

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 61

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2017

Society member honoured

The Prime Minister, Theresa May, has named Emma Slade, a British Buddhist nun and one of our members, as a Point of Light for working to improve the lives of children in rural Bhutan.

Emma is the founder of 'Opening Your Heart to Bhutan', a charity dedicated to supporting children in the country. She spent seven years working in the city of London before travelling for a number of years and eventually being ordained as a Buddhist nun in Bhutan. She combines her business background and her in-depth knowledge of Bhutan to serve as Chief Executive of the charity in an entirely voluntary capacity. Emma's charity dedicates itself to improving the quality of



The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Emma Slade and Michael Rutland

life of children living in rural areas of the country whether that can be achieved with simple interventions such as providing bedding or clothing, or whether more complex work is required, such as building toilets, constructing sewage systems, making safe cooking areas or providing sufficient sleeping areas. Emma is the latest recipient of a Point of Light award, which recognises outstanding individual volunteers, people who are making a change in their community and inspiring others. The Point of Light Programme was started in the USA by President George H W Bush to recognise volunteers and was adopted by the UK in April 2014.

In a personal letter to Emma, Prime Minister Theresa May said: "You have dedicated your life to doing everything you can to improve the quality of life for children living in rural Bhutan. By combining your business background with your in-depth knowledge of the country, you are ensuring their needs are met wherever possible and their lives are transformed. Across the world British volunteers like you are helping to build a better world for everyone. The Point of Light award is a small thank you on behalf of the whole country, in recognition of your exceptional service."

Michael Rutland, the British Honorary Consul to Bhutan said, "Emma Slade combines her style and experience in the world of international finance with the attributes of a Buddhist nun to bring to her charity enormous energy, dedication and sensitivity. Her work is making a real difference to lives of many children in the remote Kingdom of Bhutan, and provides a unique example of the power of volunteerism to have a positive effect on the lives of others."

Further details on award on www.bhutansociety.org. See also details of Forthcoming Meetings on page 2.

Diary Date

Please note that the Annual Dinner will be held on Friday 17th November 2017 at The Inner Temple in London. This will be 25th Anniversary of The Society, so a very special occasion. Further details to follow.

SOCIETY NEWS

Annual Dinner



The Society's Annual Dinner was held on Friday 21st October 2016 at The Charterhouse; eighty four members and guests attended. Thirty guests joined an optional pre-dinner tour of the building led by the resident Brothers and were duly impressed by the historic significance of The Charterhouse.

Reception drinks were held in the Old Library before guests moved up to dinner in the Great Chamber where Elizabeth 1 occasionally held Court. One of our committee, Elizabeth Jacobson, had beautifully decorated each table with significant items she had brought back from a recent visit to Bhutan. These were much appreciated by all, especially our Bhutanese guests. Our honoured guest was the Bhutanese Ambassador in Brussels, Aum Pema Choden; she was accompanied by her husband, Tokey Dorji, and Minister Counsellor Tenzin Rondel Wangchuk, who had been our chief guest last year. We also welcomed sixteen further Bhutanese guests most of whom are studying at UK universities. In addition, we welcomed two guests from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Our Chairman, Michael Rutland introduced each of the Bhutanese present including his son, Kesang Wangchuk. Michael spoke insightfully, greatly amusing the guests with his repartee. His toast to the guests followed the loyal toast led by our Vice Chairman and Secretary, Andrew Sutton, and the toast to the King, Queen and Gyalsey of Bhutan proposed by our President, Sir Simon Bowes Lyon.

The response on behalf of the guests was given by Aum Pema Choden who gave what was, by common consent, a fascinating and witty address. * Amongst many other matters, she observed that the Society, now entering its twenty fourth year, was in good strength and heart; she thanked the Society, and particularly its Chairman, for all that they do to strengthen and nurture relations between the two countries, particularly in the field of education. The speeches marked the end of the formal proceedings. All present had enjoyed a very successful evening at The Charterhouse, whose staff had looked after us so well and provided an excellent dinner.

