

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 53

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SUMMER 2014

Minister of State visits Bhutan

The Right Honourable Hugo Swire, MP, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, arrived at Paro Airport on Monday, June 4, on the first ever visit to Bhutan by a British Government Minister.

Surprisingly, in the long history of British connections with Bhutan, beginning in June 1774 with the visit of Mr. George Bogle, this was to be the highest level official visit from a United Kingdom Government ever to take place, and was therefore something of an historic occasion, as well as a recognition of the important role played by Bhutan in the South Asia region. The Minister of State was accompanied by Sir James Bevan, KCMG, British High Commissioner to India, and his Assistant Private Secretary, Mr. James Perry. After refreshments on arrival, the Minister and party were driven to the Paro Bridge. After a brisk walk up to Paro Dzong, the Minister was formally welcomed by the Paro Dzongda, and received 'Suja Desi' (ceremonial rice and butter tea) in the Dzong.

During the remainder of his two day visit, several other significant meetings followed. The Minister met the Prime Minister of Bhutan and afterwards was received in Audience by TM The King and Queen. This took place in the gardens of Linkana Palace, just below Tashichodzong. The location of the Audience was chosen by the King acknowledging the Minister's interest in gardens, and because over



Hugo Swire, MP, during an interview at the Taj Hotel Thimphu

the last five years the King has worked hard on Linkana gardens to recreate an 'Oxford English' atmosphere. The Minister also hosted a Reception in Thimphu to launch the Bhutan United Kingdom Alumni Association, in the presence of HRH Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck. Prince Jigyel himself is an alumnus of St. Peter's College Oxford, and is the Royal Patron of the Alumni Association. The Ministers of Education and Foreign Affairs were present at the Reception, along with some sixty UK Alumni. The Minister and party left for Delhi early on Wednesday June 6, after what was seen in Bhutan as a most successful and historic visit during which substantive discussions took place on strengthening Bhutan United Kingdom links.

AUTUMN DIARY DATES

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

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will take place at The Travellers Club, 106 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EP on Tuesday 7 October 2014 at 6.00 pm

The AGM will be followed at 7.00 pm by a talk from our Chairman, Michael Rutland, on "Recent developments in Bhutan".

*Reception drinks from 5.30 pm
Usual dress code applies*

Further information is enclosed

Annual Dinner

This will be held at The Charterhouse, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6AN on Friday, 19 September 2014

***Further information about this important venue and occasion is on page 2.
Dinner booking form is enclosed***

SOCIETY NEWS

ANNUAL DINNER AT THE CHARTERHOUSE

This year we have the special opportunity to visit and dine at The Charterhouse on the edge of the City of London. It is a wonderful privilege to see around and enjoy the hospitality of The Great Hall of this old but little known gem.



History

A Carthusian monastery was founded on the site in 1371 and, after its dissolution, Lord North built a fine Tudor house. This was bought, in 1611, by Thomas Sutton who amassed a fortune by trade in ordnance, coal and property as well as by money lending. Sutton established a foundation for the education of boys and the care of elderly men – the Brothers. The buildings, known as Sutton's Hospital in Charterhouse, sit in several acres of grounds close to Smithfield Market and the Barbican and the public has, traditionally, had little access. The eponymous school was on the site until its move to Godalming in 1872. For a time up to 1933, Merchant Taylors School used part of the site. Sutton's Hospital, a charity, continues as an almshouse for 40 Brothers.

Tours

Those wishing to see more of this wonderful building should arrive at Charterhouse by 6.00 pm to join the 6.15pm tour. This will include visits to the courtyards, the Chapel and The Great Chamber. Pre-dinner reception drinks – from 6.45pm - will follow.

Directions

Barbican tube station is a few minutes away. Turn left out of the station and then first left into Carthusian Street leading to Charterhouse Square. Turn right around the square, passing Florin Court ('Hercule Poirot's apartment building'), to the door to The Charterhouse. This door is by large black gates and a red post box with the Malmaison Hotel beyond. There is a Euro-carpark in Charterhouse Square.

Please do not miss this treat – an application form for places is enclosed with the Newsletter.

Opportunity taken!

Many of you read with interest in the last issue that Tharpoling Monastery had a vacancy for a volunteer to teach English to the monks and the young Rinpoche. The advertisement caught the attention of Mark Wainright in Cambridge and after correspondence with the leader of the monastery, he is now en-route via Kathmandu and Thimphu. We wish him great success with this appointment and look forward to his progress reports in future issues on teaching English and of daily life at about 11,000 feet.

