

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 76

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2022

Committee Changes

After nearly eight years' service to the Society, first as Treasurer and recently as Secretary, **David Glazebrook** has asked to stand down from the Committee to allow him time to pursue other projects. It is not easy to let him go as his experience and wise counsel have been greatly valued by all Committee members but we recognise that life and time move on. We heartily thank him for all his contributions – particularly in encouraging the Society to embrace technology with email communication, Mailchimp distribution, sharing of videos via YouTube, research on our website and the use of Zoom for meetings. David continues as a very interested member of the Society and we look forward to meeting him at future events.

We are delighted that **Dr Scott Steedman CBE**, has agreed to take David's place as Secretary following the AGM in April. Scott has been involved with Bhutan since 2005, when he first visited the country with his wife Deborah, one of the founding members of the Society. He and Deborah have visited Bhutan several times since to meet friends, learn more about the culture and to trek. Through their connections in Bhutan, Scott was invited to advise on the restoration of a small monastery (Yutha Goenpa) and on improving earthquake resistance of traditional buildings. He is also connected with Bhutan through his work as Director-General, Standards at BSI, which maintains relations with the Bhutanese Government's national standards body through the international standards community. Scott is keen to work with members of the Society to shape our future strategy and events.

Chris Watt has also agreed to re-join the Committee following the AGM to supervise the Society's use of technology and edit its website. We are delighted to welcome Chris back. Chris's lifelong interest with the Himalayas stems from a passion for mountain trekking and climbing. He has been a member of the Society since 2003, when he was fortunate enough to work in Bhutan as a volunteer for the Ministry of Agriculture's National Biodiversity Centre for six months. His life enhancing experiences there ensured that he kept in contact with Bhutan. Subsequent visits include one organised by the Society around Coronation time in 2008. He currently works for a software development company specialising in Aviation Fuel optimisation and sustainability. Outside the Society he volunteers with a local scout group and has active interests in kayaking, astrophotography, travel and literature.

Forthcoming Event

Thursday, 3 March 2022

Come and join us to celebrate the forthcoming Losar – the Bhutanese and Tibetan New Year . We will meet in the Upper Hall of St Columba's in Pont Street, London SW1X 0BD an informal reception from 6.00 to 8.00 pm.

Entry price: £25 per person.

This will include drinks – wine and non-alcoholic – and light refreshments – including momos, if we're lucky!

We hope that this will be a way not only to mark Losar but to get together again 'in person' after such a long period of Covid-related restrictions. Please come if you can. Members are also welcome to bring guests.

To secure your place, you should do two things:

1. Email Elizabeth Jacobson (tookiej@btinternet.com) to say how many places you wish to reserve, along with the names of those who will attend.
2. Make a transfer, £25 per person, to the Society's bank account:

Account Name: The Bhutan Society of the UK

Sort Code: 09-01-55

Account Number: 33385709

Please include LOSAR and your NAME as the REFERENCE of your payment. We shall then send you an email confirmation in lieu of a printed ticket.

Directions to St Columba's (from Knightsbridge, South Kensington and Sloane Square tube stations) are given at the foot of the church's home page on its website – <https://www.stcolumbas.org.uk>

SOCIETY NEWS

2022 AGM

This meeting will be held via Zoom on Monday, 25 April 2022 at 6.00 pm.

After the AGM, Michael Rutland will share his "View from Thimphu"

The AGM Agenda and Treasurer's Report for 2021 are enclosed.

Diary Date

Tuesday 17 May 2022 at 7.00 pm

Speaker: Tim Bodt

"Linguistic and Cultural links in the Eastern Himalaya"

Tim is a Dutchman currently pursuing British Academy-supported postdoctoral research at SOAS, University of London.

Tim has a long association with the Himalayan region, dating back to his adolescence. He previously worked in Tibet, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh and has travelled there extensively, as well as in Nepal. He maintains close contact with his adopted families and friends, and both these contacts and his research are greatly aided by his fluency in several languages of the Himalayan region, including Dzongkha, Tshangla, Tibetan and Nepali.

