

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 40

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON KVCO

SUMMER 2009

The AGM of the Society will be held at The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1 (off Whitehall) at 6.15 pm on Thursday 10th September 2009. The AGM notice is enclosed. This will be followed by the annual talk by Michael Rutland on 'Recent Events in Bhutan'. See page 3....

'The Dragon's Gift' Exhibition

This exhibition will be held at the Musée Guimet in Paris in the autumn from 6th October to 25th January 2010. The Society is currently planning to organise a visit to Paris for those who are interested in seeing this exhibition. Members will be aware this exhibition will not be held in London during the summer as originally hoped. A day visit has been proposed to take place on Tuesday 17th November. This date has been chosen as the Musée Guimet is closed to the public on Tuesdays and we could enjoy the privilege of the curator Mme Bazin as our exclusive guide on a private viewing that day. The plan would be to travel to Paris by Eurostar from London, arrive in Paris in time for an early lunch, visit the exhibition during the afternoon and return, after a light snack, on a late train that evening. Whilst in Paris we would travel together by coach. The approximate cost of this visit would be in the region of £130, but it would depend on the number travelling. Members who are interested, or would like further information about this trip, please contact:

Baroness Dorothea von Friesen

Tel: 0034 971 530 918 or

E-mail doryfriesen@yahoo.co.uk

Initial contact please by July 31st

MEETING DATES

**Monday 21st September, 2009
6:30pm for 7:00pm**

The speaker is Drupa Rinpoche Tenzin Kheychock, head of Drupa monastery in Kham, Eastern Tibet. He was recognised as the 7th Drupa Rinpoche by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama in 1988. From his travels Rinpoche is aware of the modern world and its concerns. He is a keen speaker and encourages questions and dialogue. Drupa Rinpoche will speak about a Buddhist's perspective on happiness and contentment.

**Thursday 15th October, 2009
6:30pm for 7:00pm**

The speaker is Tshering Tashi who will speak on the 2003 conflict in Bhutan. Tshering Tashi is a Thimphu based writer and businessman who had just co-authored a book which looks at various aspects of, and events in, Bhutan, both in the past and in more recent times (see book review on page 3)

Both meetings will be held at:

**The Oriental Club, Stratford Place
(off Oxford St.) London WC1 1ES**

Drinks available before each lecture

Please note: Oriental Club rules require gentlemen to wear jacket and tie. No jeans!

*Are Members interested in visiting the National Arboretum in Westonbirt, Gloucestershire on **Saturday 31st October 2009**? It is one of the most spectacular tree gardens in the world, with over 3,000 different trees and shrubs, including some Bhutanese species. The autumn colour won't disappoint! Depending on numbers it may be possible to book overnight accommodation, perhaps hiring a room for a talk/lecture. If you would be interested please contact Matt Heasman ASAP at:*

E-mail: matthew.heasman@virgin.net

Mobile: 07793604609 or Tel: 01698 711089

News and updates from the Society

The 17th Annual Dinner of the Bhutan Society will be held on Friday, 9th October 2009 at The Travellers Club 106 Pall Mall, London SW1 5EP

All Members and their friends are invited to join us for what is always a most enjoyable evening and a great way to catch up with old friends ... and make new ones! Please see enclosed application form for full details or contact Andrew Sutton, Annual Dinner Secretary on 01737 552723 or by e-mail at andrewsutton001@aol.com

Please consider sponsoring, or part sponsoring, a ticket for a Bhutanese student to attend. Students are invited as guests of the Society and your financial assistance is a great help.

Farewell from Lucy....

Dear Members, dear Friends,

It has been almost ten years since I took over the editorship of the Bhutan Society Newsletter. It has been a labour of love, but one which I have enjoyed greatly, and I am delighted that (with assistance in particular from Robin Lee) the Newsletter is now not only professionally printed, but also in full colour! However, the demands of two young children and a family business mean that increasingly I haven't been able to give the Newsletter the attention it deserves. It is therefore with both sadness and relief that I have now handed over the editorship to Sylvia Robert-Sargeant. I wish her all the best and I'm sure she'll take the Newsletter to new heights.

My husband, Bodo remains as webmaster and we intend to develop the website (www.bhutansociety.org), which is receiving an increasing number of visitors. If you have any ideas or comments please do let us know at: website@bhutansociety.org

We would be delighted to hear from you. With best wishes, Lucy Hornberger

.... and Thank you from us

On behalf of all the Members of the Society, I would like to express our very sincere thanks to Lucy Hornberger and her husband Bodo for the loyalty and dedication they have shown in producing our Newsletter for the last decade. Without them, the Newsletter would possibly have ceased, and certainly would not have reached the excellent standard that it has done. It is the single most important way in which Members keep in touch with Bhutan and the Society. Without it the Society would find it very difficult to function. Lucy and Bodo have put in an immense amount of work editing and publishing the Newsletter in spite of the birth of two boys and the success of their own business ventures. So thanks from all of us in the Society.....and we are pleased they will both remain active Members in the future.

Michael Rutland Chairman

Thanks to Peter Li

Observant Members will have noticed a new name to contact in this year's Dinner announcement on page 2. Peter Li has now decided, after a decade of successfully organizing our Annual Dinner event, to hand on the baton as the Society's Dinner Secretary.

Our sincere thanks go to Peter Li for so many years' contribution, and for providing us with a succession of fine dining occasions which have always gone splendidly on the night despite the vagaries of members' requests and requirements. His sound knowledge of the Society's membership also helped ensure we were always sitting alongside good company at such events.

Members will be interested to know that Peter's connections with the Bhutan Society initially arose because of his close family relationship to the former Foreign Minister, the late Lyonpo Dawa Tsering., and having joined the Society with his wife, Linda, they have both been ... and continue to be highly supportive and active Members.

Andrew Sutton has taken over this function for 2009 but would be very happy if any Member offers to play a role in the Dinner organisation in future years.

Michael Rutland
Chairman

RECENT EVENTS IN BHUTAN

An informal talk by Michael Rutland

**7:00 pm, Thursday 10th
September 2009**

Following the AGM of the Society, Michael Rutland our Chairman and Bhutan's Hon. Consul to the UK, will again present his very popular annual roundup of news from Bhutan.

This past year has indeed been a momentous time in Bhutan with the Coronation of the 5th King taking place in November 2008. Members will have seen various reports of Coronation events in the previous issue of the Newsletter including Michael's experience of attending the Coronation Banquet. We can be sure there will be more stories and photographs of other memorable events during that time, perhaps spiced with the odd bit of gossip!

Michael, who lives in Bhutan for much of the year, is particularly well placed to discuss the changes and developments taking place in the country and there will be plenty of opportunity for questions.

**Venue: The National Liberal Club
Whitehall Place
London SW1A 2HE**

Drinks available before the lecture

Advance diary notice

On 23rd November, Dr Aubrey Leatham FRCP Order of Bhutan, will speak to the Society about his medical and travelling experiences in Bhutan in the early 60's. Venue will be The Oriental Club.

Bold Bhutan Beckons

by Tim Fischer and Tshering Tashi

Published by Copyright Publishing (Australia), 2009
ISBN 978-1-876344-59-7 360 pp, illustrated
available from: www.copyright.net.au

This collaboration between Tim Fischer, friend of Bhutan and one time deputy Prime Minister of Australia, and Tshering Tashi, a younger Thimphu based writer and businessman, looks at various aspects of, and events in, Bhutan's past, many of them recent. The book reaches back to the 17th century and follows through to the elections and the Coronation in 2008.

Tshering Tashi contributes most of the chapters and presents them in a conversational style. In his extensive research he has talked to many characters – often elderly – so can relate a form of oral history.

Amongst others, we meet a remarkable monk who spends most of his time in retreat far above Punakha, a master of traditional Bhutanese music and an Indian civil engineer who helped build Bhutan's roads.

A substantial chapter uses the extraordinary life of Tshering Tashi's father – Dasho Dorji Gyeltshen, Zimpon (Chamberlain) to the Fourth King throughout his reign – to relate events and developments through the years from the late 1960s.

We hear about the tensions surrounding the assassination of Lonchen Jigme Palden Dorji (Prime Minister) in 1964 and, in greater detail, the background and execution of the successful expulsion of Indian insurgents from southern Bhutan in 'the two day Low Intensity Conflict' in 2003 – during which the King was known as Hotel Mike.

Tim Fischer provides the closing chapter in which he describes the eleven 'Levers of Life' from the Bhutanese experience with further personal thoughts and research. This is a book full of information and insights with a very fresh and positive view of Bhutan's ability to cope with future challenges.

Andrew Sutton

NEWS FROM THE

Floods kill nine people

Three days of excessively heavy rain over the whole of Bhutan in late May has had some devastating consequences.

Nine people were killed. Six died in Bumthang, including two women and four men, who were buried under a landslide while collecting cordyceps and two school students aged 8 and 16, both from Thimphu, were caught in the floods. The other flood victim was a dantak labourer in Chukha.



