

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 58

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2016

Annual Dinner

This year's Annual Dinner was held on Friday 27th November 2015 at the Polish Hearth Club in London where eighty five guests gathered for a convivial evening. Our President, Sir Simon Bowes Lyon kindly brought



with him the gift previously given to the Society, from the then Crown Prince (now K5), a wonderful silver model of a chorten. Sadly our Chairman, Michael Rutland, was unable to attend due to commitments in Thimphu. Our honoured guest was the Bhutan Charge d'Affaires in Brussels,

Tenzin Rondel Wangchuck. We also welcomed sixteen further Bhutanese guests including scholars and students from the Courtauld Institute, Erasmus, Chevening, and the Pestalozzi International Village Trust. Our President toasted the Fourth King on the occasion of his recent 60th Birthday celebrations, together with the Fifth King and Queen, who had announced the very welcome news of the arrival of the Crown Prince, due during Losar (February) in 2016.

Our Secretary and Vice Chairman, Andrew Sutton, introduced the students to the other guests who were duly impressed with their accreditations and educational progress. Their presence at the Dinner is always welcome. Tenzin Rondel Wangchuck responded to these toasts praising the close association and respect with which the Society is held in Bhutan and confirmed the news that had greeted the announcement of the imminent birth of the Crown Prince. He then spoke of his pride in Bhutan for holding its place in the world economic order despite its small size and population, and described some of the features that supported his thoughts. He felt that Bhutan faced the future with optimism. The evening concluded around 11pm with members and guests departing happily after a memorable evening.

Mark Swinbank, Dinner Secretary

Royal Visit to Bhutan



The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge will make an official visit to Bhutan this spring.

The visit will take place as the result of an invitation from their Majesties the King and Queen of Bhutan when they visited The Prince of Wales in London two and a half years ago. It will be the first time Their Royal Highnesses have visited Bhutan which will coincide with their official spring tour of India. Previous royal visits to Bhutan included a visit by The Prince of Wales in February 1998 and by The Duke of York in March 2010.

SOCIETY NEWS

Diary dates

VIEWS OF BHUTAN

TUESDAY 15 MARCH 2016 at 7.00pm

Four speakers will offer different but contemporary views on developments in Bhutan, including:

Fergus Lyon, Professor of Enterprise at Middlesex University, will consider the contribution of entrepreneurship to Gross National Happiness in Bhutan

Karma Yeshey, currently studying at the Courtauld Institute of Art, will discuss textiles in Bhutan and the Textile Museum

Nickey Subba, now reading for an MSc at the City University, will consider developments in renewable energy

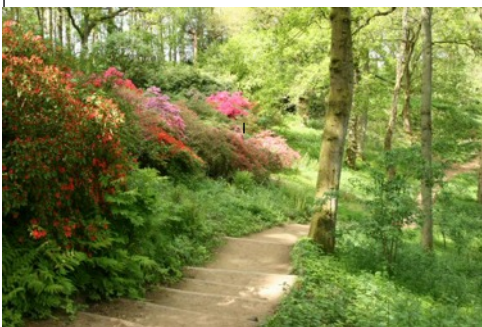
Lila Adhikari is at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine with a Chevening Scholarship and she will speak of the relevance of her course in epidemiology.

Professor Fergus Lyon is leading a programme of work on alternative business models at Middlesex University and is Deputy Director of the ESRC Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity. He has worked in Bhutan, India, Nepal, Nigeria, Ghana and UK, looking at different forms of enterprise and entrepreneurship. His recent work in Bhutan looked at how entrepreneurs are trying to address issues related to Gross National Happiness.

***This meeting will be held in the Inner Morning Room,
The Travellers Club, 106 Pall Mall London SW1 5EP***

Reception drinks from 6.30pm Usual dress code applies

Society Visit



On **May 5th 2016** there will be a Society visit to the Winkworth Arboretum in Surrey.

