

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

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## ***New Honorary Consul***

**Members have been delighted to hear that our Chairman, Andrew Sutton, has just been appointed as Honorary Consul of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Kingdom.**



When we invited him to comment, he said, "I am delighted and honoured to take on the role of Honorary Consul of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Kingdom. It has been most encouraging to have many friendly messages of support. Tangible evidence of the completion of the international diplomatic process of appointment includes a seal from Bhutan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as a photo-ID card from the Protocol Department of our own Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. I look forward to working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Embassy in Brussels and others – in Bhutan and in the UK – to support the interests of Bhutan and its citizens and to advance relations between Bhutan and the United Kingdom. There will be times, I am sure, when the Society can play a part in these activities.

My first visit to Bhutan was in 1999 when I went on my first trek there – Paro, Chomolhari, Lingzhi, Laya and Punakha; an absolute delight. I was back the following year for a 'full Snowman' and Bhutan had fully caught my imagination and my affections. Very soon I had joined the Society, helped with the visit of Bhutanese musicians and dancers to 'the Dome' and visited Leiden to see the Bhutan exhibit which was touring Europe. Then I was asked to look after student

liaison within the Society and, in 2008 I took over from Michael Rutland as Secretary of the Society. From further visits and explorations in Bhutan, contacts with so many Bhutanese (especially those studying in this country) and liaison with the other Friendship Associations in Europe, my knowledge and understanding of the country and its people have developed. I am sure that my involvement as Honorary Consul will allow those to deepen further". Michael Rutland, OBE, who as members will know, is currently our Honorary Consul of the United Kingdom to the Kingdom of Bhutan and prior to that was the first Honorary Consul of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Kingdom. He said "Having known Andrew for over twenty years, and seen how committed he has been to the Bhutan Society during all that time, I have no doubt at all that he will be an excellent Honorary Consul, and I offer him my heartiest congratulations. I was privileged to be appointed the first Honorary Consul of Bhutan in 2004, and remained in that post until I 'changed sides' and became the first British Honorary Consul in Bhutan in 2013. I know from experience that Andrew will find the role sometimes challenging but always interesting and get to enjoy the occasional very early morning expedition to Heathrow Airport! Tashi Delek on your appointment!!"

## **SOCIETY ACTIVITIES**

### ***“The Hare-Marked Moon”***

***This meeting will be held online on Tuesday, 23 November 2021  
at 7.00 pm.***

***Speaker: David Lascelles***

***David Lascelles, the 8th Earl of Harewood, will share the challenges, and often hilarious experiences, of building a 24ft Stupa in the middle of the 1,000 acres of landscape gardens at Harewood. The presentation will include a short film shot in both Bhutan and Yorkshire which covers the meeting of cultures experienced in the making of this Stupa. He will also include extracts from his book “A Hare-Marked Moon” written about the project and will answer any questions.***

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### ***Change of date:***

***“Charities supported by The Bhutan Society Trust Fund” will now take place online on Wednesday, 5 January 2022.***

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### ***Other Diary dates for 2022***

***An informal evening event to help celebrate Losar will be held on Thursday, 3 March 2022 at St Columba’s Church in Knightsbridge, London. More information soon about this first in-person gathering since the onset of Covid-19.***

***The date for the 30th Anniversary Dinner has now been confirmed. It will be held on Friday, 18 November 2022, at The Inner Temple in London.***

# SOCIETY REPORTS

## MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING Held online at 6.00pm on 21 September 2021

1. David Glazebrook, Secretary opened the meeting on behalf of the President.
2. The minutes of the previous AGM (17 November 2020) **were approved by poll.**
3. Andrew Sutton gave the Chairman's report.

The Society held two physical talks in 2020 (by Dr Francoise Pommaret and Dr David Long), before going digital-only as a result of Covid-19. Our three newsletters were published, and online talks were recorded for members, including one by Dasho Benji, and one by Michael Rutland.

The Chairman thanked his Committee colleagues for their work for the Society. The Chairman asked any of the members who would be interested in helping to support the running of the Society by joining the Committee, or becoming an Associate, to contact him.

4. The Secretary presented the Membership report on behalf of Rosie Glazebrook, thanking all 501 current members for their support and involvement. Members are encouraged to continue sharing feedback and ideas. There is positive news that Bhutanese students are returning to the UK.

5. Dorji Wangchuk presented the Treasurer's report. The Society ended 2020 with net assets of £27,022, including £17,033 cash in the bank and the interest-free loan of £10,003 to the Trust Fund. There was a surplus of £2,122 on the year. The Society continues in good financial health.  
**The accounts for 2020 were approved by poll.**

6. David Glazebrook reported that there were no changes to the committee for 2021. **The current Committee was confirmed by poll:** Andrew Sutton as Chairman, David Glazebrook as Secretary, Dorji Wangchuk as Treasurer, Sylvia Robert-Sargeant as Newsletter Editor, Rosie Glazebrook as Membership Secretary, Dee Cano as Student Liaison Officer, Elizabeth Jacobson as Dinner Secretary and Events Group, and Nicholas Thompson as Events Group Secretary.

7. Any other business and meeting closure.

Sir Simon Bowes Lyon, President, welcomed HE Getse Penjor, Bhutan's new Ambassador in Brussels, and Steve Berry, both to talk after the formal business of the AGM. The President congratulated Andrew Sutton on his appointment as Bhutan's Honorary Consul in the UK. Having noted that no other business had been shared in advance with the Secretary, the AGM was closed.

**David Glazebrook, Secretary**

**24 September 2021**

***Note: Those unable to attend the AGM will shortly be sent a direct e-link to the talk given by Steve Berry on "Tourism in Bhutan".***

## ***Exciting New Horizons in Farming***

Food self-sufficiency has been Bhutan's dream since the first plan period in 1961 but, with farmers not having enough land for large-scale production or terrain suitable for mechanisation and landholding also decreasing by the year, it is clear that agriculture development must take a new turn if this goal is to be achieved. The towns are also becoming more crowded with young people, many of whom are experiencing difficulty in finding employment. Add to this the recent Covid-19 related restrictions in food produce and workers coming from India, the challenges have become even more acute. But there are some interesting developments that could attract those young people to see farming from a different perspective.

Earlier this summer, one such group of young farmers in Mongar revived about three acres of fallow wetland and converted it into a commercial farm. They are cultivating Adzuki beans and expect the first crop to be ready to harvest by the end of this year. According to agriculture officials, growing Adzuki beans is a part of the programme to increase the production of all legume species in Bhutan. It was initiated by the Agriculture Research and Development Centre (ARDC) in collaboration with Dzongkhag Agriculture Sectors. The trial programme started three years ago and has already supported farmers in converting about thirty acres of fallow land into commercial farms. An agreement has also been made with an exporter to sell the produce to Japan where it is widely used for baking cakes and making biscuits.



Kinley Wangmo is also into a new type of farming - hydroponics. Her greenhouse just outside Thimphu has more than a thousand plants grown through hydroponics. She used to work in construction so already knew about the electrical and plumbing aspects needed, so set up Bhutan Hydroponics. She said, "Hydroponic farming is popular in countries like Japan and Singapore and with some research, I was able to transform my interest into a reality. I believe it can also help to combat climate change and will contribute to our achieving food self-sufficiency in the future." Kinley plans to impart what she knows by establishing a training centre for hydroponics as well as continue with her commercial operations. The education curriculum already mandates the teaching of hydroponics and some schools have set up small projects within their greenhouses and achieved much success. While this is

Kinley's first step towards a new way of food production, she hopes to make hydroponic farming much more significant in Bhutan by inspiring the younger generation to get involved.

When Sonam Gyeltshen decided to drop out of Class XII in 2017 and become a farmer, little did he envisage he would today, alongside his wife Cheni Wangmo, be one of the most successful young people to venture into oyster mushroom farming in Eastern Bhutan. After they both undertook mushroom cultivating training through the ARDC, they bought some mushroom spawn and sowed oyster mushrooms on a trial basis. Three years into the business, they have produced and sold about 2,000 bottles of spawn in the locality from their Samsara Organic Mushroom Farm near Mongar and also in Bumthang. Sonam has now also sold more than a tonne of fresh oyster mushrooms around local markets and on a door-to-door basis. As a back-up he also grows vegetables like winter chilies, cauliflower, cabbage and broccoli, and fruits like pineapple and mango on his small piece of land. Meanwhile, Sonam has invested any spare income on developing a laboratory on the ground floor of his house. He said, "I'm indebted to the government for what I have received and all their assistance - even today," he said. He claimed he does not regret dropping out of school and said, "I made the right decision. It was a blessing in disguise." Today, agriculture officials hire Sonam as a resource person and he shares whatever experiences and knowledge he has gained with other aspiring young people interested in this new type of food production. He said, "Farming not only helps to generate employment and a good income, but also helps achieve food self-sufficiency."