Mark Swinbank Dinner Secretary

* *Aum Pema Choden's address can be found on www.bhutansociety.org*

Forthcoming meetings

Bhutan Through the Lens of Compassion

Thursday 27 April 2017 at 7.00 pm

Speaker: Emma Slade

Emma Slade - also now known as Ani Pema Deki - is the first western woman to be ordained in Bhutan. She continues to study with her Lama in Bhutan and is particularly drawn to the teachings on compassion in Buddhism. Emma's talk will include simple Buddhist teachings, details of the work of her charity Opening Your Heart to Bhutan and provide the chance to buy a signed copy of her book "Set Free" which charts her journey from high flying financier to Buddhist nun. All proceeds from book sales go to her projects with disabled children in Bhutan.

This meeting will be held in the Lady Violet Room at the National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

The bar will open at 6.30pm

Wilderness in the Mountains of Bhutan - a Naturalist's Perspective

Monday 12th June 2017 at 7.00pm

Speaker: Lhendup Tarchen

Lhendup Tarchen has been involved with the study and conservation of Bhutan's wildlife and its habitat throughout his career. Most recently he has been the Park Manager for the Jigme Dorji National Park and has been researching the snow leopard.

He is currently studying at Cambridge University for an M Phil in Conservation Management. Lhendup was in the UK in 2010 for a course at Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) and spoke to the Society in September that year.

This meeting will be held in the David Lloyd George Room at the National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

The bar will open at 6.30pm

SOCIETY REPORTS

Society visit to Greece

Every two years the various Bhutan Friendship Societies in Europe meet to update on their activities. October 2016 saw the eighth such meeting and it was hosted by the Greece-Bhutan Friendship Association in Athens and in the former Grecian capital, Nafplion. Representatives of thirteen societies attended. Ambassador Aum Pema Choden and her husband Tokey Dorji along with Minister Counsellor Tenzin Rondel Wangchuk and two others came from the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in Brussels. Dorry



Friesen, Elizabeth Jacobson and Andrew and Jane Sutton represented the UK Society. The meeting opened with an evening reception on the roof terrace of the Ionic Centre in Plaka with stunning views of the Acropolis and the city. The Mayor of Athens welcomed everyone and there were presentations by Romolo Gandolfo (Greece) 'Greece-Bhutan: The Overlooked Connections'; by Zoltan Valcsiksak (Hungary) 'Inspired by Bhutan and GNH: A personal perspective on Bhutan's alternative development framework rooted in Buddhism' and by Lilia Khosnoutdinova (Czech Republic) 'Czech Experiences in supporting Bhutanese NGOs and Charities'. Robert Dompnier

(France) also gave us a selection of his photo archive. The next morning we visited the New Acropolis Museum for guided tours. What a building, what a display – it's a 'must see'!

On to the road next to the Peloponnese and a stop at Mycenae before settling into lodgings at charming Nafplion and dodging a dinner time thunder storm. The next morning saw a welcome from the Mayor, an address from the Ambassador and short reports from each of the societies present. Lunch was at a local vineyard – after a tour and tasting. The group returned to Athens via the spectacular theatre at Epidaurus. Romolo Gandolfo, president of the Greek association, proved a wonderful host and guide throughout, with many tales of and insights into the long history of so many of the sites we visited. Many thanks to Romolo and his colleagues. The next meeting, in 2018, will be hosted by the Swiss and the French Societies in Geneva and Chamonix.

Andrew Sutton

The Cultural Identity of Bhutan

At the mid-January meeting, Society members enjoyed a talk given by Zara Fleming. Here is her summary:

This lecture focused on Bhutan's very unique identity, which was initiated by Guru Rinpoche introducing Buddhism as the core foundation in the 8th century; fully established by the First Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal in the 17th century and promoted in particular by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Senge Wangchuck. Influenced early on by Tibetan civilization, Bhutan began to develop its own original culture when the First Shabdrung unified the country in the 17th century. He introduced Driglam Namzhag, the code which stipulates the correct forms of physical, verbal and spiritual conduct – and from this time onwards, a distinctive Bhutanese culture emerges. This includes the forms of dress, the terms of address and social behaviour which are still observed to this day.

