

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 78

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

AUTUMN 2022



Bhutan pays its respects

Bhutan observed a day of national mourning on 9 September 2022 to honour Her Majesty, the late Queen Elizabeth II. Their Majesties, The King and Queen of Bhutan, offered a thousand butter lamps at the city of Samtse.

Special prayers to offer light (called marme moenlam) were also performed during the ceremony attended by the royals, the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Government officials, and thousands of people from Samtse. According to the Royal Office for Media, "Thongdrol of Guru

Rinpoche and Zhabdrung were unfurled for the ceremony, to sanctify the important occasion."

In Thimphu, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, was joined by other members of Bhutan's Royal Family and Government to offer a thousand butter lamps and prayers, which took place at the Grand Kuenrey of Tashichhodzong. His Majesty The King also issued a Royal Command that special prayers be performed in all the important dzongs, temples and monasteries in Buddhist Bhutan. The Bhutanese flag was also flown at half-mast at the Royal Palace and a condolence message was also released stating: *"In an incredible reign of 70 years, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has inspired generations of people across the world. Through her tireless and selfless service to her people, Her Majesty will always be remembered for the wisdom, grace, dignity and strength she personified. The passing of Queen Elizabeth II marks the end of an era and we send our condolences to His Majesty The King, The Queen Consort, members of The Royal Family and the people of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth."* The King and Queen also attended the funeral service at Westminster Abbey on 19 September 2022.

DIARY DATE

Date: **Wednesday 25 January 2023 at 6.30 pm***

Place: **Spink, 67-69 Southampton Row, London WC1B 4ET**

Speakers: **Marcus Budgen and Robert Wilde-Evans**

Topic: **"The medallic history of Bhutan"**

Spink and Son Ltd was founded in London in 1666 and has since developed into the world's premier collectables auction house. It specialises in the auctioning and private sales of stamps, coins, banknotes, medals, bonds & shares, autographs, books, wine & spirits and lifestyle collectables. Spink has also designed and manufactured orders, medals and insignia for royal households, governments and armed forces around the world, including for the Kingdom of Bhutan. Our speakers, Marcus and Robert, are specialists in the Medals and Special Commissions Department. To add to the interest of the meeting, members are invited to bring with them any coin, medal or item relating to Bhutan as there will be opportunities for discussions with the Spink experts. We plan to record and share the presentation.

*Members are welcome to arrive from 6.00.

SOCIETY NEWS

Committee changes

Membership. After ten years' service on our Committee, **Rosie Glazebrook** is standing down as Membership Secretary. We are very pleased to announce that Marion Young will be taking over. Rosie has brought her considerable energy, efficiency and enthusiasm to the Bhutan Society. We are most grateful for her contribution to the wider success of the Society, particularly in developing communications and shifting to online activities and content during the pandemic and being a point of regular contact for our members. We are sure that we will stay in touch with the Glazebrooks and look forward to a time when one (or more) can be involved again with the Committee. Rosie will continue to serve as a Trustee of the Bhutan Society Trust Fund and very much hopes to travel to Bhutan soon, having last visited in 2019.

For those who don't yet know Marion, the following is a brief summary of her contact with Bhutan: In January 1989, **Marion Young** moved from teaching in London to take up a 2-year VSO assignment as District Resource Teacher in Paro. She met her future husband David, who was also based in Paro working as training captain for Druk Air. Members will recall a very interesting article in Issue 76 when David wrote about some of his more memorable moments working in Bhutan. Following some years as VSO Bhutan Country Director, Marion transitioned in 1999 into education consultancy work with UNICEF, Save the Children and The World Bank in Bhutan. She has continued to work as a senior education adviser for the Asian Development Bank and other international organisations, both in Bhutan and the South Asia region, until her recent retirement. In 2000, Marion completed the Snowman Trek which she ranks as one of the highlights of her life. Marion and David joined the Society in 1995 and they continue to keep in close contact with friends and colleagues in Bhutan. After a gap of several years, they hope to travel to Bhutan again in the near future.

Programme and Events. The Events Group has been looking for possible new members for a while – both to bring new ideas and to spread the load. We are very pleased to report that **Deborah Keith** has offered to join the team. She has been co-opted on to the Committee and we all look forward to her participation in discussions over the Society's future strategy and activities. By way of background, Deborah worked at Bondey Farm in Bhutan during the 1980's and set up the horticultural development programme – and learned Dzongkha along the way. She is a founder member of the Society and has maintained close contacts with Bhutan over the years. Her career has been in the science and technology sector, most recently in research and development with Syngenta, a global agri-business, which she left in 2014. Since then Deborah has built a portfolio of non-executive directorships. Links with the Society are even greater as she is married to Scott, our Secretary.