In this talk, Tim will discuss the history of the erstwhile Monyul region, now divided between Bhutan, Tibet, and the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. Despite formidable changes in the geopolitical situation since the mid-17th century, the people of the region continue to share both linguistic and cultural linkages.

Anthony Smith CBE



Anthony Smith, CBE, passed away in London on 28 November 2021. He was the President of Magdalen College, Oxford University, from 1988 to 2005, a period which included the time that His Majesty The King of Bhutan was studying there. Tony was a friend of Bhutan, and helped strengthen Bhutan's relations with the United Kingdom, personally mentoring many Bhutanese students who went to Oxford.

His Majesty The King offered prayers and Karmey Tongchey for him at the Simtokha Dzong on 7 December 2021. His Royal Highness Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck and other alumni of Oxford University, as well as those who knew Anthony Smith, joined the

ceremony to offer prayers and a thousand butter lamps were lit. The gathered assembly led by monks chanted the prayers for the departed, led by Letshog Lopen, one of the five top-ranked monks (and a truly visionary monk himself). Tony was a longstanding member of the Bhutan Society of the UK and friends with many of our members.

Susan Hitch, a friend and also a Society member, said, "Tony's engagement with Bhutan was deep and lasting. A week before he died, I held the phone to Tony's ear while His Majesty expressed his warm gratitude for his friendship, for his advice, example and support. It was one of the last things that Tony could hear. He was a man of straightforward loyalty and complex understanding: he saw the absolute value for Bhutan of ambitious opening up to an educated, energetic, modern, technologically enabled world - but with the absolute need to do it on Bhutan's terms, treasuring and depending on the deeply embedded virtues of its particular tradition."

SOCIETY REPORTS

Society Meeting

On 23 November 2021, the Society was delighted to welcome David Lascelles and Judi Alston via Zoom, to present their respective accounts of the building of a Stupa by Bhutanese monks in the grounds of Harewood House, David's ancestral home in Yorkshire.

The evening began with an exclusive screening of *The Making of an English Stupa*, a new short film by documentary maker Judi Alston. Most of the footage had been shot in 2004 but the film included recent additional material. With warmth and humour, Judi's camera followed the whole process, from David's first meeting with Lama Sonam Choephel, master builder of stupas, at his home in Bhutan, through the purchase of items in Thimphu market to go inside the Stupa, to the actual building work in Yorkshire and the unlikely friendships that developed across two very different cultures between the Yorkshire builders and the Bhutanese monks, none of whom had been on a plane. Incongruous though the location of Britain's only Stupa may seem, there is a story behind it. David's grandparents, the 6th Earl of Harewood and Princess Mary, sponsored plant-hunting expeditions in the Himalaya and the Stupa was

erected in the Himalayan garden. David has long been fascinated by the Himalaya. The film was followed by David reading extracts from his book *A Hare-Marked Moon* (published in 2021) with accompanying images, covering his travels in the Himalaya both before and after the building of the Stupa at Harewood. Via not just Bhutan but also Nepal, Ladakh, Northern India and Mount Kailash in Western Tibet, David investigates the history and meaning of Buddhist Stupas, those symbols of the enlightened mind of the Buddha that are so ubiquitous in the Buddhist Himalaya, before returning to Harewood to contemplate what effect having a Stupa there has had, both on its environment and the people who live or visit there.



The first chamber of the Harewood Stupa is filled

University Collaboration

The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) was established in 2003 and was based upon a network of colleges throughout the country. Shortly after, the RUB started a working relationship with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) in Scotland. Many research projects were initiated and a book has now been published which, in a collection of chapters written by the RUB staff, covers some of the action research projects that have emerged from that relationship. These successive joint initiatives in education have helped to continuously improve the learning and teaching opportunities for staff and students and are part of an ongoing initiative to embed research and action on educational activities at the RUB. Collaboration since the start of the pandemic has moved online but the UHI is currently mentoring several academic staff of the RUB for their applications to become internationally recognised as Fellows or Senior Fellows of the Higher Educational Academy. It is hoped that the benchmarking of professional skills which this will signify, is another step in the enhancement of the RUB as a developing university. The e-book is available price, £0.99, via:

