

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 68

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SUMMER 2019

British High Commissioner visits Bhutan

The Honourable Sir Dominic Asquith, KCMG, British High Commissioner to India, visited Bhutan from 25th to 27th March. The High Commissioner had meetings with the Prime Minister of Bhutan, the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Education. The delegation also visited Draktsho School for Children with disabilities, the Royal Institute of Management and the Royal Thimphu College.

The High Commissioner and the British Honorary Consul hosted an evening Reception in Thimphu which was attended by the Foreign Minister, the Health Minister, the Agriculture Minister, the Chief Justice of Bhutan, the Chairman of the Royal Privy Council, members of the Diplomatic Corps and



Visiting Royal Thimphu College

International Organisations and other distinguished guests. During the Reception the High Commissioner launched the UK's Fleming Fund project in Bhutan. The UK Government has agreed to invest up to £2.8 million in Bhutan to accelerate the fight against drug-resistant 'superbugs,' through helping establish a comprehensive surveillance system for anti-microbial resistance (AMR) in both humans and animals.

It is known that infectious diseases are evolving to survive exposure to the medicines that would normally kill them, such as antibiotics, anti-malarials and antivirals and this phenomenon is known as Anti-microbial Resistance (AMR). These micro-organisms, often referred to

as 'superbugs' can result in treatment failure causing significant morbidity and mortality.

The Fleming Fund is a £265m investment by the UK Government, through the Department of Health and Social Care, which helps Low and Middle Income Countries to generate, share and use AMR data. The fund aims to improve laboratory capacity and diagnosis as well as data and surveillance of AMR through a 'One Health' approach in South and South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The first Fleming Fund Country Grant for Bhutan started in April 2019 and will work on strengthening laboratory network on AMR in both the human health and animal health sectors. This grant will run for a 6-month inception and design period and is then expected to be extended for a further 18 months.

In addition, seven Fellows from Bhutan have been included in the Fleming Fellowship Scheme and will be equipped with the capability and networks to solve problems through guidance and mentorship from experts from the Doherty Institute, University of Melbourne.

MEETING REPORTS

The 2nd Annual Film Evening

On 26th March, over fifty members of the Society and their guests met at the Polish Hearth Club in London to enjoy an excellent and interesting programme of Bhutanese films.

The two short animation films were delightful in their quality of drawings, their simplicity and relevance of subject in today's world. One was a tongue-in-cheek look at modern generation children who are advanced and always seem a step ahead when it comes to new technology.

The 'Memoirs of a Political Officer's Wife', an older film from the 1930's, was fascinating in showing Bhutan as it was some eighty years ago. For those of us who are fortunate to have been to Bhutan recently, the film gave an excellent impression of how things were in the country in those days and how much it has changed.

After the interval, and for many a very enjoyable supper at the Club Restaurant, an amusing short film on the Yeti was screened. This was followed by a documentary showing the different dreams of two generations within a small village where a teenager is chosen by his father as the next guardian for the family monastery. It illustrated the strong cultural and religious traditions of Bhutan still evident in many rural areas.

The programme was put together by Elizabeth Jacobson and we thank her for her insight into an industry in Bhutan which seems to have a promising future.

Highgrove visit

In early May, twenty-two Society members and guests enjoyed a fascinating tour of Highgrove, the private Gloucestershire gardens of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall.



Blessed with an excellent guide, although not with the brightest of weather, the group were led, after a video introduction from the Prince, through the cottage garden, kitchen garden, stumpery and others.

The woodland area, on the same acidic soil as neighbouring Westonbirt Arboretum, was full of glorious shades of colour. In the wild flower meadow camassias and buttercups were marking the shift from spring to summer. The level of thought and attention that has gone in to every area of Highgrove gardens and

the wider estate was very clear.