Committee changes

Earlier in the year Lucy Hornberger asked if she could step down as Treasurer as she could see that family and business commitments in the near future would prevent her from doing all she would like to assist the Society. Many will know that Lucy and her husband Bodo have been tremendous supporters of the Society – she edited the Newsletter for many years up to 2009 and he designed and maintained the Society's computerised records. So I offer my and all members' thanks to Lucy for her work as Treasurer, delighted to know that she and Bodo will remain members and will participate in our activities whenever they can.

We are most fortunate that David Glazebrook, husband of Rosie our super-efficient Membership Secretary, has kindly volunteered to take over as Treasurer and the handover has been completed smoothly.

We also welcome Mark Swinbank and Elizabeth Jacobson to the Committee. Both have been members for some years, are regular visitors to Bhutan and frequently attend Society events. Mark will take over Andrew Sutton's responsibilities as Dinner Secretary – looking over Andrew's shoulder this year and then organising the 2015 dinner himself. Elizabeth will help Dorry Friesen with our programme in the organisation of evening meetings and occasional events.

I am very pleased to see the affairs of the Society in the hands of such a competent Committee.

**Michael Rutland
Chairman**

SOCIETY REPORTS

The experience of three Bhutanese studying in the UK

On 25 February, at an evening meeting of the Society at the Polish Hearth Club in London, members and guests enjoyed presentations from three Bhutanese who are currently pursuing post-graduate studies in the UK. Each spoke and answered questions about their courses and their relevance to life back home.

Sonam Peden told how her studies and experience in the UK will help the College of Science and Technology of the Royal University of Bhutan. The College was founded in 2001 and offers four undergraduate degree programmes to some eight hundred students. Sonam's City University MSc in Telecommunications and Networks will allow her to tell her students of the relevance to them of many aspects of current technology – for example, mobile communication standards in 3G and 4G, cloud computing and security.

Dorji Tashi, a business student at the University of Lincoln, spoke on entrepreneurship and society in Bhutan highlighting how his educational training in the UK would benefit his organization and Civil Society in Bhutan. He said that, while social service was embedded deep into the Bhutanese values, the formal concept of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) is barely three years old in Bhutan. He then told of his fascinating work with the Loden Foundation with a special emphasis on its youth entrepreneurship

programme and how he wishes this to be even more innovative and creative. To date Loden has supported 63 entrepreneurial projects across 16 districts of Bhutan; two Loden entrepreneurs received global awards, in 2010 and 2013, from the Global Entrepreneurship Competition organized by Prince Charles' Youth Business International based in the UK.

Wangchuk Rinzin told of the establishment of the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC), by the Fourth King, in 1986 and of his work as a chief language development officer. The DDC's mission is to encourage and enhance the use of the Dzongkha language and its work to standardise the language and to advance its functionality to meet the growing demands of the modern world. Inter alia the DDC has seen the development of use of Dzongkha on computers and has published resource material including dictionaries. The DDC also acknowledges a responsibility to preserve the various indigenous languages of Bhutan. Wangchuk said that his work towards a PhD in linguistics at Essex University will develop his knowledge, training and wisdom in ways which will definitely help the work of the DDC office, the Royal Government of Bhutan, the nation, and the public at large.

It was a most interesting evening and the Society hopes this will become an annual event.

Society visit to the Chelsea Physic Garden



Dorry Friesen kindly arranged a most enjoyable visit by Society members and friends to the Chelsea Physic Garden on 15 May. Not only did she organise an excellent lunch in the Tangerine Dream café but ensured that the weather was perfect.

A party of sixteen gathered at noon and was then taken around the garden by Guide Charlotte and then Record Keeper Tom before a break for lunch and further exploring and investigation during the afternoon.

The Garden was established in 1673 by the Society of Apothecaries – in four acres with easy access to river transport to the City – who needed more space for growing and researching medicinal plants. Some beds are maintained today with species which were used in those early days; in the

middle of the garden is a rockery, completed in 1773, made with Icelandic lava blocks used as ballast by Joseph Banks on one of his voyages! The principal medicinal 'quarter' has recently been laid out afresh, carefully segregating plants with scientifically proven efficacy from those beds with specimens with only a reputation for healing. We learned of the contributions made by Sir Hans Sloane and Philip Miller (Gardener, 1691 -1771), the espionage conducted by Robert Fortune researching the secrets of tea cultivation in China and the adoption of Carl von Linne's (Linnaeus') classification system. Knowing that Bhutan grows and uses medicinal plants, the party kept eyes open for any attributed to the Royal Kingdom. Your reporter found an *Allium Hookeri* (and what better lineage could one have?) amongst the Monocotyledon beds. The garden is a delight and well worth a visit.