In addition, during the Shabdrung's reign, the 4th Druk Desi, Tenzin Rabgye (1638-96) codified the Zorig Chusom (the thirteen traditional arts and crafts of Bhutan), in order to focus on the art and artefacts which were distinctly more Bhutanese in flavour than Tibetan. Under the fourth King, both the Driglam Namzhag and the Zorig Chusom were revived and he introduced the concept of Gross National Happiness, which is rooted in Buddhism and underpins most of Bhutan's government policies. Today Bhutan has its own very unique cultural identity; its characteristics in art, architecture, dance, ecology, politics, spirituality, textiles and other crafts are clearly distinct from its Himalayan neighbours. Bhutan is a beautiful and unique country; where its people care more about the conservation of their environment, the practise of their Buddhist beliefs and the preservation of their cultural identity than material gain. But it is not Shangri-la, like any other developing country it faces problems of debt, unemployment, drugs and the wrong sort of western influence. However, for the time being it remains a place of inspiration to us in the west.

Young democracy

With the introduction of democracy clubs in schools and education institutions, students are being equipped with much new information. They learn how to conduct elections and organise events to promote the understanding of the country's electoral system and processes, democratic governance and institutions, and also how to participate in decision-making processes.

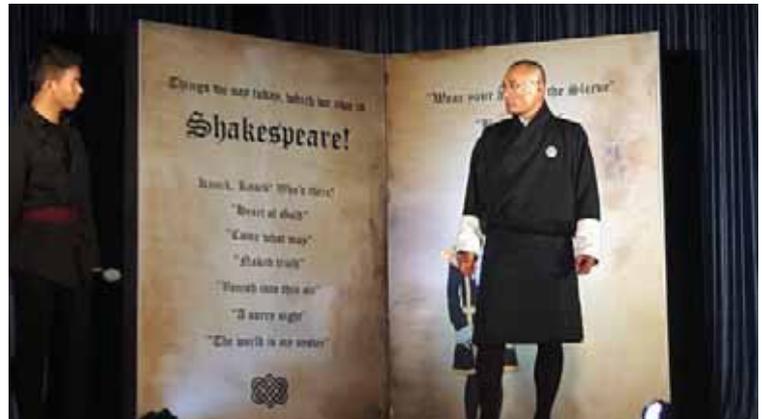
The Bhutan Children's Parliament (BCP) was established in June 2015 and functions like a Parliament where all democratic clubs can be represented. Members discuss pertinent issues to young people and have recently endorsed matters as wide ranging as the need for sex education in schools to prevent teenage pregnancy, to make Dzongkha a compulsory subject from pre-primary to class XII, to extending counselling classes and to establishing youth centres in every dzongkhag.

By September 2016 over 4,000 democracy club members had voted for 293 candidates in the first ever BCP national elections. The BCP Constitution states that the session's proceedings shall be submitted to, among others, His Majesty The King, The Chief Justice, The Speaker of Parliament and The Prime Minister. One Member of BCP said, "BCP is unique. We shed light on youth issues that do not reach the main parliamentary sessions and help address them. Our responsibility is also to help address the issues faced not only by school-going children but also illiterate children, and how our resolutions could improve and change their lives. Helping the younger generation understand how democracy works by giving hands-on experience, is also very important now that our country is in its eighth year as a constitutional democracy."

The Bard is back !

For many decades Bhutan was famous as a country where a school pupil in a remote village could from memory recite speeches from Shakespeare.

Then some years ago as a result of a rewrite of the English Syllabus by Canadian consultants, Shakespeare disappeared. However, the enthusiasm for Shakespeare was evident when The Globe Theatre Company gave a performance of Hamlet in Thimphu last year. Recently, at a highly original and entertaining presentation in the Royal Banqueting Hall in Thimphu, Shakespeare returned with a bang! The new Minister of Education also announced that from 2017 The Merchant of Venice would be part of the school English Curriculum.