Website. Since re-joining the Committee to supervise and support technology as it is used by the Society, **Chris Watt** has been able to complete some planned changes to the website, including moving it to a new template with Squarespace. He will now manage the website content. See more information about new links on page 3. We would like to record our thanks to **Bodo Hornberger** who has provided immense support to the Society over the years, most recently in keeping the website running. He and Lucy continue as great friends of the Society and we look forward to seeing them at our events.

30th Anniversary Celebrations

Please join us to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of The Bhutan Society in the United Kingdom. We are delighted to confirm that we will be hosting a Reception in the Parliament Chamber of the Inner Temple in London on 18th November, 6:30 - 9pm. We expect many members of the Society, including Bhutanese nationals working in the UK, to attend and bring guests to celebrate this important occasion. All Bhutanese students in the UK are invited to attend and we expect many will travel to London to be with us.

The Parliament Chamber at the Inner Temple is a very fine room with plenty of space for easy mingling and socialising with friends old and new. We will be offering a glass of sparkling wine on arrival with red and white wines and soft drinks to follow. Supper will be served in bowls and will include a selection of delicious savoury and sweet dishes. There will be seating and tall tables for people to gather around.

We are delighted that we will be joined by the Ambassador of Bhutan to the European Union, His Excellency Mr Tshering Gyaltsen Penjor and his wife Mrs Tshering Chenzome. The President of the Society Sir Simon Bowes Lyon, and past President, Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, will attend and the Vice President of the Society, Michael Rutland OBE, plans to visit from Thimphu. We hope that many members will want to join us, and you are welcome to bring guests.

The Booking Form for tickets was circulated with the last issue of the Newsletter but is also available to download from the e-mail circulated in late September. Please return the completed Booking Form with payment to Elizabeth Jacobson as soon as possible or you can email Elizabeth at tookiej@btinternet.com. Tickets are £50 per person.

SOCIETY REPORTS

Meeting of the European Bhutan Friendship Associations

Even before the challenges of Covid the Hungary-Bhutan Friendship Association had begun planning a gathering in Budapest. Originally scheduled for autumn 2020, delegates were eventually able to gather together on 14 September 2022 for four days of meetings, informal interaction mixed with exploration of Budapest and rural Hungary. Representatives of the 14 Societies present were welcomed by Hungarian



Society president, Zoltan Valcsicsak, and by a representative of the Deputy Mayor of Budapest.

HE Mr Tshering Gyaltshen Penjor, Bhutan's ambassador to the EU, then led a discussion on significant issues. Top of the list was consideration of the new rules for tourism including the significant increase in the Sustainable Development Fee payable by international tourists and the introduction of a smaller fee for regional tourists. While these had been adopted by the Parliament in Bhutan, all the practical changes had yet to be fully worked through and much infrastructure still required improvement. Another

significant issue was the increasing number of young Bhutanese (including teachers) wishing either to study abroad or to seek employment and even settle abroad. Reports from the 14 individual Societies showed that all had maintained activity throughout the pandemic where possible, often relying on Zoom and other virtual options.

Discussions widened in the afternoon of the 14th with presentations on Value-based Business (Banking with Magnet Community Bank; the Boddhisatva Entrepreneur by Gerard Tardy; Buddhist Economics with Corvinus University) and Value-based Education (Dharma Gate Buddhist College; Values and Challenges with Dr Karma Phuntsho; REAL School, Budapest). These were followed by talks from a Bhutanese and a Hungarian archer, comparing the local competitions, equipment and techniques. All present expressed their great appreciation of the imagination, planning and hospitality of Zoltan and his colleagues from the Hungarian Society.

Website Links

Tourism in Bhutan

With the many changes to the rules governing tourism in Bhutan, the Tourism Council of Bhutan has compiled a very comprehensive Q+A Document that covers all aspects of visiting Bhutan from Visa and permit requirements, how the Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) works, to options on how to plan, pay and travel within Bhutan. This document can be found in the "News" section on our website:www.bhutansociety.org

Chidrel Tawaa

The third edition of Chidrel Tawaa, an annual publication from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has just been launched. The main theme this year is **"50 years of Bhutan's membership to the United Nations"**. This publication can be found in the "News" section on our website: www.bhutansociety.org

New Horizons?