Andrew Sutton

NEWS FROM THE

India will not let Bhutan down, assures Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

It was a historic moment when the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the National Assembly on June 16. The newly-elected Indian PM said he had personally chosen Bhutan as the first country to be visited after assuming office and irrespective of the change in the government in India, the relationship between Bhutan and India would remain the same.

"Bhutan and India share a very special relationship that has stood the test of time. Thus, Bhutan was a natural choice for my first visit abroad," PM Modi said. During his 45-minutes speech, Narendra Modi praised Bhutan's developmental policy of Gross National Happiness and expressed his admiration for Bhutan's role in combating global warming for the benefit of the entire world.



As Modi finished his extempore speech, delivered in Hindi, which the members of parliament including the Bhutanese PM Tshering Tobgay and other important dignitaries listened to in rapt attention with the help of interpreters, the gathering broke into spontaneous applause.

People of Bhutan do not clap as a congratulatory gesture as they believe that clapping is done only to ward off evil spirits. But on Monday they made an exception for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Some key points of PM Modi's visit

1. India and Bhutan reiterated their commitment to achieving the 10,000 MW target in hydropower cooperation and not to allow their territories to be used for interests "inimical" to each other.
2. Modi inaugurated one of India's assistance projects - the building of the Supreme Court of Bhutan and laid the foundation stone of the 600MW Kholongchu Hydro-electric project, a joint venture between India and Bhutan.
3. India also announced a number of measures and concessions including the exemption of Bhutan from any ban on the export of milk powder, wheat, edible oil, pulses and non-basmati rice.
4. The two sides recalled the free trade arrangement between them and the expanding bilateral trade and its importance in further cementing their friendship.
5. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also mooted the idea of an annual hill sports festival with India's North-eastern states along with Bhutan and Nepal.
6. Modi announced the doubling of scholarships being provided to Bhutanese students in India which will now be worth Rs 2 crore.
7. India will also assist Bhutan to set up a digital library which will provide access to Bhutanese youth to two million books and periodicals.
8. Both India-Bhutan reaffirmed their commitment to extensive development cooperation and discussed ways to further enhance economic ties.
9. Modi described Bhutan as a natural choice for his first visit abroad as the two countries shared a "special relationship".
10. The fact that the Prime Minister chose Bhutan as his first foreign destination assumes significance since China has lately intensified efforts to woo it and establish fully fledged diplomatic ties with Thimphu.

Prisoners join Dzong reconstruction team

In the middle of June the first group batch of prisoners started work on the reconstruction of Wangduephondrang Dzong. Fifty two prisoners were selected from among those who had completed over 50 percent of their prison term. They work from 9am to 5pm, have an hour long lunch break and earn Nu 165 a day. They work alongside the other 180 workers dismantling structures and the collection of stone. Labour camps with a capacity to accommodate 60 families, forest offices, and carpentry and sawmill sheds had been set up at Samthang and a camp for prisoners at Dangchu Phakha. Work on dismantling the Dzong's inner structure began in February with much of the material collected for reuse. Reconstruction work began after a sachu bumter (ceremonial vase) installation ceremony, which was held on June 17. To date the project has spent about Nu 25M on timber and other materials for setting up infrastructures. Reconstruction work is expected to be completed in 2018.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Ropeway to the Rescue

In one of the villages under Samtse Dzongkhag, technology is changing the lives of the community. Villagers who have lived their entire life carrying goods on their backs now have a 980 metre goods-ropeway. It was a gift from the Tarayana Foundation and Her Majesty the Queen Mother, Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck- also the patron of Tarayana Foundation - who inaugurated the ropeway during her recent



visit. The Thikha-Changju Gravity Goods Ropeway will benefit more than 400 people in the area and the Nu.3 million it cost to construct was funded by the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme. The ropeway can carry 25 kilograms upward and has a capacity to carry 130 kilograms downward. Since roads were not feasible, the Tarayana Foundation came up with the idea of a ropeway which was not only technically cheaper and faster, but also environmentally friendly. Villagers could see that it saved both time and money.

One said that a kilogram load would now cost them only Nu.1 whereas they used to pay Nu.5. "It was also difficult for elderly people. Now all we have to do is load the goods on at one end and then collect them at the other." Two caretakers have been employed to operate the ropeway.

Don't chew the plates!

Bio-degradable plates and cups made from dry sheaths of betel nut trees are now available in Thimphu market. This new venture was started by Chhuzanggang Agricultural Farmers' Cooperative and SNV. These products could replace the ubiquitous paper plates and plastic cups and be an answer to the ever-increasing waste problem in Bhutan.