There may not have been a direct Bhutan connection, but the theme of royal concern for nature and the environment which recurred throughout the tour will however be a familiar one to members. Everyone agreed that the gardens either completely lived up to, or exceeded, expectations – even on a gloomy day. Several people commented that they would recommend the visit to friends and that it would be fascinating to return at other seasons. Many thanks indeed are due to Dorry Friesen

SOCIETY NEWS

Forthcoming Meeting

**Wednesday 9 October 2019
at the Royal Over-Seas League
Park Place, St James's Street
London SW1A 1LR**

**“Practical ideas for Bhutan to
demonstrate resilience in the
face of climate change”**

Time: 7.00 pm

Speaker: Professor Steven Newman

Professor Newman is a leading expert in climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive rural development. He is currently Visiting Professor in the School of Biology at Leeds University facilitating research and consultancy ventures linked to agroforestry, biodiversity, forestry, climate change and low carbon futures. He is an associate member of the UK Centre for Climate Change Policy and Economics under Lord Stern.

He has experience with renewable natural resource management in the Himalayan region. In 2009 he worked with the EU as it developed its relationship with Bhutan with Renewable Natural Resources and this work continues. He is currently working with Bhutan on climate-smart developments linked to renewable natural resources in the region. In his talk he will explore how policy can be improved, lessons can be learned, and citizens contribute in a way that leads to greater peace, harmony and belonging.

Bhutan in the Footsteps of George Sherriff

A fabulous exhibition of Sherriff's plant expedition trips to Bhutan in the 1930's and 1940's where he collected 5000 specimens, including many novelties, are on display at the Logan Studio at the Logan Botanical Garden. Logan is an outpost of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and is at Port Logan, near Stranrear. Entrance to the Studio is free with Garden admission and no booking is required. The Garden is open daily from 10.00 – 17.00 and the Exhibition finishes on Wednesday 31st July 2019

Meeting report

Following the formal business of the 2019 AGM of the Society, three Bhutanese students currently in the UK on one year post-graduate courses spoke of their courses, their dissertations and how these related to their work in Bhutan.



Left to right : Yedzin Tobgay, Kesang Tshokey and Dorji Lhamo

Ms Dorji Lhamo is a Chevening Scholar (sponsored by the UK Government) at the University of Sussex studying for an MA course in International Education and Development. She is a planning officer at the Royal University of Bhutan and is enjoying this opportunity to explore concepts of education policy and practices and spoke, inter alia, of the challenges which come with the development of private schools, school autonomy and the borrowing and using of international education policies in Bhutan. She also spoke about how education policy is a long term effort and the need for elected governments to share this perspective. Dorji is also looking at the Programme of International Assessment for Developing Countries (PISA D), in which Bhutan participated in 2018, and how it sits with the current challenges of education in Bhutan.

Ms Kesang Tshokey is also a Chevening Scholar. She is at Exeter University and her course is in Public Administration. In Bhutan she works in the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources. She has particular interest in opportunities for women in rural enterprises and for young people in commercial agriculture. This may involve linking those who have available land with others who wish to develop new farming practices. She would also like to explore how behavioural economics can be used to look at lowering unemployment in Bhutan.

Ms Yedzin Tobgay is studying Modern South Asian Studies at Cambridge University with a King's Scholarship linked with the Cambridge Trust. She spoke about her dissertation which compares the role of the monarchies of Bhutan and Nepal in the development of their countries and their moves to democracy. She highlighted how the kingdoms of Bhutan and Nepal were watched carefully by western powers in the early/ mid 1900s in the light of India's independence and the growth of the Chinese Communist Party in China.

Minutes of the AGM are enclosed with this issue

Paralympics Day

The first ever Paralympics Day to celebrate sports for people with disabilities was held in Thimphu in April. More than 300 participants took part playing unique sports from sitting volleyball for wheelchair users to football for visually impaired people.

Bhutan Paralympics Committee organised the event to promote and advocate the Paralympics movement in the country. The Committee says it intended to make sports fully accessible to people living with impairments. Sonam Karma Tshering, the Interim Secretary General of Bhutan Paralympics Committee, said, "We also want to get the community, the government, the federations and all the able-bodied children to play sports in an integrated manner and to help eliminate social stigma towards people with disabilities". As part of the event, Her Royal Highness Princess Euphelma Choden Wangchuck also awarded recognition certificates to the medal winners of the Special Olympics held in Abu Dhabi earlier this year.