Winkworth is a lovely wooded hillside garden featuring over 1000 different species of plants and trees, with some specimens from the Himalayas and South East Asia including Himalayan birches and Himalayan blue

poppies. We will be shown around the Arboretum by our own guide. After visiting Winkworth, we drive to Vann, (about fifteen minutes) to visit an outstanding garden designed by Gertrud Jekyll which is considered one of the most beautiful private gardens in England. There we will also have lunch, which is the home of Dr. Mary Caroe - a friend and member of the Bhutan Society. A bus will take us to Surrey and return to central London in the afternoon.

**For further information please contact the Programme Secretary at:
dorotheafriesen@gmail.com**

Vice-Chairman retires



John Davey, a founding member of the Bhutan Society through his connections with Michael Rutland which date back to University days in the late '50's, has recently retired as Vice-Chairman of the Society. John also looked after events and lectures for several years, and his contribution to the Society is typical of the valuable voluntary support which has been evident since its inception, and continues to be, fundamental to the functioning of the Society.

John read Law at King's College London(1957/60), and taught at the then new and highly fashionable Tulse Hill Comprehensive School before going off to teach English in Kuwait which, in 1966, was a small city. He spent the rest of his professional career in Arabia, latterly in Bahrain, where he was an English Curriculum Specialist and an Inspector of English in the Education Ministry.

On retirement John is now a Brother in The London Charterhouse. He visited Bhutan sufficiently long ago to provide him with a profound shock to see how much it has developed in the last couple of decades. John has given much time and commitment to the Bhutan Society, for which we thank him enormously. He continues to be an active Member.

**Michael Rutland
Chairman**

SOCIETY MEETING REPORTS

Trekking High in Bhutan



On 23 September 2015, Andrew Sutton and Dr Henry Preston spoke at an evening meeting of the Society at the Polish Hearth Club in London. They based their talk on experiences of treks since 1999 and, most recently, in October 2014 when they explored the area immediately south of Gankar Punsum.

While total tourist numbers have risen fast since the start of the Millennium, trekkers on all routes (fewer than 3,000 in 2013) are less than 7% of the international tourists; so trekkers are still able to experience the beauties, charms and thrills of rural Bhutan away from other visitors.

Andrew discussed the principal route (the Snowman) from Paro to Laya and then on, across Lunana and the high reaches of arms of the Po Chhu, to Jakar in Bumthang and the old trading track from Jakar to Luentse and

Tashiyangtse. Henry described the trek to and from Gankar Punsum and Jakar and the search, for a few days above 16,000ft, for a manageable pass between the Chamkhar and Mangde Chhus. (That search is still 'work in progress'; Steve Berry and Mountain Kingdoms took another exploratory trek to the area in the autumn of 2015.) Andrew and Henry were able to illustrate their talk with a host of photographs showing the country and mountains in a variety of moods.

Hidden-Lands in Himalayan Myth and History



'In early November 2015, members of the Society met in London for an illustrated presentation by Ian Baker. Hidden-Lands', or beyul in Tibetan, refer to remote regions of the Himalayas that the eighth century Tantric Buddhist adept Padmasambhava is said to have designated as places for earthly refuge and spiritual awakening. This ancient tradition entered Western imagination as the fictional realm of Shangri-La, but Padmasambhava's hidden-lands actively inform Himalayan Buddhist practice as well as environmental policy in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. In this illustrated talk, author and anthropologist Ian Baker shared perspectives on the place of hidden-lands in both Eastern and Western imagination with a focus on Beyul Pemako, the 'Hidden-Land Arrayed like Lotus', in the Tsangpo Gorge region of southern Tibet. Apart from its importance to Tibetan Buddhists as an earthly paradise, this botanically and

geologically diverse region at the eastern edge of the Himalayan range was the focus of Royal Geographical Society efforts during the late 19th and early 20th centuries to discover a fabled waterfall that many believed would rival Niagara Falls in the United States and Victoria Falls in Africa.