<https://www.lulu.com/en/us/shop/frank-rennie-and-scott-connor-and-keith-smyth-and-carolin-radtke/bhutan-ways-of-learning-and-teaching/ebook/product-8wnd7d.html?page=1&pageSize=4>

GNH Business Certificate Awards

Three companies – Bank of Bhutan Ltd., Bhutan Power Corporation Ltd., and Bhutan Telecom Ltd. – were recently awarded the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Business Certificate. They are the first recipients of this award and are examples of three companies which have been doing their business in conformity with Gross National Happiness values.

A team from the Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies assessed the companies based on indicators within the nine domains of GNH such as psychological well-being, health, good governance and community vitality among others. The evaluation was conducted between 2019 and 2021. The Chief Research Officer of the Centre, Karma Wangdi, said, “GNH of Business is an idea of meeting the needs of stakeholders while conducting business operations with sensitivity towards social, cultural, economic, and environmental issues and relying on holistic well-being measures for its performance.” For a company, receiving the certification is expected to serve as an incentive as well as a powerful brand carrying the impact of GNH. BPC’s Chief Executive Officer, Sonam Tobjey, said, “The certification will encourage us further to strive and fulfill the company’s goals in line with the GNH ideals.” According to the Chief Research Officer, the Board of Directors for GNH Certification, which awards the certificates, is working on other incentives for a certified company. He said, “We are looking at preferential treatments while awarding contracts and tax benefits from the government’s side.” The Prime Minister, Dr Lotay Tshering, attended the award ceremony which also marked the formal launch of the certification system. Certification is valid for two years after which a company may apply for reassessment.

Reviving the Art of the Blacksmith

Wochu valley near Paro was once popular for its art of blacksmithing. Had it not been for the Royal Iron Craft Centre, the art would be lost. Today, it has encouraged many youths to take up the art of blacksmithing.



Working with fire and charcoal and forging metal was not considered a good profession in the past. But now, many are willing to take up the profession and are committed to changing perceptions around the art form. There are 21 staff, mostly youth, in the Royal Iron Craft Centre. Cheychey Dorji, Production Manager at the Centre said, “Blacksmiths are looked down on in the community and the youth wouldn’t come forward. Now the story is different after His Majesty was involved with the Centre. Now, as they are doing well in the community, many are following them.” The art of blacksmithing, known as Garzo in the country, is believed to have been introduced sometime in the late 14th century.

Safer Treatments by Local Healers

Alongside modern and traditional medicines, Bhutanese also turn to local healers for treatment. While such healers use skills inherent to them and indigenous to their locality, most of their treatments involve lacerating and sucking blood. However, such practices often raise questions on the safety and risks of transmission of contagious diseases and, to address such issues, an awareness campaign on safe treatment is underway in Mongar and Tashigang. According to the Chief Programme Officer, Dorji Tshering, “The programme, familiarises the healers with safe treatment practices. We also urge them to refer patients to the nearest health centres if they cannot treat them through traditional healing practices.” One healer, from Thangrong Gewog, said that he had been treating patients with headaches and stomach aches for many years by sucking blood. However, he now realised it was not safe and understood the risks associated with it and would familiarise himself about the use of disinfecting equipment before and after treatment.

According to the Nationwide Mapping and Documentation of Local Healers in Bhutan in 2019, more than 70 per cent of the healers, mostly in Eastern Bhutan, have not attended any health awareness programme. Dorji Tshering said, “This still poses an ongoing and huge vulnerability issue in the transmission of contagious diseases.” About 90 local healers and local leaders attended the first programme run in Lhuntse in October 2021 and this course is being replicated in other districts also. It is believed that there are more than 2000 local healers in the country today.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

A Month to Spare and Enjoy Trekking?