The plates are made from cleaned and dried sheaths of betel nut trees which are pressed into moulds of various sizes and designs. The three machines currently in operation can produce about 600 plates a day. The SNV's Representative said that while this is a promising venture, maintaining quality, reliability and price would be important if they were to expand the market. The project is also expected to benefit Sherzong, Umling and Taraythang, which have large areas of betel nut plantation.

Putting on the brakes?

It was only in the last issue that we included the dramatic news that Bhutan was planning to replace conventional cars with electric ones. There is a new twist to the story with the central bank now directing banks not to sanction loans to buy electric or utility cars.

This comes as a slap to the Government's policy of switching to electric cars. The Government was promoting the use of electric cars and had plans to replace the entire pool of vehicles with electric cars. There is also a plan to replace taxis in Thimphu with electric cars as the Government is gearing towards reducing the dependence on fossil fuel. State support in the form of subsidies were also announced.

The central bank, RMA must prioritise correcting the imbalances in trade deficit. However if the country has a huge deficit in current account owing to imports, the electric car project, if successful, is estimated to save 4M litres of fuel a year, or Nu 3.5B over the life of the vehicles, and a multiplier effect of 70 percent fossil fuel reduction within 10 years.

It would appear that the objectives of both the central bank and the Government, to a large extent are the same when it comes to impact on the economy. Maybe better communication and planning between the Government and the central bank might have helped matters?

NEWS AND UPDATES

Going back to the Fields

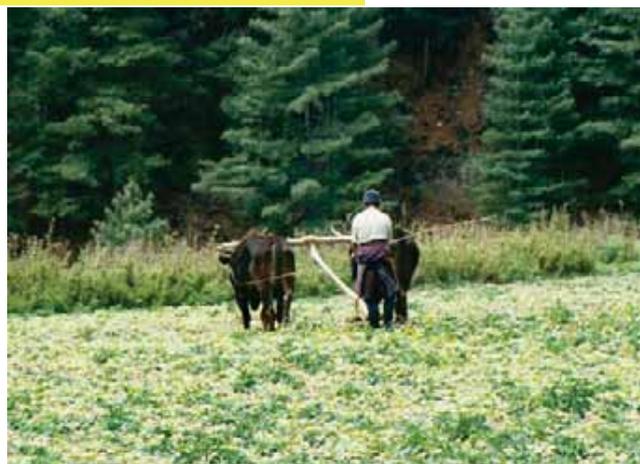
With increasing unemployment, rural-urban migration and the increasing burden of importing foods becoming a serious concern, the idea of returning to working the fields is again being explored. In the past, few opportunities were associated with it, so little was achieved.

The concept of going back this time is approached from a business perspective, and could work if there are significant profits to be made. However making agribusiness work in Bhutan is difficult. Predominantly it is subsistence farming with meagre land holding that is fragmented every generation, and each growing just enough to eat or last until the next season. The majority of farmers are practicing the same method of cultivation, the same breed and reaping the same yield. The immediate challenges are obvious.

Commercial farming requires land, acres of it, machines, research and a dynamic market to thrive as a business.

We have covered stories in the Newsletter from time to time about specialisation with specific crops, but none are yet on a scale to make a significant impact on the economy. Bhutan's performance, when it comes to food self-sufficiency, is one of the lowest in the region. The country has a little more than 50 percent self-sufficiency in rice production, six percent sufficiency in terms of edible oil, and close to zero percent in terms of meat. Meat is one of the highest cost food items imported. According to the Royal Monetary Authority's annual report, published early this year, total value of meat has increased from Nu 642M in 2011 to Nu 1B in 2012. Rice imports have increased from Nu 853M to Nu 1.25B and edible oil imports increased from Nu 667M to Nu 926M, in the same period. Overall, there is a Nu 4.2B deficit in the balance of food trade. This is more than half the total net earning made by the hydropower sector in a year.

To reduce dependence on imports, Agriculture Minister Yeshey Dorji said the Ministry will be establishing mega farms, slaughterhouses in the country, dairy farms, piggeries, fisheries and turkey farms among others.



"We want to change the way we do things", he said. "We will achieve food self-sufficiency only with these kind of activities." Other plans, the Minister said, to increase self-sufficiency, were to cultivate rice in another 2,000 hectares during 2014. Plans also include buying raw paddy from India and processing them in the country before selling it to domestic consumers. This, the Minister said, had various advantages, because it will be cheaper to buy raw paddy than rice, and it can be supplied fresh in the domestic market. Similarly, raw edible oil would be imported before processing and selling to domestic consumers.