Ludrong Memorial Garden

Since this Garden, in the middle of Thimphu, was inaugurated by His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo four years ago, it has matured into a lush green nature park that offers a wonderful oasis



in the middle of a busy growing city. During its development, this eight acre Garden was enriched with 560 varieties of trees, 362 scrub species, 385 bush species, 1,724 flower species and 75 fruit bearing trees. Whilst mostly dominated by oak and pine trees, as well as the flowers of the azalea species, some of the *sisi-shing* or local oak species (*Quercus grifithii*) planted were from the seeds of the *sisi-shing* planted by the first King Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck at Ugyen Pelri Palace in Paro. The area is also home to at least 15 common bird species, as well as 30 seasonal birds, including the ibis bill and black-tailed crane.

In addition to the plants, the three ponds were filled with brown trout,

snow trout and carp fish species that were originally brought from Kashmir by Gongzim Sonam Tobgye Dorji. The Garden is surrounded by the five historical sites – the Lingkana or Royal Garden Palace, Tashichhodzong, Parliament House, the historical cantilever bridge and the Supreme Court. In addition, one pond reflects the image of the Tashichhodzong in the distance.

With its ponds and varied species of plants, the spiritual sounds resounding from Tashichhodzong, along with the wind fluttering through the prayer flags, the Garden provides the perfect opportunity for all visitors to enjoy some of Bhutan's unique natural and spiritual beauty. It is open during the summer (March to October) from dawn to dusk (7am – 7pm) and during the winter (November to February) until 4pm. The Garden is closed every Monday.

It is well worth a visit if you are in Thimphu and it's also worth knowing that just beside and overlooking the Garden, is an excellent Russian cafe most conveniently placed for refreshments afterwards!

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

The Shaking Table



Being in a seismic zone, Bhutan is prone to earthquakes. To build more earthquake resilient structures in the country, the Department of Culture is introducing a 'Shaking Table' facility.

First of its kind in the country, this facility will help understand the characteristics and performance of buildings in the country. As the name suggests, the Shaking Table is an experimental technique used to test the response of structures to verify their seismic performance. The Table is connected to a computer that has a database of the recorded

motions from past earthquakes and can simulate a real earthquake scenario on about just any structure.

"Through the facility, we will try to see what the inherent weak points are and, based on that, we are going to retrofit the whole structure. What is more important is that we will be able to understand the behaviour of the structure. With that data, we could come up with some scientific codes which would be incorporated into building rules and regulations," said the Department of Culture. The facility was built at a cost of USD 0.7 M. The installation of a Shaking Table is part of a five-year project at the Department of Culture funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Radio station keeps local community informed

In a remote part of Pemagatshel in south east Bhutan, community radio still plays an important part in everyday life. It has become a powerful medium in connecting small villages especially as a channel for education, a platform for sharing information and promoting public debate and, most importantly, helping to promote the national language.

Locals say they are hooked on the programmes that include old traditional songs, local beliefs and customs and traditions. Villagers hardly get to listen to them elsewhere, so a community radio that keeps folklore alive is welcomed. Although recent developments in this remote community, with such a harsh geographical terrain and scattered population, have resulted in basic amenities like roads now connecting almost every village to the Dzongkhag headquarters in Pemagatchel, the community radio in remote villages, such as Khotakpa, continues to help local leaders disseminate information to the villagers about forthcoming meetings quickly and effectively. One villager said the radio also aired important agriculture and health-related information and provided an opportunity for people to discuss both social and local issues. It also plays a big role in emergency communication and disaster relief.

The first community radio in the area was established in 2016 and stationed at the library and READ Resource Centre with funding from the Swiss Development Cooperation in partnership with the Ministry of Information and Communications. It can be accessed in nine neighbouring villages and by more than 500 households. Radio Jockey (RJ) Ugyen Wangchuk plays the recorded indigenous famous songs followed by old sayings in the morning programme and interested listeners can also dedicate their own messages and songs.

However with modernization and change, even in remote areas such as Pemagatshel, almost 90% of the people use smartphones to tune into FM and music so the number of radio sets has decreased significantly and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) now also provides coverage in most villages. Sustainability is one of the biggest challenges confronting the community radio station in Pemagatshel. With lack of funds, the sustainable functioning of the radio station and also the quality of programmes are affected. "It is difficult to make good programmes since we hardly get any funds," said the RJ. So there are plans to start charging minimal fees for announcement services to help fund their station and keep this community service going.