The hopes and aspirations of most people are generally straightforward. They want to secure the future of their children by providing a good education, drive a reliable car, have sufficient savings in the bank, own a house before they retire, and live a stable, secure old age. But in Bhutan, many are not seeing those basic aspirations being fulfilled. Economic inequalities, the seemingly widening gap between rich and poor, unemployment crises, lack of opportunities, and above all, an evident lack of hope for individual prosperity and financial well being means that people are understandably looking for opportunities elsewhere.



Meeting of the Bhutanese Australian Association of South Australia 2022

The exodus, which started as a trickle around a decade ago, has now grown significantly, with Australia being a favourite destination. Firstly, for those wishing to continue their studies, the fees in Australia are cheaper than in Europe or the USA and it is also possible to work whilst studying - an option that is also available to other members of their immediate family. In addition, self-funded students are usually allowed to stay and work for the same number of years as their course after graduation. During this period there is also the opportunity to obtain a Permanent Resident (PR) status which, although not citizenship, does allow Bhutanese to live and work in Australia. The Australian Government regularly publishes a list identifying a

wide range of required skills and anyone who has those skills, can apply for a PR. The PR data is important for Bhutan as it answers an important question on whether Bhutanese going to Australia to study and work are likely to come back or to settle down there, and also the level of skilled people being lost. Data from the Department of Home Affairs of Australia shows that in July 2011, 10 PR permits were issued to Bhutanese citizens but by July 2021 the total had grown to 1,061.

The city of Perth is a favourite with around 10-12,000 Bhutanese having settled there, followed by Canberra with around 2,000. Perth is thought to offer cheaper college fees and living costs and new arrivals often rely on relatives and friends to help out initially. Alongside those going there to study, highly skilled personnel like doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers are also leaving because they see no economic incentive in pursuing these professions in Bhutan. The exodus is also evident in many young graduates, fresh out of universities, those who haven't even tried to do something and are already despondent. One of the unexpected consequences is that Bhutanese in Australia are also a significant economic force through sending back their maximum foreign remittance every year to the extent that the RMA monthly statistics Bulletin in 2020 showed a total of Nu 5,343 bn coming back into Bhutan. Associated with this is that Bhutanese in Australia have now become the main land buyers in Thimphu and Paro. Whilst it may look like a growing one-way traffic, many expect the trend may change in three to four years when visas begin to expire. The increased cost of housing, fewer job opportunities and concerns about a possible recession amongst Australians, makes it an even more considered decision to leave Bhutan. Many of those who have PR status would also like to return if they were able to continue doing business with the ease they have experienced in Australia.

Bhutan itself is also going through a period of transformation with an initiative envisioned by His Majesty which focuses on rebooting traditional conventions that are seen to be undermining the economy. Major reforms are underway to change how the civil service machinery functions to its optimum, and education methods are being made more relevant to both re-skill young people to enable them to meet the realities of the modern workplace, and Universities are revisiting curricula to ensure they are relevant to the world of work. Change can be difficult and challenging but in light of the growing trend, time is of the essence if a small country like Bhutan is not going to be left behind.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Transforming Tourism

Since September 1974, when Bhutan cautiously first opened its door to visitors, the approach was a unique “High value, low volume” policy. This required international visitors to pay at least a daily rate, most recently an increase in 2012 up to \$250, that covered accommodation, meals, a mandatory tour guide and it also included a daily \$65 (set in 1991) “Sustainable Development Fee” paid to the Government.

Bhutan’s Department of Tourism was set up under Royal Command in 1971 and was placed under the Ministry of Finance, with a mandate to plan, develop and promote the growth of tourism and also operate the tours. At the time, the Department’s biggest responsibility was managing the three state-owned hotels, namely the Olathang Hotel in Paro and the Mothithang Hotel in Thimphu, both of which were both built in 1974 for the coronation of the Fourth King. The third, the Kharbandi Hotel near Phuentsholing, was the main entry point into Bhutan until Paro Airport opened in 1983.

However when Bhutan reopened its borders following COVID restrictions in September 2022, visitors no longer needed to be on a package tour. A Tourism Levy Bill that was passed this summer has changed significantly the way visits to Bhutan are managed. The daily “Sustainable Development Fee” (SDF) which is still paid to the Government, has increased to \$200 and visitors must now pay separately for their accommodation, meals, tours and other travel expenses.