The reality, and nature, of the 'Falls of the Tsangpo' remained an unresolved geographical riddle until 1998 when Ian Baker reached the base of the falls in the depths of the Tsangpo Gorge – an area that, until then, had been a blank spot on the map of world exploration. Ian's series of expeditions exploring the myth and reality of Padmasambhava's hidden-lands, and their significance for environmental conservation today, are chronicled in his book *The Heart of the World: A Journey to the Last Secret Place* (Penguin Press, 2003) and his forthcoming *Secret River: Journeys in the Hidden-Land of Pemako*.

For those who are interested, Ian will be giving a similar talk at the London Institute of Tibetan Studies (Shang Shung Institute) on the evening of February 18, 2016 entitled 'The Geography of Paradise: Hidden-Lands in Himalayan Myth, History, and Buddhist Practice'



Bhutan jubilant about news of Royal Heir

It was with much jubilation that the crowds at Changlimethang Stadium in Thimphu on November 11th 2015 received the news from His Majesty, King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, on the 60th birth anniversary celebrations of his father the nation's fourth king, that he and Her Royal Highness Queen Jetsun Pema were expecting a son during February 2016. The Crown Prince will continue the lineage of the Wangchuck Dynasty that has led Bhutan for a century. The Bhutanese are jubilant that the Royal Heir, whom His Majesty dubbed "a son to all the Bhutanese", will be born in an auspicious and sacred month coinciding with Losar in Bhutan.

New "K9" recruits

Law enforcement departments around the world depend on sniffer dogs to help the police in their daily activities. The Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) now has a total of nine dogs, four given by the Federal Government of Germany in 2010, and an additional five dogs bought in 2015 from India and trained at the Canine Training Centre of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police. They have been trained to aid police personnel in anti-sabotage tasks and counter narcotic work.

With the arrival of five additional dogs the crime rate has decreased further, especially with drugs and tobacco-related issues. Some of the dogs are specialists in their own fields such as detecting explosives, pharmaceutical drugs, marijuana and tobacco. As is customary, each dog works with a trained handler. The latest five dogs cost more than Nu 350,000, excluding training cost for the handlers, and in a month Nu 32,750 is spent on food for all nine dogs. Each dog consumes on average 25 kg of canned dog food, a litre of milk, a kg of boneless beef meat and four packets of dog biscuits per month. Whilst expensive, they are deemed effective, so further units are planned for Bumthang, which will cover the East, and in Gelephu or Sarpang, which will cover the South. Killing a police dog is a felony in Bhutan and if it happens in the line of duty, it is often given a full police funeral.

World Bank gives USD 3.8M as climate aid

The World Bank has just agreed to give Bhutan another USD 3.8 million to help it combat climate change and prevent natural disasters. The Bank's Vice President for South Asia, Annette Dixon, said, "Bhutan has long been a champion and a global leader for climate change adaptation and disaster resilience. With this new funding, we're initiating a low-carbon strategy, which will embrace all sectors of the economy and could become a model for the rest of South Asia." The support is for a new weather and disaster improvement project which will strengthen weather forecasting and the natural disaster early warning system. It also includes a grant to develop a climate resilience strategy, which is expected to pave the way for additional international financing from other sources. Bhutan committed to remaining carbon neutral in 2009 and has since embarked on initiatives in agriculture and sustainable land management, green energy, and green urban transport system among others. Annette Dixon said, "Among its many achievements is its impressive progress in addressing climate change. Bhutan has lessons to teach many other countries in adapting to climate change in South Asia and around the world".

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Communications: Past and Present

Evolution takes time and comes on its own terms. For Bhutan, it has a special narrative that weaves into the history of the country. Whilst the scattered and independent regions of the country had their own lord and laws, there was the desire for more effective and wholesome union through the nation, but also a realisation that little could be achieved without good communications.

Early communications systems were developed. Official letters were carried by runners known as **garps**, who were selected by the King, or regional chieftains, based on qualities such as speed, power of memory (messages often being verbal), clarity of speech, and being trustworthy. Whilst the days of these legendary postal runners, who were able to walk from Punakha to Trongsa and back in one day have now gone, the story of the service they provided has



become a feature at the Bhutan Postal Museum which was launched in Thimphu at the end of November. At the opening, sixty-two-year-old Ugyen Tenzin, one of the last postal runners, shared with the people of Thimphu how communications systems had developed in the country over the years. When he started as a postal runner in Lingzhi in 1976, his salary was Nu 217. He would have to carry official letters and the salary of government officials, crossing torrential rivers and dense forests. “Those were dangerous times,” he said. “Animals didn’t bother me so much. I was more afraid of robbers. In the line of work I was in, failure would have ended in my being behind bars.” At the launch of the Postal Museum in Thimphu, Ugyen Tenzin was recognised for his long and dedicated service for the country.

The modern postal network in Bhutan started in 1962 with the opening of the first post office in Phuentsholing. In the same year, two post offices were established in Thimphu and Paro. The world was then learning about Bhutan as being the land of beautiful stamps. Bhutan became a member of the Universal Postal Union in 1969 and fourteen years later, in 1983, it became a member of the Asian Pacific Postal Union. Modern telecommunications were introduced in Bhutan on November 1991, with the opening of the first public telephone booth in Thimphu. The first facsimile service was established a few weeks

later. Telecommunications received a major boost in 1999 with the launch of Internet and television and a year later, Bhutan initiated the first telemedicine project in 2000 between Mongar Regional General Hospital and Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital in Thimphu. Three years later, the country launched the first mobile communication service. Today, Bhutan has four licensed Internet Service Providers and the country has achieved internet access to 40.9 per cent of the population and fibre optic cables have reached 20 districts and 187 gewogs. Email, WeChat and Facebook now seem to have replaced the role of **garps**.

Passang Tshering, a popular blogger in Bhutan, with more than 740 followers, started with blogging on technical issues, then moved on to family stories, then started writing on social issues and has now progressed to historical pieces. As one of the most vocal and prominent bloggers in the country, he is also one of the co-founders of the recently formed Community of Bhutanese Bloggers (CBB). CBB is an association that attempts to bring bloggers together and educate them on various aspects of media literacy - the rights and responsibilities of social media users. The CBB aims to ensure equal readership for all bloggers through their mobile phone app and will soon be working with the Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy (BCMD) to train users in responsible blogging. Many believe that bloggers will in future play a significant role in changing people’s perception about social issues.

In the meantime the Government has just approved the development of a social media policy. The objectives are to use social media to disseminate and receive information, to use it as a tool for collaboration in the formulation of public policy and for improving the design and delivery of public services. All in all, quite an amazing pace of change in communications over such a short period of time.

NEWS AND UPDATES

Obituary Notice

Anthony Aris

27 March 1946 – 14 October 2015

Anthony Aris was a publisher of high reputation. Through his books he introduced readers to the fascinating world of Bhutan and these quality publications are seen as having made a significant contribution to the positive image Bhutan enjoys around the world. Anthony with his twin brother, the historian Michael Aris, visited Bhutan in the late 60's and both then and since, in his subsequent visits travelling all over the country, made many friends from all walks of life.

Anthony founded Serindia Publications in 1976 which resulted in the next twenty five years in the publication of a great number of exquisitely produced volumes in many different fields of scholarship related to Tibet, the Himalayas in general and Bhutan.

Anthony Aris was also a true social entrepreneur. A short time before he passed away in 1999, his brother Michael had taken the first steps towards setting up a Tibetan and Himalayan Studies Centre in Oxford. Anthony brought this project to a successful conclusion, securing the patronage of the Prince of Wales. The Centre is now located at Wolfson College, which also hosts the Lectureship dedicated to Tibetan and Himalayan studies. In bringing all this about it would be very difficult to overrate the importance of Anthony's patient, diplomatic and dedicated efforts.