NEWS AND EVENTS

Traveller's Tales

Talakha Goempa is a very special place that we have visited twice on our travels in Bhutan. This monastery was founded in the 16th century and is located above Thimphu at an altitude of 3080m. Even by car from Thimphu, it takes over an hour to reach Talakha and the farm road is steep, rough and bumpy. Fortunately we did not spot any bears on our journey as they are often seen on this road at night.

The journey was well worth it as, once there, the views of Thimphu and beyond are spectacular. All temples, landmarks and even Jhomolhari at 7314m are visible.

Even inside, Talakha holds special significance, housing many sacred relics including Tibetan Buddhist "Kanjur" (Translation of The Word) with 108 volumes of 500 pages each, printed on hand-made paper made from the Daphne plant.



Since 2013, Lama Choeten has been responsible for the welfare of Talakha's thirty monks who live at the Monastery. They arrive as young as six years old and many are from humble backgrounds and need clothes, blankets and even footwear upon joining the Monastery.

Although the monastic body provides funding for half of the monks, the Lama needs to fund the remainder from donations. His own day begins at 4am with prayers, admin and teaching monks. Since arriving at Talaka, the Lama has been responsible for renovating five buildings and also in 2018, constructing – with private funds - a meditation hut which is open for all visitors to use.

Having developed a friendship with Lama Choeten, we communicate regularly and have been happy to post reading glasses and provide funding for blankets and warm clothing for the bitterly cold winters. With further funding, the Lama plans to fence the compound to ensure it's safe and free from yaks, cows, and other wild animals as well as continuing to feed and clothe his monks.

EDITORS NOTE: Thanks to our member Dee Cano for this story. Please do share more of your travel tales with us, especially about visiting the more remote areas of Bhutan.

Prime Minister visits India



Dr Lotay Tshering, Prime Minister of Bhutan, arrives in Delhi to attend the swearing in of Prime Minister Modi

Airport bus

A shuttle bus now operates between Thimphu and Paro International Airport. With the launch of three shuttle buses, passengers at the Airport can now avail themselves of comfortable bus rides to and from Thimphu.

Unlike any other public transport buses in the country, this bus is equipped with free WIFI service and air conditioning. Passengers are also able to enjoy other facilities like mobile charging ports and comfortable reclining seats. The buses operate every day and the service is linked to the flight schedules.

Through this new development, there is also an opportunity to reduce the number of cars which have previously created traffic congestion at the Airport. The Director-General of the Road Safety and Transport Authority (RSTA), Pemba Wangchuk, said it was a good initiative. "This is something that we have been looking for and we hope both visitors and local travellers will make good use of it." The shuttle bus service costs Nu 200 per person per journey. The bus has a carrying capacity of 32 passengers and is stationed at Changlimethang in Thimphu.

Annual Dinner 2019

The Annual Dinner will be held on Wednesday 30th October 2019 at

**Ognisko Polskie (Hearth Club)Ltd,
55 Princes Gate, South Kensington
London SW7 2PN**

A booking form is enclosed

REPORTS AND UPDATES

Recent Projects of the Wall Painting Department at the Courtauld Institute of Art

Members able to reach the Polish Hearth Club in London on 4th February enjoyed a special insight into the work of the Courtauld's Wall Painting Department. Ms Sibylla Tringham – who currently leads the Department, following Professor David Park's retirement in 2018 – and Mr Karma Yeshey – in his third and final year of an MA in Conservation of Wall painting – spoke about the approach to conservation, some significant field projects and also Karma's current research.



The Courtauld Institute places great emphasis on careful and detailed examination of any wall painting before any intervention is made. Understanding the materials involved and their chemistry, the physical stability of any structure and the nature of any previous interventions is fundamental to the planning of any ongoing conservation work. This research may take time but cannot be avoided. Sometimes the team will have to cope with (or even remove) earlier mistaken interventions, for example a coating over a painting which has then altered the aesthetics of the painting as well as prevented the natural movement of air and moisture.

