi lingual guides." The Council's target for 2012 is to bring in 100,000 high-end tourists – an increase of over 50% on 2011 numbers. Currently there are eight five stars, seven four stars, forty three stars, fifty four two stars and nineteen one star hotels in the country.

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## First there was coffee growing in Bhutan - now there is green tea

We are all familiar these days with the availability of green tea and have read of many of its alleged health benefits. Soon you will be able to buy home grown green tea in Bhutan - Samchholing green tea – which originates from the village of Samchholing in the Trongsa area.

The green tea at Samchholing has interesting beginnings. It is said to have been brought to Bhutan by the Second Druk Gyalpo. Scientifically known as **Camellia Sinensis**, it was planted near the Samchholing Palace and intended initially for personal use of the Royal family.



But for Samchholing green tea, things are changing. There are presently only a handful of farmers who grow the tea commercially, but the Gewog Agriculture Office, who now coordinate activities, say that farmers, who normally harvest the tea 9 months of the year, all now bring their crop to the Renewable Natural Resources Centre at Drakten for processing. A packet of Samchholing green tea currently costs Nu. 100 and most is transported to Thimphu for sale once it is processed and packaged.

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## Gift to Courtauld will make London a world centre of Buddhist art studies

London is set to seal its status as one of the leading western centres for the study and conservation of Buddhist art, following a remarkable private donation to the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. The gift comes from a devout Buddhist, Robert YC Ho, a Hong Kong benefactor who is continuing a family tradition of philanthropy that dates back to the 19th century.

The donation will allow the Courtauld to establish an endowment for a postgraduate degree devoted to Buddhist art, examining it from the points of view of religion, history and conservation. The course will examine the vast heritage of Buddhist art, from painted cave temples along the Silk Road that linked Europe to the far-east, to colossal sculptures, delicate porcelain artefacts and illuminated manuscripts. A greater focus on non-western art has become a firm part of the Courtauld's long-term strategy. The institute's director, Professor Deborah Swallow, who is a former keeper of the V&A's Asian department and has a particular interest in Buddhist art, said the donation would allow the Courtauld to return to its pre-Second World War roots.

London also boasts important Buddhist collections in the British Museum and the British Library, as well as at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), which has the highest concentration of students of Buddhist studies at any university outside Asia. The Courtauld will collaborate with SOAS on its new degree. Professor David Park of the Courtauld institute, who has been instrumental in setting up the new MA course, said: "Quite a few monasteries are building their own museums. They like tourists coming."

## Digital archive donated to National Library

Monasteries and temples in Bhutan hold most of the country's rich textual heritage, which, if not conserved, could be lost to natural calamities like fire, earthquake or to theft, burglary and smuggling, and to ignorance and neglect. Today, digital technology has made conservation much easier than in the past, and Bhutanese scholar Dr Karma Phuntsho has successfully digitalised around 5,000 volumes of various textual heritages from about 20 monasteries and temples.

The textual conservation project, an initiative by Dr Karma Phuntsho that started in 2005, photographed over three million pages of different volumes of texts and documents. The digital archive was recently handed over to the home minister, Minjur Dorji, as an individual contribution for the National Library.

"Some of the owners thought that we're into textual business, and we had a difficult time convincing them about our conservation effort," said Dr Phuntso.

According to him, Bhutan is the only Mahayana Buddhist country with a long undisturbed history of Buddhism, and many old monasteries and temples are repositories of undiscovered texts and scriptures of Buddhist scholarly works, poetry, rare documents, biographies and histories. "We discovered some of the most rare documents and texts from among the waste paper dumped in the corner of monasteries," he said.



"People take care of only those ritual scriptures that they use the most, the rest seems neglected."

The project was financially supported by the endangered archive program of British Library and Cambridge University, which is also financing his research on

scholarly works of terton (treasure discoverer) Pema Lingpa.

Dr Karma Phuntsho said that the copies of the project work will be given to the British Library for preservation, since they have the capacity to update the electronics accordingly, and could serve as a back up, in case anything happens to the archive in Bhutan.

"Such a conservation effort is of benefit to the country and its people, but we weren't able to support financially since government didn't have the budget for it," Lyonpo Minjur Dorji said. "However we'll support with other means to make conservation much easier, such as recommending people and the monasteries to help the process."

Dr Karma Phuntsho said a lot still needs to be done, as Bhutan has at least 2,000 monasteries and temples.

## Wangduephodrang Dzong destroyed

The 17th Century Wangduephodrang Dzong has been destroyed by a fire. It broke out on the afternoon of June 24th and started near the front entrance. Because of high winds and lack of rain over many days, it quickly spread and destroyed the whole of the Dzong.



Firefighters could do little to stop it spreading because, with the front half ablaze, access to the rear part of the Dzong was very difficult. All the records in

the front part of the Dzong housing the civil administration have been destroyed, and many invaluable old records, statues and religious texts have also been lost. HM The King and HM The Fourth King were on the scene very soon after the fire started.



**Wangduephodrang Dzong as we remember it - located dramatically on a ridge above the confluence of two local rivers.**



## CONTACT LIST

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### NOTE

*If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending your latest e-mail address to the Membership Secretary at:*

***[rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com)***

*who will then add it to the database. There is no plan for the Society to go 'paperless' but there are times when it could be very convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.*

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