

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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## **MARK SWINBANK** *July 1949 – September 2017*



In early September Mark Swinbank, committee member and great supporter of the Society, lost his battle with cancer, sadly before he had a chance to see or contact many friends. Mark's first visit to Bhutan was in 2006 and he has been back five or six times since often taking friends and relations with him – his most recent visit was last November (after a railway-buff's dream holiday riding on several of India's famous trains). He was not the first to find that the people of Bhutan and their culture made a profound impression on him and he soon came to love the country. Coming from an English background and a career in insurance, based in the City of London, he probably did not expect to be so moved – but he was.

In 2014 he published an autobiography, *The Road to Kamji*, subtitled '**A very personal Journey through Life and Bhutan**'. Kamji was the lunch stop when driving up from Phuntsoling to Thimphu on his first visit and the atmosphere of that place and the interaction with its residents were magical for Mark. He has made many friends in Bhutan and has generously supported various ventures since. Mark joined the Society early in 2009 and joined the committee in 2014 to learn the art and craft of being the dinner secretary. He masterminded the dinners of 2015 (The Polish Hearth Club) and 2016 (The Charterhouse) and has laid the plans for the 2017 '25th anniversary' dinner at the Inner Temple. It is so sad that he will not be with us then; he will be much missed.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

***The 2017 AGM of The Bhutan Society of the UK will be held on Monday  
30 October 2017 at 6.00 pm at The Travellers Club in London SW1.***

***Following the AGM, Chairman Michael Rutland OBE, will speak on  
"Recent Developments in Bhutan"***

# SOCIETY NEWS

## *Annual Dinner*

***The Annual Dinner celebrating 25 years of the Society in the UK will be held at The Inner Temple in London on Friday 17 November 2017. Places are still available for this special event. Please send your application form now to Andrew Sutton, not to Mark Swinbank's address. Should any member have mislaid the form, a new one is available, also from Andrew.***

***E-mails sent to Mark, since about 14 September, may not be recovered. Therefore members who have applied for places at the dinner recently - by e-mail and bank transfer - and have NOT received any confirmation from Mark or Andrew, should please contact Andrew at [andrewsutton001@aol.com](mailto:andrewsutton001@aol.com). Andrew's address in Dorking and phone number are on page 8.***

### **FORTHCOMING MEETING**

#### ***The Wherabouts of the Yeti***

***Thursday 11 January 2018  
at 7.00 pm***

***Speaker: Steve Berry***

*Having stumbled on what may have been yeti tracks in the snow near to Gangkar Puensum in late 2014, Steve has been back several times to continue the search.*

*This meeting will be held at the National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE*

*The bar will open at 6.30 pm*

### **Hearts and Life and the Kingdom of Bhutan by Dr Aubrey Leatham**

In this book Dr Aubrey Leatham has traced the development of cardiology from 1945, when there was little or no treatment for any cardiac problem, to today, when there is specific treatment for virtually every cardiac condition. It has been brought about by specialisation initiated in 1947 by Dr John Parkinson who formed the Institute of Cardiology which later developed into a World Centre. Clinical cardiology became a major discipline, further stimulated by the author's visit as a consultant to the King of Bhutan in 1963. The author's experiences in that country, only connected to the outside world at that time by a fortnight-long mule journey, are illustrated in this book by a selection of his unique colour photographs.

***ISBN 978-1-86077-710-0. Price £20.00 (inc p+p)***

***Members interested in purchasing a copy should write to his widow, Mrs Judith Leatham, at Rookwood Farmhouse, West Wittering, Chichester, PO20 8QH giving their postal details and enclosing a cheque made out to her for £20. Mrs Leatham has kindly offered to gift the proceeds, net of p&p, to the Bhutan Society Trust Fund.***

# NEWS and REPORTS

## *Some glimmer of hope*

**Dechen Tshomo was 19 when she started developing pains in her head and neck. Painkillers were soon ineffective and within a short time she was admitted to a hospital where she went into a coma which lasted seven months.**



According to medical records, Dechen was diagnosed with meningitis, an inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain and spinal cord. Dechen knew that she was now half paralysed and, with no offer of a cure, went back to live at her family village home. Whilst her parents were out working in the fields, Dechen's only companion was her mobile phone. For almost five years, she lay in the corner of the house and interacted with the outside world, the only way she could - on Facebook.

One of the people who came to know about Dechen was Emma Slade, founder of UK-based charity organisation, Opening Your Heart to Bhutan. She visited Dechen at her village late last year when Dechen told her that she wanted to join a nunnery in Pemagatshel. But, because of the lack of necessary facilities, that was not possible. However, after studying Dechen's condition, and persuading her parents of the opportunities available, the principle of DRAKTSO East Vocational Centre arranged for Dechen to be admitted to the Centre earlier this year.