If you are such an intrepid traveller, and cautiously emerging from lockdown, then we are sure you will be excited to hear that The Trans Bhutan Trail is close to reopening. For the first time in 60 years, this historic pilgrimage trail, running the length of Bhutan from Haa in the West to Trashigang in the East, is set to re-open following years of extensive restoration.

The Trail is a path through Bhutan's history, with 400 historic and cultural sites identified along the route to date. The Trail's origins go back at least 500 years when it connected the Dzongs and served as the pilgrimage route for Buddhists in the East travelling to sacred sites in Western Bhutan and Tibet. It was also used by the Garps, the legendary runners, travelling with mail and vital messages at great speed across the country. The Trail played a major role in uniting numerous Himalayan kingdoms which ultimately led to the birth of Bhutan as a nation in 1907. However, once the construction of roads began across Bhutan in the 1960's, the Trail's stairways and footpaths gradually fell into disrepair.



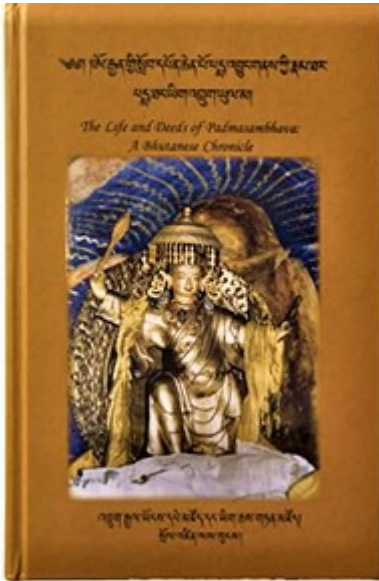
The now fully cleared Trail crosses through nine dzongkhags, 28 gewogs, two municipalities and one national park. It meanders through pristine forest, offering distant and spectacular views and will allow easier access to parts of the country seldom visited. The Trail will present a rich experience for bird watchers and botanists, photographers, rafters and runners, as well as for those looking for a spiritual, wellness, or religious experience. When re-opened, guided walking and biking routes will be available. These will be charged on a not-for-profit basis, with all proceeds going back into communities along the route. It is expected that regular trekkers will be able to walk the entire trail in just over a month. Half-day and full-day treks will be possible with three, four or seven-day section hikes expected to become popular options. Accommodation along the way will be offered in signature campsites, home stays, and hotels

The initiative in 2018 to restore the Trail, and to make it accessible, was undertaken by the Bhutan Canada Foundation in conjunction with His Majesty The King and the Tourism Council of Bhutan. More than 900 local workers restored the ancient route, which includes 18 major bridges, 10,000 stairs, and 250 miles of Trail. Opening ceremonies for the Trail to be held in Trongsa, will be hosted in March 2022 by His Majesty The King and, from April 2022, a limited number of permits will be issued to international travellers to hike the Trail, in whole or in part.

BOOKS AND FILM

Guru Rinpoche

The first ever biography of Guru Rinpoche written by Bhutanese authors was launched recently. The book highlights Guru Rinpoche's life and legacy and his contribution towards shaping social, cultural and spiritual identity of the Bhutanese people. The 700-page book is titled 'The Life and Deeds of Padmasambhava:



A Bhutanese chronicle.'

According to the authors of the book, of about two dozen biographies on Guru Rinpoche that exist today, not a single biography mentions his life and works in Bhutan in detail. To fill this gap, the four authors – the late Dasho Sangay Dorji, former

Secretary of Dzongkha Development Commission and Dzongkha Specialist, Gonpo Tshering, former Director of National Library and Archives of Bhutan, Kunzang Thinley, Chief Editor and writer and researcher, KMT Publications and Dr Karma Phuntsho, Director of Shejuen Oral Literature Project, Loden Foundation, came together to compile accounts of Guru Rinpoche's life and works in Bhutan. Dr Karma Phuntsho, the co-author of the book said, "When we look at Bhutan's religious and cultural heritage, Guru Rinpoche features as a very important central aspect of our culture and spirituality. Most of us know what Guru Rinpoche looks like by looking at his statue or Thangka or a Thongdrel." He added, "If we were to ask who Guru Rinpoche really was and what did he do in the Himalayas or where he come from, not many people would know the details. So, this book basically gives a story of who he is or who we believe he is and what he has left behind as the legacy for all of us." The authors began their research project in 2016 under the management of the National Library and Archives in the Department of Culture. The research project worth about Nu 9 M was funded by the Indian Government.