Bhutan today has about eight percent or 277,000 acres of arable land. Of this total, only 23 percent is being cultivated. These innovative projects, which are just some of those that have emerged during the Covid-19 crisis, although still in their infancy, may offer some exciting new ways to help meet the challenges of achieving self-sufficiency in food production in Bhutan.

# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## ***Vanishing Tradition of Nettle Weaving***

In Trongsa, the tradition of weaving fabric from nettle yarn is on the verge of disappearance once again, after it was last revived about two decades ago. This time, it is the unavailability of nettle plant that is the problem. To collect the plant now means that women have a day's journey to the base of the Black Mountain to collect supplies.

To revive the tradition of weaving nettle fabric, the Tarayana Foundation formed a women's group consisting of 32 members in 2005. Today, only 14 members of the group remain. Weavers say that nettle yarn is hard to spin and special skills and training are needed to weave it as the thread is rough. Meanwhile, the Youth Development Fund, which is now supporting the women's group, recently taught the weavers how to dye the nettle yarns using natural dyes and to preserve the indigenous patterns. Today the group weaves different nettle based fabrics such as bedcovers, table runners, cushion covers as well as other embroidered items with indigenous ancient designs. The weavers say that so long as they have enough raw materials, there is no dearth of market for their nettle woven fabrics. Sonam Lhamo from Baling said, "We need almost six kilograms of yarns to weave a Gho." The gewog also now plans to try to grow the nettle plant more locally.

## ***Hotstone Baths - Business Opportunity***

With the inauguration of a new hotstone bath facility in September, members of Tashi Dargay Community Forest (CF) in Dagana, are hoping that they will generate some additional and alternative income. The hotstone bath facility is at Tashi Dargay menchu (a source of medicinal water) and it falls within the CF and is run by the community on a benefit-sharing basis. The one-storey building has four rooms, one for an office and three fitted with wooden bathtubs for hot stone baths with attached washrooms. The World Wildlife Fund Bhutan (WWF) helped with the provision of materials and wages for skilled labour and CF members contributed labour and local materials. Water from the menchu is piped to two 1,000 litre water tanks which are joined to the 1,000 litre boiler and heated using firewood, which is further connected to the bathtubs. The menchu is popularly believed to cure throat problems, arthritis, gastritis, heart ailments, and eye problems. The baths are open to all, but members of the CF can avail the services at a reduced rate. CF members plan to use the income from the hotstone bath services for their sapling development programme and to improve income and livelihood within the community.

## ***Progress at Wangdue***



Whilst reconstruction works are progressing at Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, the district administration took the annual Tshechu to its residents this year. The three-day Tshechu was broadcast live on the two local channels which have more than 1,300 subscribers. The residents were happy that they could witness the sacred Tshechu from the comfort of their own homes and 68-year-old Rinchen Khandu, who witnessed the sacred mask dances on his television, said, "I would like to thank the Dzongkhag for arranging this amid the pandemic. I did not find any difference between watching the Tshechu in person and on TV. It all depends on our beliefs". According to Wangdue Dzongda Sonam Jamtsho, people in the district had expressed their interest in witnessing the Tshechu. "Therefore, we came up with a solution and offered our services by broadcasting the programmes". Meanwhile all mask dances by the monks and laymen, including Dolung Raksha Chham, were performed in consultation with the National Covid-19 Task Force and all the artists performing in the Tshechu were in self-containment from the time of practising, and the festival was held as a closed-door event.