To welcome Shakespeare back to the mountains, the Prime Minister himself came on stage to give a spirited and most competent performance of the famous soliloquy by Shylock. This was followed by a shadow-theatre presentation of the essence of the Twelfth Night characters and plot, which was



wonderfully done. Congratulations to the Minister of Education for taking this bold step in reintroducing young Bhutanese to the glories of Shakespeare.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Is it covered?

The minimum 60 per cent forest cover was first mentioned in the National Forest Policy 1974. It states: ***In consideration of the geo-physical conditions of Bhutan and the necessity of maintaining soil and climatic equilibrium, the objective will be to maintain a minimum of 60 per cent of the total land under forests.***

This is now enshrined in the Constitution for which the country is lauded by the international community as an example to follow. Article 5 Section 3 now reads: ***The Government shall ensure that, in order to conserve the country's natural resources and to prevent degradation of the ecosystem, a minimum of sixty per cent of Bhutan's total land shall be maintained under forest cover for all time.***

Many land cover exercises have been undertaken during the past 50 years and these show a forest cover increase from 57.14 per cent to 80.89 per cent. This would suggest a significant increase, but there are those who have doubts. The confusions and disagreements are to a large extent due to inconsistent forest definitions which are believed to total over 800.



The notion of forest to most people is a large tract of land covered with trees or other woody vegetation. However, under many forest definitions, an area completely lacking trees may still be considered a forest if there were trees on it in the past and will have trees in the future. Similarly, land that is legally designated as a forest is defined as forest even if no trees are on it.

At an international level again there are many definitions. Bhutan follows the FAO definition that defines forest as land area of more than 0.5 hectare with a tree canopy of more than 10 per cent and tree height of 5m and above. These definitions of forest are criticised for their overemphasis on timber

production aspects and for lacking environmental and social criteria. Some experts believe that efforts to maintain and enhance these environmental functions of forests must start with a clear understanding of both existing knowledge and an exploration of other associated environmental factors such as (1) Are trees the primary focus in forest cover? (2) Do other land uses such as grasslands, open forest and non-forest land have a role in soil, water and biodiversity conservation? (3) How should the forest cover be distributed across the country and over time? (4) What does it mean by "conservation of the country's natural resources"? (5) What does it mean by "to prevent degradation of the ecosystem"?

Use and supply of water is another factor. Traditionally, the belief is that the more trees, the more water. However, current forest hydrology research challenges this assumption. The forest ecosystem is in fact a major user of water through evapotranspiration. Studies claim that forests are not the best land cover to increase downstream water yield, especially in arid or semi-arid ecosystems. Also that ground cover, shrubs and grass are the most important component of the forest environment for protecting the soil from erosion and landslides. So to uphold the Constitution and ensure it is based on best science and wisdom, it is perhaps timely to explore a more explicit national definition as to what it means in a Bhutanese context to maintain the minimum 60 per cent forest cover.

NEWS AND UPDATES



Birthday greetings to The Crown Prince who celebrated his first birthday on February 5th 2017

Fund raising success

Members and friends of the Society will be delighted to know that £2,515 was raised as a result of this appeal from DPAB (see Issue 60). This was made up to a total of £5,000 with an additional grant coming from The Bhutan Society Trust Fund.

Sue Gross, on behalf of Physionet UK said, *"Thank you for your letter confirming the transfer of funds to Physionet to sponsor the shipment of equipment for the disabled via DPAB which is being loaded and leaving this Saturday. These items will help many individuals and their families, my deepest thanks to the Fund, the officers and all the members who contributed to this"*.

Guidelines to help trade fairs

Trade fairs are now officially recognised as an efficient means to promote goods and services and to attract business partners. The Department of Trade will shortly issue new guidelines that will help individuals and organisations plan and organise a trade fair or exhibition in a systematic way.

Applications for licences will be accepted in one of three main categories - general exhibitions, thematic – such as education, environmental, tourism etc - and consumer fairs . All will be required to have appropriate information counters and be able to handle regional as well as international business.