Dechen is doing well. Since she already had basic education, it was easy for her to grasp the skills taught at the Centre and is currently enjoying art classes. With the help of the physiotherapy sessions she receives monthly, Dechen said that she has started to feel a slight sensation in her lower limbs. "I hope to walk on my legs one day. I feel good about my chances. I will give it my best," she said.

## *Keeping the wheels moving*



***Karma Wangchuk preparing tool boards which were funded by the Bhutan Society Trust Fund.***

**Bhutan's progressive healthcare policy has resulted in an increased survival rate in spinal cord injury cases and in children with disabilities such as cerebral palsy. Whilst the basic orthopaedic wheelchairs provide mobility, they are not appropriate for individuals with spinal cord injury or children with supportive seating requirements.**

To meet the needs of Bhutan's healthcare system, appropriate wheelchairs need to be supplied, physiotherapists need to be trained in assessment and prescription and engineers need to be trained in maintenance and repair.

In 2016/17 Health Volunteers Overseas (HVO) secured funding from MSH (Medical Science for Health) to train physiotherapists and to supply a test batch of 200 appropriate wheelchairs which are designed to suit a wide range of disabilities as well as the environmental conditions of Bhutan. These wheelchairs, from a number of manufacturers, are designed to have at least five years of serviceable life on condition that key individuals are trained in wheelchair maintenance

and repair and that spare parts are available. Wheelchair maintenance and repair is an essential part of any wheelchair service and the training implemented by Simon Gue was designed to complement the wider wheelchair service training being carried out by HVO as part of the 'Wheelchair Service Strategy for Bhutan'.

The participants were trained to identify wheelchair parts, how to assemble wheelchairs, how to source components locally and how to repair them. With the information learned and the tools provided, each individual will return to their department equipped to deliver wheelchair maintenance and repair. The long-term beneficiaries of the project will be the wheelchair users who experience an enhanced service and independence through mobility. The Bhutan Ministry of Health will benefit as cost of a national wheelchair service will be substantially reduced through wheelchairs lasting over five years instead of one to two years.

***This summary is part of a full report prepared for the Bhutan Society Trust Fund who supported Simon Gue and this project. Further information from the Treasurer, David Glazebrook.***

## ***New support for highland farmers***

**Traditionally the livelihood of highland farmers depended on rearing yaks, sheep and horses but once the collection of the cordyceps fungus was legalised in 2006, it has provided an additional and significant source of income for these highlanders.** Cordyceps are only present above 4,000 – 5,000 metres altitude and once collected, they are auctioned off, often to exporters. For some farmers the economic benefits of collecting and selling cordyceps have been enough for them to abandon animal rearing completely. Although the price varies slightly, the highest price a kilo of high quality cordyceps this year was around \$ 40,000. In comparison a farmer may earn only about \$ 150 by selling cheese, butter and milk from yaks.



Understandably with such low returns, most farmers have lost interest in rearing yaks. In one district the number of herds has gone from more than 100 to below 50. This decline has also posed a threat to the loss of yak products such as meat, wool, cheese and clothes, impacting greatly on age-old traditions.

However as the climate is changing and over-harvesting has affected both quantity and quality of the cordyceps, the income from their harvesting is no longer guaranteed.

So the highland farmers have to look again at yak herding, but this time the Department for Livestock will step in to offer help. “We are planning different activities to give highlanders the same opportunities as those farmers living in lower valleys,” says Tauchu Rabgay, Head of the Highland Development Programme. “In the same way that other government departments have provided them with facilities such as schools and hospitals, the Dept of Livestock will provide them with veterinary hospitals for their animals. They will also be given fodder, seeds, and modern equipment for producing yak products. In the past, the return from the yaks only consisted of cheese, butter and meat, but now we are planning to improve those products and will try to export them.”

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### ***NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE 2018***

***Three issues will be published in 2018 - at the end February, June and October***

# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## ***Recycling print cartridges***

**Bhutan produces over a truckload of E-wastes, every year and used printer cartridges are one of the greatest culprits.**

However for Leki Dawa, these worn out printer cartridges are not waste but a resource which could be converted to money. With a diploma in engineering from India, he decided in 2015 to form a company called Bhutan Alternatives. Today, he collects used toner cartridges from various agencies, government organisations and corporations and sets about restoring them.



So far, the group has re-manufactured and has sold around 9,500 toner cartridges to almost nineteen districts. Leki Dawa has also been selected as the Best Entrepreneur by the Loden Foundation and aspires to start a Green Technology Centre in future.

“We will then recondition the E-waste items like laptops, computers, and household items like fridges and washing machines and sell them back to the market,” he said. “This will help in contributing to the economy, the environment and also create jobs for young people.” Bhutan Alternatives is certified by the International Standard Organization in re-manufacturing printing cartridges. With just eighteen youth employees, it has collected more than 13,000 toner cartridges since setting up two years ago.

### ***New travel website***

***The Tourism Council of Bhutan launched a new website on 27 September 2017.***

***[www.tourism.gov.bt](http://www.tourism.gov.bt)***

## ***Lottery developments***

**Gambling in Bhutan is illegal. However Section 395 of the Penal Code of Bhutan (2004) states that an authorized lottery is not considered as gambling.**

Royal Bhutan Lottery Limited (BLL) was officially launched in April 2016. It has been established as a State Owned Enterprise under the Ministry of Finance with a board of directors chaired by the Finance Secretary with senior representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Home and Cultural Affairs and Economic Affairs.

The first year has not gone as well as expected and the weather has been partly to blame. Rainfall has often disrupted sales and damaged tickets. Sales go up to 60% of that expected except during the monsoon summer months when it reaches only 40%. Most of the ticket sellers are mobile, so poor weather has been challenging. Every month, 200,000 tickets are sold to sales agents across the country and. BLL earns around Nu 1 million net profit a month in the peak season while during the monsoon season, net profits drop to Nu 600,000. The lottery tickets are sold only in the Bhutanese market and are yet to go international and the month-long wait for results has not helped either. Traditionally lottery results are declared instantly and people across the border in India are much more used to such a system.

Now a year into operation, Bhutan Lottery Limited (BLL) is planning to go online in the next six months as well as introducing instant scratch cards. The latter will be available before the end of 2017, cost Nu 30 each and the results will be available immediately.

The online lottery will initially target the domestic market and will be either an app or web-based lottery where only registered Bhutanese players can take part using their bank accounts.

Meanwhile BLL will look into promoting responsible gambling following due procedure of the country's gambling laws. Age limits will be imposed and frequency of games played by an individual player will be restricted. The online gaming platform will probably only be open after office hours so that office goers refrain from playing during work. Although the online lottery will be restricted initially to Bhutanese citizens, BLL plans to expand into other markets. However there are already issues with six foreign lottery sites operating using the Bhutan Lottery brand and BLL are trying to block these web-sites in the country so that Bhutanese Lottery buyers will not be confused.

## NEWS AND UPDATES

### ***Suicide numbers still high despite an action plan***

More than two years after the implementation of a suicide prevention action plan, preventing suicides still remains a challenge. On average eight suicide cases are reported every month and it is among the top six causes of deaths in the country today. Last year, the highest number of suicide cases was among those between twenty-one and thirty years.

The Cabinet endorsed a three-year suicide prevention action plan in May 2015 to address the increasing number of suicides in the country. The action plan has six objectives and fifty-six actions. Programme officer with the National Suicide Prevention Programme (NSPP), Yeshi Wangdi, said suicide is a complex issue. "It's a multi-sectorial approach and a single agency alone cannot solve the issue."

He said that in most of the suicide incidences, it is difficult to say why a person committed suicide. "However, if you look at the underlying factors like the victim's history of alcohol and drug use, and mental status, among others, most of the victims are found to be dependent on controlled substances and alcohol."

Relationship issues are also a common reason for many of the attempted suicide cases and it is believed that psychological support could help prevent many cases. However the training of such counsellors could not be conducted due to lack of budget.

He went on to say "I feel the best approach to prevent an individual from taking his own life is by changing the individual's behaviour and his attitude towards life. This can be done by religious figures through religious discourse in public gatherings and in institutions including schools and universities. Prominent religious figures could also convince people to have a positive attitude towards life. Other stakeholders like the media could do more in educating and creating awareness on suicide prevention."

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### ***BICMA censors television channels***

To standardize and to bring uniformity among the number and types of TV channels in the country, the Bhutan Infocomm and Media Authority (BICMA) has sent notifications to all the Dzongkhags enclosing the list of TV channels now available for distribution throughout the country. This came into effect from September 1. The decision to standardize came after they had conducted an assessment study of existing channels. The study revealed that including BBS 1 and 2, there were 147 channels which, after the assessment, was reduced to 56. It was also evident that a third category was being used and that was one of suitability. The BICMA stated that some channels were also censored as they did not make the cut. They were not considered appropriate viewing as they were not in line with the culture of the country. BICMA justified this by saying that studies revealed that if people are exposed to such kinds of programmes for a long period of time, they tend to become inappropriately desensitized.