This Government reform is part of the 11 transformational exercises going on, with tourism now being a key area. It has arisen from a concern that the “High value low volume” policy has failed to generate high end services and facilities, with jobs that enable a good living and benefits that are widely shared. It is believed that over the years, long term gain has been sacrificed for short term benefits resulting in a move into mass and low end tourism. It is hoped that the reform will provide significant revenue for the Government not only to invest back into tourism by training guides, improving the quality of hotels, restaurants and food but also to invest in reforming social services such as education and health. Many tour operators have expressed anxiety over the change and are worried that the new structure will leave them without any business, especially now that tourists have the option of booking tour guides etc directly through hotels. They argue that the minimum package framework encouraged tourists by including all essential services. However with around 3,500 tour operators and 4,000 guides and an oversupply of hotels in the major centres, the margins for most were meagre.

Tourism revenue is a key contributor to Bhutan’s economy making up around 6% of the country’s gross domestic product. According to the Tourism Council of Bhutan, in 2019, nearly 320,000 tourists visited earning the tourism industry around \$225 million. However, figures show that although the number of arrivals between 2018 and 2019 jumped by 15%, gross earnings went up by only 3.67% .

The Prime Minister, Dr Lotay Tschering, said that alongside reform in tourism, investment in waste management infrastructure, the protection of Bhutan’s biological corridors, nature parks and its main cultural assets, would also be priorities.

The new rules cover requirements as much for those visiting as for those involved in servicing any part of the tourism industry. Whilst the finer details are yet to be confirmed, tour operators and hotels will likely need to be certified and registered as will vehicles for use by visitors. Every tour has to have a guide with a recognised level of competency either as a culture tour guide; culture and any area of specialisation tour guide; or tour leader. Tour guides may also specialise in a wide range of areas from cultural and spiritual to trekking, photography, fishing, kayaking/rafting and arts and crafts. For those planning to travel to Bhutan, the Tourism Council has developed an extensive “Visitors Q+A” document which can be found on the Society’s website with additional information on www.tourism.gov.bt. During the welcome ceremonies at the airport in September, Bhutan’s new brand “Bhutan -Believe” was also prominently displayed. The new logo calls on people to believe in the Bhutan story and it draws upon contemporary Bhutan, the youth, tradition, nature and cultural motifs and the complexity of what is on offer in Bhutan beyond GNH. “Bhutan – Believe” comes as a vital challenge at a time when Bhutanese society is also grappling with tensions and problems caused in many areas other than tourism.



The new “Bhutan - Believe” logo

NEWS UPDATES

Best of Both Worlds: Britain and Bhutan

By Dechen Lhamo Gyeltshen, University of Reading, class of 2022

I had the privilege of coming to the United Kingdom for my undergraduate degree in BSc Meteorology and Climate at the University of Reading. For someone who had not ventured further than South Asia, I did experience a (pleasant) cultural shock since everything was so much bigger and more advanced. What awed me most was the vast diversity of people in terms of race, religion, and expression. I did struggle with homesickness in the beginning but with time I made new friends and met some incredible members of the Bhutan Society. Their warm welcomes made me feel right at home. Thanks to the wonderful people I met, I got to learn about and indulge in many beautiful British cultures. I experienced my first Christmas, Guy Fawkes night, and Halloween during my stay and got to taste delectable Yorkshire puddings, scones, and my favourite, Cornish pasties! Additionally, being in England opened a lot of avenues in work and studies as well. I had the opportunity to work in customer service, library



management, and as a resource person for a climate statistics workshop.

All these wonderful experiences motivated me to diligently pursue my undergraduate degree. In my first and second years, I was fortunate enough to receive the University of Reading's Vice Chancellor's Award

for academic excellence. And to my pleasant surprise, I was awarded the Department of Meteorology Undergraduate Prize in my final year for being the cohort's top student. It was a great honour for me to accept these awards and bring them home. As of September 2022, I am sitting for the Royal Civil Service Commission examinations in Bhutan with the hope of serving my country with all my accumulated skills and experiences. I have nothing but immense gratitude and love for the United Kingdom and its people for being the best second home one could have.

Riverside Developments

As the old centenary Farmers Market in Thimphu undergoes its much-awaited renovations, the vendors of the first floor have now set up shop at the new Riverside Market, also known as Kaja Throm.