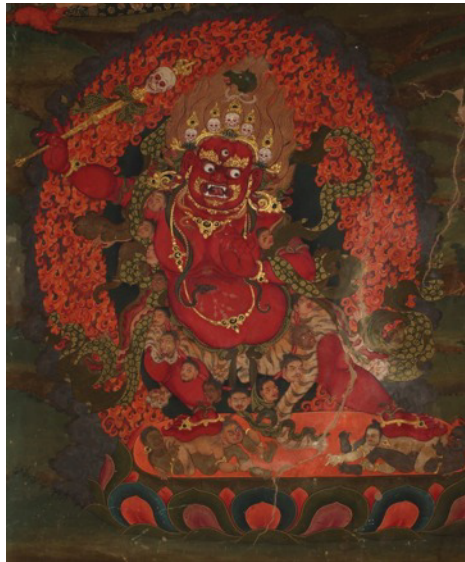
However The Institute normally aims at minimal intervention which leaves original components in place (even if colours may have dimmed); it undertakes stabilization interventions mainly, reducing their visual impact and bonding loose flakes back to the wall with adhesives which are both effective and unlikely to affect the painting.

The illustration shows a damaged painting (above) which had been worked on by others but was cleaned and stabilised by the Courtauld, minimising the effect of the crack (below).

(Image: Conservation of Wall Paintings, Courtauld Institute of Art).

Illustrations were drawn from a project conserving rare and high-quality paintings in the Utse of Tango monastery near Thimphu and from conservation work in Nagaur Fort, Rajasthan. The Courtauld is now starting a project for English Heritage, working on wall paintings at Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough.

Karma spoke of his field work at these sites and of his research into the risks of fire – along with their mitigation – in the hakhangs, monasteries and dzongs of Bhutan; research which should have practical application when he returns to Bhutan.



Limits on work permits for expatriate workers

The five categories affected are carpenters in furniture units, architects, civil and electrical engineers, construction supervisors and Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) managers or staff. The aim is to facilitate employment opportunities and skills development of the Bhutanese workforce and to reduce dependency on foreign workers.

A study by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources (MoLHR) revealed that even after two decades, the purpose of facilitating foreign workers to help train Bhutanese had failed to serve as intended. A spokesperson said, "It is the Government's policy to give our youth and our labour force an opportunity. So far 28 job categories have been listed in the closed occupation list. There are enough local skilled people in these job categories in the country but, if we continue giving permits to foreign workers, then I don't know how long we will keep depending on them". As of September 2018, there were nearly 53,000 foreign workers in Bhutan.

Lack of quality jobs despite heavy investment in education, says World Bank

Despite heavy investment in education, available jobs remains vacant and educated youth remain unemployed.

According to the World Bank's recent working paper, Bhutan Development Report, Government spending on education showed that although it is greater than neighbouring countries, the unemployment rate for educated youth (with bachelor's degree) stood at 67 percent in 2016. Bhutan's public sector provides about 20 percent of the total jobs packaged with better monetary and non-monetary benefits than the private sector.

The report suggests that while hydropower will remain dominant in the foreseeable future, it only employs only 0.8 percent of the labour force, so Bhutan's demographic transition will require more concerted efforts to develop the private sector. At the same time, the share of the working-age population is projected to increase from 65 percent in 2010 to 71 percent in 2025. In other words, about 8,000 people will enter the labour market every year, and most of them will be better educated than the previous generation. "Therefore, it will be important to create good quality jobs for the working-age population to ensure sustainable and inclusive development in the future," the Report states.

The structure of employment remains overwhelmingly agrarian, accounting for 70 percent of the jobs in the private sector. This, according to the World Bank, reflected lack of job opportunities for the youth. The Report also states that in the last two decades, Bhutan has achieved noteworthy improvements in health, but critical challenges remain.

As the country develops, significant changes in lifestyle are occurring, leading to the emergence of new health challenges. Non-communicable diseases (NCD's) are increasing and account for more than 70 percent of the reported disease burden. "This poses a significant risk to people's health in their productive years. Mental health problems including alcoholism and suicides are on the rise, owing to socio-cultural changes, growing urbanisation, migration and unemployment," the Report stated.

According to the Report, Bhutan's average years of schooling are lower than what would be expected for its income level and, as of 2016, 63 percent of Bhutan's labour force lack formal education and only 5 percent complete some form of tertiary education.

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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.

Published by The Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom