

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



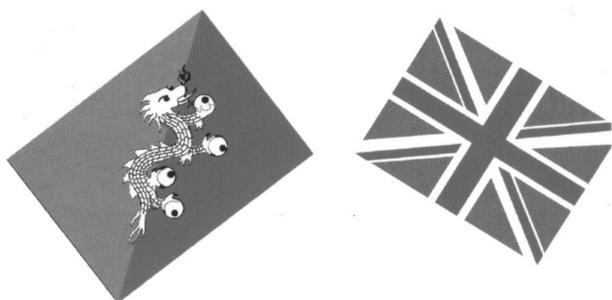
NEWSLETTER

Number 20

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT, GCMG

September 2001

The Annual Dinner 2001



Friday, November 9th 2001

**at the National Liberal Club
Whitehall Place
London SW1**

*Please see enclosed flyer for application form
and further details.*

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland will be in
Bhutan from September 14th to December 31st 2001.
Address: PO Box 1044, Thimphu, Bhutan
Tel: +975-2-321066
E-mail: mrutland@aol.com

*Michael Rutland will be delighted to meet members of
the Bhutan Society visiting Bhutan during this period.
Telephone him when you are in Thimphu.*

Those wishing to join the Society please contact:
The Hon. Treasurer
Mr. Nicholas Rhodes
28 Napier Gardens
Hythe, Kent CT21 6DD

Message of condolence to President George W. Bush

*Text of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's
message to Mr. George W. Bush, President of the
United States of America.*

“The Government and people of Bhutan are deeply shocked and concerned over the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC. On behalf of the Government and people of Bhutan, and on my own behalf, I would like to express our deepest condolences for the tragic loss of lives and catastrophic destruction resulting from these incomprehensible and abominable acts of terrorism.

We strongly condemn this terrorist attack on your country. The international community must extend its full cooperation and support to the United States in bringing to justice all those responsible for committing this senseless atrocity against the American people. I would like to express the solidarity of the Government and people of Bhutan to Your Excellency and the Government and people of the United States at this time of national tragedy.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

J.S.Wangchuck
King of Bhutan

The Kingdom's flag at half mast

The Head of Government, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, during an interview this morning (Wednesday 12th September) said that the Kingdom of Bhutan will observe a day of mourning and flags will be flown at half mast. A butter lamp offering will take place at noon today in Trashichhodzong. ●

Polytunnel Appeal

By Jessica Beaghen

I visited the Royal Botanic Garden in Bhutan in May of this year on a travel scholarship from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, where I am a second year Horticulture Diploma student. The Bhutanese landscape and the commitment of the Bhutanese people to the conservation and preservation of the flora and fauna of their country captivated me.

Bhutan's Royal Botanic Garden has two polytunnels. These polytunnels are the only place for the propagation of plants from seeds and cuttings collected on field trips. They also provide the only shelter for any plants that need protection over the winter months. Unfortunately the polythene on both these polytunnels was ripped to shreds by the high winds experienced in the winter. It desperately needs replacing with a strong grade of polythene. In addition some minor repairs need to be carried out. The Royal Botanic Gardens does not have the funds for this, and needs US\$2,100 (about £1,600) to restore them.

The people of Bhutan will gratefully receive any help that you can give towards raising this money.

Contributions may be made through the Bhutan Society. Please send a cheque made payable to the "Bhutan Society Trust Fund" to The Hon. Treasurer Nicholas Rhodes, 28 Napier Gardens, Hythe, Kent CT21 6DD, making it clear that your contribution is intended for the RBG Polytunnel Fund.

A Voice from the Past

The Hon. Secretary recently received the following request from the Bhutanese artist Chhime Dorji, who was a student at Yangchenphug High School when Society member Mr. John Tyson was its Principal.

Michael, I would like to send through the Bhutan Society Newsletter the following good wishes to Mr. John Tyson:

Dear Mr. Tyson,

Just a few evenings ago I bumped into an acquaintance of yours, Mr. Michael Rutland. In course of our conversation I was talking about our Art club back in School and I mentioned how fortunate were to have an accomplished Artist (Mr. Sen Gupta) as our Art teacher under your gracious patronage.