Bazam - Bridges in the Himalayas

Author: Prof. Manfred Gerner

In the Himalaya, a distinct type of wooden cantilever bridge was developed over many centuries. These bridges were adventurous, occasionally frightening, are picturesque and form part of the landscape with



their materials of wood and stone. For many centuries, they served to open up the Himalayan lands over deep gorges and raging rivers in the most difficult terrain. In high mountain areas, they are still the crossing and stopping points for caravan and trekking routes. As new bridge constructions become necessary for motor traffic, the unique wooden cantilever bridges of the Himalaya are rarely in use anymore. Only in Bhutan are they still traditionally built. The wooden cantilever bridges are economically and ecologically outstanding and are documented in detail by the author Prof. Manfred Gerner using numerous examples in Bhutan, Tibet, China and in Indian Himalayan valleys including Ladakh. He has travelled to the Himalaya well over a hundred times since 1971 and has walked, photographed and documented many bridges and finally researched the history of the bridges. He brings to life the architecture and construction of the wooden cantilever bridges as part of the cultural landscape of the Himalaya in texts, context and photos. The book with numerous colour illustrations comprises 148 pages, the texts are in German and English.

Price: EUR 28,00 plus postage and packing

ISBN 978-3-00-067706-9

FANTASTIC BEASTS 3

The trailer for the film 'Fantastic Beasts 3' has been released on YOUTUBE.COM, and you may notice some scenes set in Bhutan. In these CoVID days it was not possible for Warner Bros to send a crew out to Bhutan, so Ju-Nor Studio in Thimphu was given the job of shooting several hundred photos of Bhutan's scenery and architecture from which studio sets were constructed in the Warner Bros Leavesden Studios. You may also notice that a few Bhutanese students, who are currently in the UK, appear as 'extras' in the film, which will be released in April 2022. When tourism restarts, Ju-Nor Studio will be offering photographic-focused tours of Bhutan - the 'Magical Kingdom'.

TRAVELLERS TALES

From time to time we are able to share and enjoy tales of times spent by members in Bhutan. Below David Young recalls some of the memorable moments working as a flying instructor in Bhutan.

On the 19 March 1989 I sat on the jump seat of a BAe-146, registered in the Kingdom of Bhutan as A5-RGD, flying from Delhi to Paro overflying Lucknow and Kathmandu en route. I had been recruited to help fulfil a contract requirement to provide a training captain for the first two years of operation of the aircraft.

The next morning dawned bright and clear with an iridescent blue sky that is so characteristic of Bhutan in the winter and I was captivated by the beauty all around me. The sheer scale of the Himalayas was overpowering and never more so than when we were on the end of the very short – 1400 metre – runway and considering the limited options for action following an engine failure during the take-off. Pushing the throttles forward for that first take-off was definitely memorable. An hour or so spent practising this manoeuvre for both ends of the runway left me with respect

for the performance engineers but even more in awe of the mountains around Paro.

As well as the BAe-146, Paro was served by two Dornier 228's that were based in Calcutta and flew the Calcutta-Paro route when weather allowed. The Dorniers were unpressurised and therefore restricted theoretically to a maximum passenger carrying height of 10,000 feet. With a minimum safe height in cloud around Paro of 16,000 feet, I can well imagine the problems the Dornier pilots experienced. Shortly after my arrival in Bhutan one of the Dorniers landed wheels up at Calcutta and, a week later, the other went off the end of the runway at Paro ending that period in Bhutan aviation history. Fortunately, no one was injured in either accident.