On 22 October 2015, the first 'Aris Lecture' took place at Wolfson College. This is to be an annual event, in memory of both Michael and Anthony. This first lecture was given by Janet Gyatso, on the appropriate theme "Tibetan Studies and its Possible Futures". Sadly, after more than a year of illness, Anthony passed away on October 14th 2015 - in the week before the lecture. Anthony Aris is survived by his wife, son and daughter.

Lunaps hire helicopter to return home

In its first local charter, a group of Lunaps hired the government's helicopter to travel back to remote Lunana in Gasa. In a total of three flights, a group of 18 Lunaps, comprising children, women, and even a 20-day old infant, each paying Nu 32,750, to fly the 25 minute flight from Zomlingthang in Punakha back to Lunana. The local rate for hiring the helicopter is around Nu 167,500 or USD 2,500, plus some fuel surcharges.



Many Lunaps, mostly the elderly and children, are currently in Punakha spending the winter months away from the harsh northern cold. They also migrate down to Lunana to stock up on basic necessities. While Lunana is still under snow cover, the Lunana gup, Goenpo Tshering said that the group had to return for emergency reasons. Travelling on foot at this time of the year would have been impossible as the passes would be blocked. Even when clear, the trek to Lunana from Tashithang and Goenshari in Punakha would take up to eight days. Lunana has a population of around 2,000 people from one hundred and ninety five households. The Lunaps farm and also depend on livestock, but their main source of income is the highly lucrative fungi, cordyceps. So far, the helicopter has carried out medical evacuations, tourist flights, and one hydropower survey flight for the Economic Affairs Ministry in the east of the country.

Restoration of Wangduephodang Dzong

Members will no doubt be delighted to hear that the Society has now been able to release the generous funds raised by members towards the restoration costs of the Wangduephodang Dzong. Below is a letter received from from Budhiman Rai who controls the reconstruction funds and is Deputy Chief Accounts Officer in the Ministry of Finance.

"This is with reference to your letter regarding the contribution made by the Bhutan Society Trust Fund in UK for the reconstruction of Wangduephodang Dzong. In this regard, I would like to acknowledge with thanks the receipt/credit of fund Nu. 1,261,975.50 in the account. The information/list of contributions made will be updated in the website of the Ministry of Finance."

If members wish to check the Ministry of Finance website go to: <http://www.mof.gov.bt>. Scroll down - looking at the right hand panel to a picture of the old Dzong - and click on account 9999 for details of donations.

NEWS AND UPDATES

Safety at Mebartsho

Mebartsho is considered one of the most sacred sites in central Bhutan and is often called The Burning Lake. Today this small fresh water lake is a sacred pilgrimage site for the Bhutanese, with bright multicolored prayer flags surrounding it, and where a small altar dedicated to Terton Pema Lingpa has also been set up. On auspicious days people offer butter lamps at the lake. Many tourists visit the site to observe the spectacular beauty of this important historical and religious site.



Sadly, in early November, two people were drowned in the lake, bringing the total number of fatalities to five since 2011. Since 2013, the safety of all those visiting Mebartsho has been highlighted in many forums and discussed in the Bumthang Dzongkhag Tshogdu. The Tshogdu even considered disallowing unguided tourists at the lake but later resolved that the Dzongkhag had come up with appropriate safety measures instead. Two years on and safety at the lake site remains an issue.