I had always remembered how kind and caring both you and your wife have been to us though it was a short period in our life... and that we all have so much respect and good memory of you and your family. When Karma Wangdi returned from the UK few years back he told me that he had been to visit you at your place and told me stories of your hospitality and warm reception.

I am also now a father of four grown up children, two daughters and two sons, eldest is a daughter and will be completing her High School this year. I am always in debt to you and your wife for the guidance and helping hand in making us what we are today, thank you and hope that we meet again sometime in future,

*Yours faithfully,
Chhime Dorji*

The Bhutan-inspired art of Merlyn Chesterman

By Caroline Dale

Merlyn Chesterman will exhibit a number of her paintings and wood block prints of Bhutan in the Lady Violet Room of the National Liberal Club during the 2001 Annual Dinner. A percentage of proceeds from work sold on the evening will be donated to the Bhutan Society Trust Fund.

There is something immensely satisfying about discovering the East through Merlyn Chesterman's paintings. The bold primary tones, sharp outlines and details gently guide the senses over subjects frequently quite alien to Western eyes. Layers of appreciation start to form and the more you see, the more you get.



Merlyn Chesterman

Merlyn first visited Bhutan with the Royal Asiatic Society in 1979. At the time she was living in Hong Kong where she had grown up among expatriate academics. Apart from a spell studying Fine Art at Bath Academy of Art in the early 1970s, home had always been in the

Far East. This opportunity to visit Bhutan at the time of the fabulous Paro Tsechu (Paro Festival) opened a fresh chapter in the development of her work – notably in the intensity and harmony of her colours.

Merlyn visited Bhutan again on a journalists' trip and once more by invitation together with her young children in 1989. Each visit took her deeper into the country and its traditions. And each visit yielded a new body of work. Members of the Bhutanese Royal Family attended her subsequent exhibitions in Hong Kong and they now possess some of her paintings.

Merlyn has been a member of the Bhutan Society since 1993. Today she photographs, prints and paints in South West England, far away from the Land of the Thunder Dragon. Home is the remote village of Hartland on the sparse, exposed, and craggy coast of North Devon – an environment that kindles a kind of spiritual parallel traceable in her Bhutan experience. ●



*Inside Paro Dzong
Gouache on paper
Approx. 12"x 9"*

Opening of the Bhutan Textile Museum

In June the newly created Bhutan Textile Museum was opened by Her Majesty Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuk, the Museum's founder and Patron.

Situated in a new and specially designed building in the main street of Thimphu, the Museum aims to be a permanent focus for exhibitions celebrating the outstanding skills and quality of Bhutanese weaving and textile arts.

Speaking at the Opening Ceremony, which was attended by members of the Cabinet and distinguished foreign guests, H.M. The Queen emphasised the core place that textile skills occupy in the culture of Bhutan, and expressed the wish that the Museum would further enhance knowledge of Bhutanese textiles both overseas and within the Kingdom. As well as fine examples of the textile arts, demonstrations of weaving allow visitors to see the skills in action.

Bhutanese weaving is acknowledged to be among the finest in the world, and a collection of antique Bhutanese textiles has recently been offered for sale in the USA with a price tag of US\$8 million! ●

Preserving Folk Heritage

A 19th century three-storey traditional rammed mud and timber house in Kawajangsa, Thimphu, has been reborn as a folk heritage museum to document traditional Bhutanese lifestyle and values.

The design and the form of the house resembles an average household in the Wang area during that era. Apart from some renovation to recreate the authenticity of a typical medieval house, the original design and architecture has been maintained. The aged structure also demonstrates the durability of local building materials.

A comprehensive collection of clothes, furniture, crafts, tools and farming implements centred around agriculture and animal husbandry depict the main sources of livelihood for rural households. Other items portray religious practices, sports and leisure activities.