## ***HIDDEN KINGDOM World Music Festival***

This new music festival was conceived and organised by Sonam Dorji, a musician well known in Bhutan, in partnership with MusiConnect Asia. COVID-19 restrictions meant that the inaugural season was held virtually at the end of July 2021. The principal elements of the festival were four concerts shown in the early evenings and featured twenty four bands from eighteen countries – nine of which were Bhutanese. All performances were streamed and are still available to enjoy. For more information and concerts please go to:

<https://youtube.com/channel/UCVDIWW73IOFun07ISJmK4yg>

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## ***Bhutan's Second Venture into Space***

If everything goes as planned, Bhutan's second satellite will be in space by the end of this year. This satellite is being developed jointly by a group of three engineers from the Department of Information, Technology and Telecom (DITT) and a lecturer from the College of Science and Technology in Bhutan working with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). On 24th September, The Ministry of Information and Communications (MoIC) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) signed an



Implementing Arrangement (IA) for this project to go ahead.

It will have two major components. The first will be a camera to take images of Bhutan and a second that will enable communications with the satellite from the ground through a radio-transmitter.

It is hoped that the images can be used to

improve forest utilization, study soil quality and types of vegetation etc. and it will help scientists better study the glaciers and their threats. The second major component is being developed in Bhutan, but as local scientists do not have the facilities to test this second component, it will be sent to India where its survival capacity in space in extreme fluctuations in temperature, dust, oxygen-free zone, and zero gravity will be measured. A technical review of the satellite will then be conducted and if it survives such harsh testing, the team hope to launch it by the end of this year. The second satellite will be bigger than BHUTAN-1, the country's first satellite launched in 2019. It will be 30-cubic centimetres and weigh around 15 kilograms and will pass over Bhutan at least twice a day.

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## ***OTTPs aim to boost Bhutan's Film Industry***

With cinema halls closed for more than a year, the entertainment industry has been badly affected. However the pandemic has given impetus to the introduction of over-the-top platforms (OTTP) in the country and two have been launched this year. Songyala and Samuh are two companies that aim to give individuals in the entertainment industry a platform to exercise their creativity. These OTTPs also aim to develop local media content for children with Dzongkha as a medium. An OTTP media service is offered directly to viewers via the Internet as opposed to the traditional means of a cable or satellite provider.

Chief Executive Director of Songyala, Sonam Ugyen, said that Songyala was developed to provide a platform for local media content. "Except for BBS and local channels, people don't have options to access local media content." He said that there were talented Bhutanese content creators available, but it was just that the film industry hasn't been able to tap into their skills and talents. His initial idea was to focus on creating digital content for children. "There is very little digital content for children in Dzongkha and many children from a young age first learn English before they can speak their mother tongue or Dzongkha".

Samuh's Creative Director, Kinley Tshering, said that the response from people had been overwhelming. More than 20,000 subscribers had been received from 65 countries in the first month after its launch. He said, "The idea of the platform is to launch young talent and present varied genres of local media content." Development of children's content was also an objective for Samuh.

Both agreed that there were many challenges to address not least the film producers' reluctance to share their works on the platform on a cost-sharing model. In the long term, a producer might have the opportunity to earn more through an OTTP platform, but traditionally some expect up front payments. Concern had also been expressed that streaming online would allow others to screen record. Both companies referred to Digital Rights Management (DRM) that uses encryption to protect video content to address piracy issues and also allows the content publisher to set business rules and control as to who could consume their content.

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## **Woodblock Engraving**

To preserve the traditional printing culture that includes the art of papermaking, calligraphy, woodblock engraving, and printing techniques, the National Library and Archives of Bhutan recently opened a traditional Print Heritage Museum in Thimphu.

The tradition of woodblock engraving for duplicating scriptures in Bhutan dates back to the time of the fifteenth century patron saint Terton Pema Lingpa and its popularity grew significantly in the seventeenth century. Today, with the emergence of modern printing technologies, the traditional printing culture is in danger of disappearing altogether. The Museum is expected also to show and educate the younger generations about the country's rich cultural heritage. The museum has for display raw materials and equipment for traditional papermaking, materials and engraving tools for xylographic woodblocks, materials and tools for printing, inks and ink-making ingredients, ink pots and materials to make traditional pens and containers.