If Bhutanese can go back to the fields, start businesses, create jobs and improve the livelihood of the community, it will be quite an achievement, but if the country intends to become more self-sufficient in food, the assistance of the Agriculture Ministry will also be an essential part of the process.

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

During 2014 one more issue of the Newsletter will be published - at the end of September. Details of meetings not included in the Newsletters will be notified directly to members via e-mail and on the Society's web site.

Please make sure that the Membership Secretary has your latest e-mail address.

NEWS AND UPDATES

Bhutan UK Alumni Association



The Bhutan-United Kingdom Alumni Association, was inaugurated on 5th June 2014 by Mr Hugo Swire, MP, the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. His Royal Highness The Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, an alumnus of St.Peter's College, University of Oxford, has consented to be the Patron of the Association. The Association will have the following objectives:

1. To further strengthen the historic links between the Kingdom of Bhutan and the United Kingdom
2. To augment the bonds of friendship between the United Kingdom and former students who have studied there
3. To create a network among those Bhutanese who have studied in the United Kingdom
4. To act as a resource base for young Bhutanese who are going to study or are considering studying in the United Kingdom

There are currently over two hundred Bhutanese who are studying or have in the past studied in the United Kingdom. They cover a very wide range of specialities and are currently in a very wide range of occupations within Bhutan. The list of alumni of universities and institutions is an impressive demonstration of how the United Kingdom has contributed to the remarkable development of Bhutan during the last half century. Probably the first Bhutanese to study in the United Kingdom was Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother, who was followed later by Lyonpo Dago Tshering, former Home Minister and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. Noteworthy among those who have studied in the UK are Their Majesties the Fourth and Fifth Kings, and Her Majesty the Queen. This long educational link between Bhutan and the United Kingdom will be enhanced through the announcement of four highly prestigious Chevening Scholarships for Bhutanese students in the coming year 2015-2016.

At one of the first meetings of the Association, held at the Taj Hotel in Thimphu on June 24, the guest speaker was Professor David Park, Director of The Conservation of Wall Paintings Department at The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London. Professor Park's talk was entitled "World Treasures of Bhutan".

He gave an account of the unique and precious cultural heritage of Bhutan which takes many forms. One of the most valuable is the remarkable treasury of wall paintings to be found in the Temples and Dzongs of Bhutan. Some of these date back many hundreds of years. Bhutan remains one of the last repositories in the world of Buddhist art of this quality, and should be considered a world treasure.



The Courtauld Institute, currently involved in a conservation project in the Bumthang Valley, is working hard to try to save some outstanding wall paintings at Tango Monastery, north of Thimphu. The monastery is currently undergoing much needed renovation which is threatening a number of world-class Buddhist wall paintings. The Courtauld Institute and its Director of Wall Painting Conservation, Professor David Park, are advising on how these paintings might be saved.

One third of Bhutanese children are stunted

A study conducted by the Ministry of Health says 35 percent of Bhutanese children are stunted due to lack of proper nutrition. Of those a further third are severely stunted. The Prime Minister, Tshering Tobgay, said it was unacceptable that so many children in Bhutan continue to face lack of proper nutrition. While speaking at a high-level consultative meeting on maternal and child nutrition in Bhutan, he said a lot needs to be done to reach out to all the children and mothers in the country. They need help to deal with these problems during a period when adequate nutrition is most important. Stunting occurs in households with food shortage. According to studies, stunting occurs in early life, from conception until a child is two years old.

The prevalence of anaemia in women and children is seen as alarming with 54.8% and 80.6% respectively. Over 80 % of mothers who go to the National Referral Hospital are anaemic.

While the sporadic outbreaks of vitamin deficiencies have been a public health issue since 1998, it remains a problem even today. While hunger is not a problem in the country, eating the right diet is an issue. The government reports it is making concerted efforts to make nutritious food available and in educating the population on the importance of good eating habits.

Crying for Joy

A group of Japanese men recently conducted a seminar called 'Crying for Joy' in Thimphu. According to these men, crying is also a stress therapy, in fact more effective and powerful than laughter.

During the therapy the participants were made to listen and watch carefully to a traditional Japanese story teller, narrating a sad tale which eventually made the listeners cry.

Dressed in their traditional dress, Kimono, these Japanese men are known for making people cry when back home. The 'Crying for Joy' seminar by these men attracted huge international media attention. Bhutan is the first country outside Japan where they have conducted such a seminar.

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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:

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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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