The exhibits are structured according to the way space was used in rural households. The first floor was used as a pen for livestock and displays implements ranging from farming tools to equestrian equipment for riding, travel and transport. The second floor was the family granary where grains were stored in containers of various types and sizes. The family lived on the top floor.

Complementing the 19th century house are typical paddy, wheat and millet fields, a traditional water mill (with mill stones that date back more than 150 years), traditional style kitchen gardens and a traditional hot stone bath. Native trees and plants, such as plants that were and are still used for making paper, threads to weave cloth, traditional medicines and dyes, are also represented. The museum was inaugurated on July 28 by the museum's founder and patron, Her Majesty the Queen Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. ●

◀ The Bhutan Society Tour of Bhutan ▶

On the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom, the Foreign Ministry of Bhutan has invited a delegation of up to sixteen members of the Bhutan Society to visit Bhutan on guest visas.

The normal tourist fee of USD 200 per day has been waived, and members of the group will pay only the basic in-country costs, which will total around USD 100 per day. This will include accommodation (twin), full board, transportation and guide services.

The tour will last approximately fourteen days, and may include some official functions. The itinerary will be fixed later, but it will include a cross-country tour at least as far as Bumthang. It may be possible for a sub-group of the party to undertake a short trek, while the remainder of the party takes a less energetic route!

The tour will be led by the Hon. Secretary of the Bhutan Society, Michael Rutland, who will make the in-country arrangements. The flights to and from the UK will be booked as a party booking by Steve Berry, of Himalayan Kingdoms. The Tour will take place in mid to late October next year (2002), aiming to avoid the main tourist throng.

This is a splendid opportunity for members of the Society to visit Bhutan, either to renew old friendships or as a first visit, and it is open only to members of the Society. If you would like to register for this Tour, please contact the Hon. Secretary as follows:

By post to: Michael Rutland
PO Box 1044, Thimphu, Bhutan
By e-mail to: mrutland@aol.com

Please be sure to give your address (in block letters), phone number and e-mail address (if you have one!).

Royal Audit Authority goes online

As is well-known by bilateral and multilateral agencies involved in aid projects in Bhutan, the Kingdom has long had a reputation for its hard line against corruption. An essential tool in minimizing corruption has been the Royal Audit Authority, many of whose personnel have received training in the United Kingdom. The Royal Audit Authority can now be accessed on the internet at www.raa.gov.bt.

The auditor general, Dasho Kinzang Wangdi said that the web site serves as a reminder that audit is not an end in itself but an essential part of a regulatory system. A spokesman said that the site is an indication of the RAA's support of the international growth of knowledge and ability in the use of information technology. The web site will serve as a forum where government and public agencies of Bhutan can download various audit forms, manuals or any other information.

The JOCV resident representative, Mr. Yasuyuki Mori, formally inaugurated the RAA web site on Tuesday morning (September 10) in Thimphu. ●

The 2001 National Assembly

As the 79th session of the National Assembly concluded on August 3, the 14th day of the 6th Bhutanese month, the representatives of the clergy, the government, and the people gathered in prayer before the Golden Throne. This is the traditional gesture of devotion to the Druk Gyalpo, symbolic of unity and harmony among all sections of the Bhutanese population.

In his concluding address the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dasho Ugyen Dorji, said that the session had been a success. As in preceding years the 79th session was dominated by nation-wide concern over the illegal presence of ULFA and NDFB militants on Bhutanese soil. With the entire Bhutanese population closely united behind the Druk Gyalpo, the government had signed the agreed minutes after several rounds of talks with the ULFA leadership this June. The ULFA leaders agreed to shift four camps out of Bhutan by December 2001. Dasho Ugen Dorji expressed his hope that the remaining five camps could also be closed down through similar dialogue, thus avoiding bloodshed which would not be desirable to either side.