The problem with the schedule in the early days was that we

were always trying to get back into Paro in the late afternoon by which time cumulus clouds had built up during the day and there was often full cloud cover, frequently accompanied by thunder storms. With no ground based navigation aids, we had to have a clear view of the airfield before descending below the minimum safety height. This, as I discovered within my first week, led frequently to diversions with many nights spent in Calcutta, Bagdogra and Dhaka. A few weeks later we had to divert to Dhaka in the worst weather I had ever experienced with the weather radar totally useless as it was solid red. The winds on the ground were such that we could not open the passenger doors for over an hour.

Shortly after we started operating the BAe 146 I had a visit from the Dantak engineer in charge of maintenance at Paro. He informed me that the airport would have to be closed for six months to carry out work to resurface and extend the runway. The Managing Director and I explained that this was not acceptable and eventually he accepted that they would lay strips down each edge of the runway during the day leaving just enough space for us to land between. Once we were back on the ground, or if we had been diverted, they would then fill in the centre strip. This worked well but took many months. The airfield was to undergo extension work for several years and each day the farmers living in the village would take their cattle across

the runway to graze on nearby fields. Cattle were not the only hazards as ponies and dogs frequently invaded the runway often leaving evidence of their passage. Gradually things improved. New Bhutanese pilots were recruited and trained and I am still proud of how they have developed into fine and very capable Captains. The photo above shows one crew with me in the early years. When I visit Bhutan now, after more than 30 years of association with their aviation scene, I am totally amazed at the transformation - two airlines operating Airbus aircraft to many more destinations, a grand new terminal building that is a credit to the country and a helicopter operation that offers private charters and emergency rescue services. But, most of all, despite the operating difficulties in and out of Paro, Druk Air and now Bhutan Airlines have developed into two of the most professional and safe airlines in the world.



UK Aid Programme Supports the Disabled

Tshewang Rinzin, a person with blindness, is planning to apply for a license to expand a printing shop he runs in Trashigang. He is not worried about the money. The 22 year-old opened the shop after he secured a microgrant last year to buy printing equipment for his shop. A free shop space from his relative helped him get started and now he wants to expand his business. The microgrant was part of a pilot project called “Understanding, Developing, and Supporting Meaningful Work and Adults with Disabilities in Bhutan: Networks, Communities, and Transition,” managed by the Royal Thimphu College, the University of Birmingham, and the University of Minnesota, and funded by the UK Government. The project started in 2019 for a duration of two years to study how these types of interventions could enhance social participation and employment opportunities if such facilities and support systems were made available for youth with disabilities. The grant of up to Nu 50,000 included capital for start-up, school fees, transportation costs, and related costs for youth with disabilities.

Grant coordinator, Sonam Tshewang, said that most grant recipients were thriving despite pandemic challenges. “Microgrants modelling provides evidence of how persons with disabilities (PwDs) can be supported through doable financial assistance.” He said that with microfinance PwDs were able to seek opportunities which has helped them become independent. The project supported 19 young people with disabilities to pursue further education, training, employment, and entrepreneurship goals. Modelling inclusive coordinators had helped the team understand how having such roles could help in building more inclusive societies. “It facilitated youth with disabilities in developing individualised planning, seeking customised employment, and mentoring entrepreneurship,” he said. The pilot project has also produced the first full-length documentary on PwDs in Bhutan, ‘Dreams of Birds Flying in the Sky’ directed by Arun Bhattarai which is currently being screened in various international festivals.

Bhutan Society Trust Fund

Following the successful Society meeting a few weeks ago, which focused on three charitable projects run by the Trust Fund, the Society, in collaboration with the Bhutan Society Trust Fund, is hoping to raise £2,500 for a shipment of 3000 new library books in Spring 2022.

These will be for READ Bhutan community libraries and also to link with Bhutan Echoes - Drukylul Literary Festival. Any donations from members who would like to support this project, however small the donation, will be hugely appreciated. Please contact rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com for details.

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NOTE

If you have not done so already, please send your e-mail address to rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com who will add it to the database.

There is no plan to go paperless, but it is often convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.

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