None of the trails either side of the lake are secured by fencing, and it is understood that the Dzongkhag administration are still looking for funds to construct railings and traditional structures in eight hazardous areas to help ensure visitors' safety. However the Dzongkhag engineer, Yeshey Dorji, said that the safety plans could not be implemented out of fear of disturbing the sanctity of the sacred lake. Breaking and drilling of rocks could perturb the deities, although such negative effects of disturbing religious sites could be averted with prayers and offerings. In the meantime the Dzongkhag has put up cautionary signboards barring visitors from crossing certain hazardous points. The stringing of prayer flags has been prohibited and existing prayer flags will soon be removed. With so many flags obstructing the view, visitors climb down to the banks of the lake and it has been difficult for guides to see where they were going. However, most accidents occurred because visitors do not behave responsibly, go too close to the lake and ignore existing safety warnings, and guides should not be expected to risk their own safety as a consequence of such actions. The frail wooden bridge across the lake will be replaced and discussions will also take place to agree ownership of the lake. A resident guide to educate visitors on the lake's sacred history and safety issues, will also be organised.

91.2 % of Bhutanese are happy: latest GNH survey results

The GNH Index is a multi-dimensional and survey-based measure of well being and happiness of the Bhutanese population. It is a number crunched from happiness survey statistics across nine "domains", of which only one is living standards. Others include health, education, psychological well being, time use, community vitality and cultural diversity. In essence, GNH is made up of a blend of hard numbers, subjective perceptions and virtually unmeasurable concepts, but, since the notion was first introduced by Bhutan's fourth king in the 70s, it has gained some traction in the country.

There's nothing wrong with measuring subjective happiness levels – it's interesting precisely because they are subjective. In Bhutan, people's perceptions of their own health worsened even as healthcare indices improved. Still, 91% of Bhutanese are classed as either narrowly, extensively or deeply happy. "Narrowly happy" is defined as someone enjoying sufficient achievements in between half and two-thirds of the GNH domains, and "deeply or extensively happy", if it is two-thirds or more. Joy-wise that's roughly on a par with Denmark, even though Bhutan's adult literacy rate is around 60% and its GDP per capita puts it well below mid-table in world rankings. The 2015 survey covers 7,153 people aged 15-96, some 1% of the country's population. Interviews took place between January and May 2015 and were conducted by six survey teams that travelled to all 20 Dzongkhags. The survey included 148 questions and each interview took about an hour and a half to be completed. Since the last survey carried out in 2010, Bhutan's happiness index has risen from 0.743 to 0.756. Whether this is fast or slow has yet to be determined. The full findings of the GNH survey 2015 can be found on the GNH website. (www.grossnationalhappiness.com).

The ups and downs of fish ladders

Although, hydropower projects are the main driving force behind Bhutan's economic growth, the impact on the environment, particularly on aquatic life, has always been of concern.

One of the ways to mitigate its impact on aquatic life, especially to the fish population, has been the construction of fish ladders in the dams. An effective fish ladder will allow the migration of fish from downstream to the dam reservoir.



Of the many hydropower projects already constructed or being planned, only two have so far adopted this measure. These are the hydropower plants in Kurichhu and Dagachhu. The fish ladder in Kurichhu is a pool and weir type, which is one of the oldest styles of fish ladders, and has a depth of two meters. Such fish ladders are easier to fit in these low level dams whereas in other projects like Tala and Punatsangchhu I and II and Mangdechhu, which have high dams, it is quite difficult to design suitable fish ladders. However given the stringent environmental laws in the country and the need to preserve the aquatic life, there is pressure to adopt alternative measures in other hydropower projects where fish ladders are not suitable. In many western countries the problem has been overcome by breeding fingerlings and transporting them up and downstream depending on the migratory season. This process is now being considered for the dams at Punatsangchhu. The Kurichhu Dam fish ladder remains closed from November till February every year as studies suggest that fish do not migrate during those months.

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

During 2016, three issues of the Newsletter will be published.

The next issue will be at the end of June and the third will be at the end of September.

Dates of meetings not included in the Newsletters will be notified directly to members via e-mail and on the Society website. Please make sure that the Membership Secretary has your latest e-mail address.

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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:

rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com

*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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