A number of Acts passed this year further strengthen the rule of law within the unique Bhutanese system. The introduction of personal income tax is expected to lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth within society. Every Bhutanese citizen should pay their taxes honestly and be proud to make their contributions to nation building, said the Speaker. The judicial system saw historic reform with the enactment of the Civil and Criminal Procedure Code, yet another step towards a strong and comprehensive legal system which is not only simple, practical and accessible to all the people but will lead to the promotion of a just society and safeguard the rights of all the people. The Speaker said that the National Assembly of Bhutan itself, the nation's highest legislative body, continues to evolve. With the devolution of powers initiated by His Majesty and unprecedented socio-economic change and growth taking place, the National Assembly of Bhutan is geared towards taking up increasingly greater responsibility for the running of the Kingdom. ●

Druk Air's second plane back in service

After 13 months at BAe Systems in Woodford, near Manchester, undergoing repairs to and eventually replacement of its wings, Druk Air's second BAe 146 plane returned to Paro on August 3rd. Druk Air's BAe 146 spent 13 months under repair after corrosion in the wings was detected during a routine structural check. After detailed x-rays of both wings BAe Systems found major repairs necessary. Druk Air then requested that both wings be replaced with new ones. BAe Systems declined this request, and said that both wings could be repaired. Following much grinding and filing of the corrosion on the wings, it was not until nine months later that BAe Systems finally admitted that the wings were beyond repair and new ones would have to be placed on the aircraft. According to a report in Kuensel, Bae Systems has acknowledged that if they had initially listened to Druk Air's requests a great deal of money and time could of been saved on both sides.

Whilst BAe Systems maintains that the problem was caused by the fuel used in the Druk Air planes, it appears that a number of Bae 146 planes in various parts of the world, including South America, are experiencing the same wing corrosion and Druk Air strongly disputes BAe Systems' diagnosis of the cause of the problem.

During the last thirteen months Druk Air has endeavoured to maintain its flight schedule with only one plane. In addition to the resulting loss of revenue and inconvenience to passengers, Druk Air has had to pay out US\$1.5 million in repair costs. Fortunately during the signing of the repair contract, a clause was added placing a ceiling on repair costs to Druk Air of UK£1.025 million (US\$1.5 million). Had this not been done, the repair bill could have amounted to US\$4.5 million. Nevertheless, for Bhutan's small airline a million pounds represents a very significant sum of money.

Druk Air should have both planes operational for the impending tourist season in September. "The flight schedule that has been announced for the September season will not change with a second plane, rather additional flights will be operated," said the Managing Director of Druk Air. ●

Bhutan and Nepal agree on measures to simplify verification process

The Foreign Minister of Bhutan, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, and the Finance Minister of Nepal, Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, described the eleventh meeting of the Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) in Thimphu from August 20-23 as "satisfactory". During the meeting the two governments agreed to accelerate the verification process of the people in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal but, at the same time, maintain the "quality and thoroughness" of the verification work. The measures agreed upon to accelerate the verification process were: a) simplification of procedures; b) strengthening of the JVT (Joint Verification Team); and c) bifurcation of the JVT to conduct separate activities simultaneously.

"I am satisfied with the talks," Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley said after the meeting. "We were able to agree on accelerating the process while making sure that the measures we have taken will not in any way be compromised, so that at no time will the verification process lose its credibility and at no time should we feel the need for the process to be repeated. I think we have not sacrificed the objective of thoroughness." The Foreign Minister added that he saw no major obstacles to the process that had already been initiated by the two governments "because initially the two sides had agreed and established a very elaborate mechanism for verification. Since the mechanism is very elaborate, spelling out every detailed aspect of the verification process, there has been no conflict, nor differences, between the two teams so far and I think that as long as we adhere to this mechanism there should be no problems."

According to Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, the 11th MJC had made a good beginning in that the two governments had agreed to simplify the process of verification. "I am happy with what we have achieved during the present round of talks," he said. Dr. Mahat also said that the present working of the joint verification team had been very useful. "It has been an eye-opener on the part of both sides in the sense that there is eagerness on both sides to solve the problem," he said. "The two sides have gathered a lot of experience, and a lot of mutual confidence and trust as well." ●