Reviving the weaving of bamboo products

Sephu in Wangduephodrang was known for its high quality bamboo products, which the locals bartered for edibles with the neighbouring people of Sha valley and upper Trongsa. Shops in Chazam, displayed the bamboo products along the road, but in the last few years, displays of the traditional bamboo products have declined. The assumption is that the locals are no longer interested in weaving bamboo products as cordyceps collection has made them rich. But the reality is different. It is apparent that as so much bamboo has died out in the locality, most have needed to stop this age old tradition.

However, some young people in the locality want their bamboo weaving revived and in the nearby Wangchuck Centennial Park, the rangers are responding by providing financial support to the locals so that they can grow bamboo on their own land. He said people have collected bamboo saplings from the forest and have started growing it on their own small plots of land again.

The Park is also planning to form a farmer's group so that people can weave together and market together. It is hoped that if the art of bamboo weaving is revived, people will restart the barter system and they will not be totally dependent on imported goods.



NEWS AND UPDATES

Four new butterflies recorded

A recent butterfly survey team has discovered four new butterfly species:

Khasi Forest Bob (*Scobura isota*),
Ambon Onyx (Female) (*Horaga Syrinx*)

Pointed Perrot (*Niphanda cymbia*),
Brown Onyx (*Horaga viola*)



Ambon Onyx



Khasi Forest Bob



Pointed Perrot

Photo courtesy: Butterfly Survey Team

With the new discovery, Bhutan now has 732 butterfly species recorded. The newly found butterflies are from the family of Lycaenidae (blues) and Hesperidae (skipper). With the finding of four more butterflies, Bhutan now has 177 species of Lycaenidae and 145 species of Hesperidae. It was the same team that sighted a rare Pointed Perrot belonging to the Lycaenidae (blues) family from Koilatar on the same day.

Hand made soaps

As industrial processes are used to make most of the goods we buy today, handmade and crafted products can offer an attractive alternative. Initially started as a hobby, Sonam Pelden started making soaps from organic raw materials such as aloe vera plant and tomatoes for her personal use two years ago. With growing interest and demand she started experimenting with other local materials. Today, her range of products includes soaps made from dandelion, turmeric, palm oil, essential oil, flower essence, lemon grass and coconut oil. In the coming years, she plans to open up Pelbar Natural Soaps as a home-based business to teach others how to make soaps, not only through the organic raw materials, but also from used oil to make dishwashing soaps. For now, Sonam Pelden makes these soaps at home when she receives orders.



Further along this entrepreneurial route is Ugyen, general manager of Bio Bhutan. Along with his team, comprising 15 people, they have been making natural soaps since 2008. Today, they export their products to countries such as Germany, Taiwan and Singapore, among others. With a help of a soap expert from Thailand, the employees learnt how to create soaps based on the rich flora of the country. "We are dedicated to promote sustainable use of natural resources and support rural communities in remote places," Ugyen said. "The raw materials are supplied by communities from rural areas, which generate an income for the rural communities."

With an increasing range of such products available, many people are now having an opportunity to try these handmade products and it looks to be a growing sector of the market as customers become more aware and appreciative of the skills, time and effort put into producing such naturally crafted products.

Holiday activities

Archery

In an attempt to promote traditional archery in the country, the first traditional archery coaching camp for students was held at the Changlimithang archery range in Thimphu during the winter holiday period.



The aim of the camp was to introduce the art of traditional archery to children, including basic usage like handling traditional bows and arrows, safety measures, releasing of arrows and a brief history about archery, among others. More than 100 students aged between seven and fifteen from Thimphu took part in the five-day camp. The programme was organised by the Bhutan Indigenous Games and Sports Association (BIGSA) in collaboration with the Labour Ministry, Druk Green Power Corporation, Bhutan Power Corporation and The Bank of Bhutan.

Weaving

Meanwhile, twenty five girls are learning the art of traditional weaving, the art of yarn dyeing, contemporary skills related to design and colour combination, and are acquiring basic knowledge on business and book keeping skills. The weaving centre at the Royal Textile Academy (RTA) in Thimphu conducted the winter weaving training



programme from late December.

The programme is targeted to productively engage the students and train them in the art of weaving during their holidays. Students are provided with necessary weaving tools and materials from the centre as well as a minimum stipend to purchase their school necessities.

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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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