BICMA's initiative to standardize and remove some of the channels as an interim measure until digitization of CATV is completed, also appears to be contradicting the aim of providing more digital services (channels) and convergence of ICT services, all of which would result in a greater choice for the viewers and improve picture quality.

Concern was also expressed about the direct to home television services (DTH) which pay 0% tax to the government. Their content can neither be monitored nor standardized, so this move will only give them a competitive advantage.

The BICMA have reassured viewers that the current number of channels is not a ceiling for cable operators. "If tomorrow, there is one with a good content and people come to us, the channel will be

subjected to review and if it meets requisite criteria, we will always allow it." The BICMA has recently sent another letter to the Dzongkhags to monitor if the cable operators are adhering to the approved list of channels.



# NEWS AND UPDATES

## ***Traditional architecture on the brink of modernisation***

**Rapid development in technology, mechanisation, and hiring of workers from outside the country, has led to a loss of traditional architecture.**



***Chhukka Dzong, completed in 2012***

Karma Galey, who designed the new dzongs at Chhukha and Tsirang, has raised the concerns of balancing cultural heritages and traditional architecture with modernisation and advancement in technology. Sharing concerns and aspirations of architecture in Bhutan, he asked the Home Ministry's head of the conservation of heritage sites division, Nagtsho Dorji, on how appropriate it is for hotels, office buildings and gateways to have a sertog. He said that a decade ago, a sertog, a copper turret gilded in gold, was installed on rooftops of all temples and dzongs.

"Dzongs epitomise Bhutan's architecture", Karma Galey said. "The principles of traditional arts and engineering are visible on the walls of dzongs." He also said that the way dzongs were built by the community together shows how a nation is built. "Communities used to celebrate the constructions of a building. This legacy and continuing traditions need to be sustained. This participatory approach is not practiced today," he said. "We need to educate and remind young citizens about this tradition of building nationhood." He observed that traditional architecture and designs are interpreted for decorations today. The red bands were painted on the walls of temples and monasteries in the past. But nowadays, bands in others colours are painted on the walls of hotels and whilst religious items are used at the doorways of hotels, this spreads a different meaning of traditional identities.

Nagtsho Dorji said that the new forms of design in architecture are a result of drawing inspiration from traditional architecture. "However, these modernised versions of architecture pose challenges in preserving the traditional styles."

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## ***New opportunities in retirement***

Three years ago Wangda decided to spend his savings on buying three acres of land below the Phuentsholing-Thimphu highway. For 22 years Wangda had served in the armed forces and after retiring worked for twelve years as a bank security guard. Wangda admitted the latest change in lifestyle had been difficult at his age, but was optimistic and wanted to see how it went.



Today he cultivates fourteen different fruits and cash crops with kiwi and cardamom being his most valued. Last year Wangda's first harvest of 50kg of kiwi sold for Nu 300 a kilogram during the Kiwi Festival. So he has now planted another fifty kiwi saplings. In addition to the over one hundred lush green cardamom plants, he has also planted twenty avocado trees, chilies, Japanese pears, grapes and sugarcane, all of which are already cash crops for him and his family. He also grows apples, lemons, persimmons and walnuts. More staple products such as potatoes and corn are also grown, but saving the

corn from monkeys has proven to be a challenge, although three dogs do help to ward them off most of the time.

Until harvesting time, the energetic farmer said that he is not sure about the returns from his growing experiments. Only time will tell, Wangda said, adding that he would invest only in those fruits and crops that earn more. Not content with just growing crops, Wangda and his family also rear livestock and keep five turkeys and eight Jersey cows.

## Reviving chog-zhi-bur-zo

Dechen Tshewang, a trainer at the Institute of Zorig Chusum in Thimphu, along with his three apprentices, will be remembered as the craftsmen who revived the chog-zhi-bur-zo (four dimensional woodcarving).



"All wood carvings subsisting in the country are three-dimensional," Dechen Tshewang said. Woodcarvings are mostly found on altars, pillars and walls. He said that during Zhabdrung's reign the art of four-dimensional woodcarving was practiced to make statues. "There are today only a few wooden statues and these are centuries old. The tradition of making four-dimensional wooden statues died with the emergence of bronze and mud statues. One can be seen at the Chari monastery."

Upon the recent Royal Command of His Majesty The King, a project to revive this art was started. The most appealing display at the recent Zorig exhibition was the four-dimensional, architecturally convoluted four-foot edifice of Zhabdrung Phuensum Tshogpa, the most significant altarpiece for Bhutanese. It took Dechen Tshewang and his team five months to complete the project. He plans to carve Guru Tshengye on a similar basis. He considers the completion of this project auspicious as it falls on the anniversary of 400 years of Zhabdrung's arrival in the country.

## 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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