A line of stalls selling fresh seasonal fruits, vegetables and incense begins from the parking area of the old market and extends all the way to the VAST building. You can also see some stalls selling cereals, animal products and flowers. The covered pathway provides shelter for both vendors and shoppers alike and even the sides of the footpath have various art installations by VAST Bhutan. For visitors who manage to reach all the way to the end of the market by the VAST building, a small quaint café decorated by flowers of all types and colours awaits. The café named "Hidden Gayul Garden", offers a little getaway from the shopping crowd so that you can sip your coffee and enjoy a light snack in the middle of flower beds by the Wangchhu river. This area also has multiple art installations surrounding the café. A new walking path alongside the river has also been opened recently. The path, which is nearly 2 km long, loops between the Bazam (traditional footbridge) at the Farmer's Market and the concrete Dechen Zam and is so designed that walkers do not need to cross the road at any point. Along the way there are rest stops, view points, mini-gardens, and water filters for drinking water.

The Riverside Walk was developed by the Tashichhodzong Garden Project as part of an overall plan to develop green public spaces and gardens encircling the Thimphu Tashichhodzong. The Project has developed a Rhododendron garden at Zilukha, above the dzong, as well as lawns and gardens around the dzong. In addition, at the Riverside Market, the Project has also developed several other gardens, including a dinosaur park.

NEWS UPDATES

Playing safe

Archery is the national sport and, for many, it is a favourite pastime at weekends and holidays. However, with the consumption of alcohol as a cultural part of the game, mishaps do occur and increasingly the lack of stringent rules and carelessness make archery a potentially dangerous sport with over 10 serious archery related accidents being referred to the national hospital every year.

In and around Thimphu there are no less than 20 archery ranges, mostly near roads or houses and the news that the Bhutan Indigenous Games and Sports Association (BIGSA) is exploring places and ways to relocate the archery ranges and to disallow the mainly imported compound bow, has been



well received by local residents. Another initiative, welcomed by many archers, has been the use of digital technology to show the cheering and play during the game by setting up monitor screens at both ends. Ngawang Jigme Namgyal said. "I feel that this facility has made the sport very safe. We have the habit and culture of staying beside the target to cheer our friends especially when someone is drawing the bow from

the other side. With this new initiative, we can just stand behind the safety wall and watch our friends shoot while also knowing the direction of the arrow".

High altitude sickness cases rising

Bhutan has recorded an increase in the number of people suffering from high altitude sickness requiring airlifts this year. It has been attributed both to the increase of hikers and pilgrims and also those collecting cordyceps in the mountains. Whilst there are plans to train all the health assistants living close to the high altitude areas like Khoma, on the way to Singye Dzong in Lhuentse, Laya and Lingzhi on how to manage high altitude sickness cases, they have not yet been implemented due to financial constraints. Altitude sickness can affect anyone irrespective of age, gender and general health. Travel advice for avoiding high altitude sickness from the Health Ministry states that people should not travel to high altitude areas (2,500 metres and above) without practising for a few days and also should avoid climbing more than 600 metres a day, and to drink enough water. Smoking and alcohol should also be avoided while climbing in high-altitude areas and if one feels unwell and suspects high altitude sickness, resting is essential. If the symptoms persist, climbers should descend a 1,000 metres from where they have actually halted and then refrain from climbing higher for at least 24 to 48 hours.

Fertility rates falls again

According to a recent official Report, Bhutan has been experiencing a steep fertility decline in the recent past and it is expected to remain below replacement level in the foreseeable future. The fertility rate of Bhutan has fallen from 6.6 births per woman in 1971 to 1.8 births per woman in 2022. Replacement level fertility is defined as the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next and can be taken as requiring an average of 2.1 children per woman. The Report also indicates that there is a delay in giving birth as well as an increase in the age at marriage, both of which are often thought to be a reflection of a higher level of education and more career opportunities for women. Another reason given by working mothers for having no more than one or two children was the lack of family support to help raise their children.

A new look

The Clock Tower in the centre of Thimphu has been one of the city's major landmarks and the surrounding area has been used as an entertainment platform for music, art and campaigns for many years.

But visitors to the Square will notice a difference as nearly Nu 3 million has been spent so far on an extensive makeover. The Tower has been repainted, and the stone slabs and storm water drains are being replaced and the clogged drains have been cleared.



The damaged sitting galleries, including steps that run through, have been renovated and repainted in bright rainbow colours. The broken fountain pool has been removed as have the broken benches and Mani Dangrim. The Tower is also now much simpler in design although it has lost none of its aesthetic grandeur. Among the new additions are the electrical lights that exude a new aura at night.

Local shopkeepers have been keen to watch the renovations and many have been surprised by the extent of the work undertaken. However it will remain one of the main meeting places in Thimphu and a recognised landmark in such a fast-changing city.

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NOTE

*If you have not done so already, please send details of your current e-mail address to Marion Young at ***membership@bhutansociety.org*** 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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