Calligraphic texts and documents written in lantsa (languages of gods), wartu (language of the nagas), and uchen (Brahmic/mundane scripts, now less used in Tibet and Bhutan) as well as writings by historical figures and writing samples from contemporary calligraphers, are also on display.

Yonten Dargye, Director of the National Library and Archives, said that the three-year project was started with the hope of

promoting and preserving the print heritage of Bhutan. He said, "With the emergence of new printing and computing technologies, traditional print heritage is increasingly under threat." Calligraphy and printing in Bhutan have served as primary ways for recording information, be it for religious teachings, instructions, events, transactions, or communication across the country and beyond. According to the Antiques Division under the Home Ministry, there are 19,458 woodblocks in temples, monastic institutions and dzongs across the country and the National Library is working to collect woodblocks to add to the Museum's collection and to keep them on display.

Three books were also launched during the opening of the Museum:

\* "Festivals of Bumthang Dzongkhag", focuses on 24 religious and folk festivals constituting tshechu, chodpa, kuchod, rabney, yakchod, yaklhai, kangsol, mani, and mewang that are practised in the Choekhor, Tang, Chumey, and Ura in central Bhutan. Yonten Dragye said: "The communities fear that they might have to leave their traditions behind because there was no one to perform or learn the traditions."

\* The second book, "Written Scripts and Calligraphies of Bhutan" presents the evolution of Buddhist scripts and handwriting styles.

\* Finally "Writing and Print Culture in Bhutan" discusses the origins and significance of letters, the art of traditional writing and papermaking, pen and ink making, woodblock engraving and printing, and the significance of lekham (bound volume) and reading scriptures.

## **Recognising and Preserving Traditional Music**

Traditional musicians can now get certified as professionals in Bhutan. It was evident that with no official recognition or certificates, many musicians who would often participate in competitions or appear on live shows, could not be considered as professionals. This year, the Heritage, Education and Professional Development Centre at the Paro College of Education, in collaboration with the Labour Ministry, started recognizing these musicians. The first group of 12 musicians underwent an assessment at the College in both their theory knowledge and practical skills. Karma Yonten, a musician said, "No matter how talented we are, only a certificate will recognize us as professionals, so we are grateful for being given this opportunity. Even if we aspire to train or give music classes to young people and children, we need certificates to prove that we are professionals."

This is a timely development as the Royal Academy of Performing Arts (RAPA) is also becoming increasingly concerned that the art of making traditional music instruments is slowly dying.



With a limited number of traditional instrument makers in the country, and not many people interested in making such instruments, the Academy says that supporting the instrument makers and ensuring their skills are passed on to future generations has become essential. RAPA's Principal, Tshering Zangmo said, "On our part, we plan to support our senior artistes after their retirement so they can keep alive the art of making traditional musical instruments, which many wish to do." Along with recognizing and certifying traditional musicians, such developments are expected to go a long way in preserving traditional art and music in the country.

## **CONTACT LIST**

Vice President	Michael Rutland OBE British Honorary Consulate PO Box 1044 Thimphu Bhutan  13A, Pewley Hill, Guildford GU1 3SN  <b><i>rutland.michael@gmail.com</i></b>
Chairman	Andrew Sutton West Walls, Cotmandene Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2BL T: 01306 884349 <b><i>andrewsutton001@aol.com</i></b>
Secretary	David Glazebrook <b><i>davidglazebrook@outlook.com</i></b>
Treasurer	Dorji Wangchuk <b><i>dorji.wangchuk@outlook.com</i></b>
Membership	Rosie Glazebrook <b><i>rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com</i></b>
Newsletter Editor	Sylvia Robert-Sargeant <b><i>editor@bhutansociety.org</i></b>
Dinner /Films Secretary	Elizabeth Jacobson <b><i>tookiej@btinternet.com</i></b>
Student Liaison Officer	Dee Cano <b><i>deecano108@gmail.com</i></b>
Website Coordination	<b><i>website@bhutansociety.org</i></b>
Events Group Secretary	Nicholas Thompson <b><i>n.thompson@rediffmail.com</i></b>
Enquiries	<b><i>info@bhutansociety.org</i></b>
Website	<b><i>www.bhutansociety.org</i></b>

### **NOTE**

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

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

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