River scene close to the Sunday market in Thimphu

Updated reports from across the country show that damage has been extensive.

- Around 10 highways, 7 feeder roads, and other smaller roads have been blocked or washed away, some at multiple points, posing a huge transport challenge to the people.
- 49 bridges have been washed away, of which 5 are steel bridges, 3 permanent bridges, 14 bazam or traditional bridges, 12 temporary bridges, 5 wooden bridges and 10 suspension bridges in 13 dzongkhags.
- The floods have also washed away or damaged 10 government buildings and 18 houses.

Agriculture has taken the hardest hit, with most irrigation take-off points from the river destroyed. Dams in several communities have been damaged and acres of forest plantation and cultivated paddy fields have been wiped out or submerged.

Clearing the damage could take some time, according to officials. The scale of devastation could also have a serious effect on food and fuel supplies in Thimphu and elsewhere.

Tourism to come to Merak-Sakteng

The brokpas (highlanders) of remote Merak and Sakteng will see more chilips (foreigners) with the Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) having identified it as a tourist destination.

On the directives of the Cabinet to open up this remote community to tourism, the Council carried out a study of the area. The Council's Director - General, Kezang Wangdi said, "Merak and Sakteng fit positively in TCB's policy of 'high quality, low volume' tourism. There is good potential for nature-based tourism, such as trekking, rafting, bird watching, rock climbing and village walks in the east."

Close to the border with India's Arunachal Pradesh, Merak and Sakteng are located about 50 miles east of Trashigang at an altitude of 3,000 m above sea level.

The journey from Thimphu to Merak and Sakteng, normally takes about 6 days. However when the domestic airstrip at Yonphula in Trashigang has been completed, it will be shortened to only 2 days.

"An airport at Yonphula is a complementary action for promoting tourism in the east," said Kezang Wangdi, adding that, with the airstrip and the Guwahati trade route opened, Merak and Sakteng would be very accessible to tourism.

Bhutan Government goes online

The Bhutanese Government has decided to bring public administration online and the system is expected to be activated this year. The Director of the Department of Information and Technology (DIT), Tenzin Chhoeda, said that the online system would link every police station in the country with the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs.

Another e-governance project is the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital's information system. A patient's medical history would be transferred to an electronic database that would be available to the relevant doctors. "This will not only reduce the burden placed on a limited number of medical specialists in the country, but also improve their delivery of healthcare," says Chhoeda.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Civil Society Organization Authority established

The Civil Society Organization Authority has finally been formed. Its establishment was a requirement of the Civil Society Act which came into force on July 20, 2007.

The Authority, which comprises five elected members, will look into the registration and accreditation of Civil Society Organizations (CSO's). They will also encourage and facilitate better internal administration and monitor activities and other responsibilities.

Though the Authority has been formed, it will take another six months or more for it to start functioning efficiently. "We cannot function properly since we still need to establish an office," said Kinchho Norbu, elected secretary of the Authority. "The budget will come from the Government, we will also receive some staff from the RCSE," he added. Talks are underway with some donor agencies to fund the construction of the office.

Civil Society Organizations as mentioned in the Act are associations, societies, foundations, charitable trusts, non-profit organizations and other entities that do not distribute any income or profit to their members, founders, donors, directors and trustees. At present, there are 28 listed CSO's and the Authority is expecting more. The Authority will hire an international consultant to set up procedures and other formalities for registration.

Many listed CSO's are looking forward to how the Authority would benefit them. "CSO's can help strengthen civil society and promote the overall development of the country, so the establishment of an Authority is important," said a member of RENEW, a CSO in Thimphu.

Paro Tshechu sees a sharp drop in the number of tourists

Even the Paro Tshechu, one of the most popular festivals in Bhutan which normally attracts thousands of tourists from across the world, has been affected this year by the global economic crisis. The festival experienced a sharp drop in the number of visitors.

Thousands of people normally throng the Deyangkha ground as the Paro Tshechu begins. But this year, the situation is quite different. There were not as many tourists jostling among the crowd and the sitting gallery was mostly occupied by Bhutanese.

The Dzongkhag Administration Officer, Tshewang Dorji, who has been coordinating the festival for the last few years, confirmed that compared to previous years, tourist arrivals at the Tshechu this year had been minimal. The economic slump also hit the tour operators, hoteliers and resort owners in Paro. Most of the 40 hotels and resorts in Paro are normally packed during the Tshechu season. But this year, several of the proprietors and managers had the same story to share – many rooms were lying vacant.

In his 'State of the Nation' address at the opening of the new session of the National Assembly on 26th June, the Prime Minister announced that tourism numbers so far this year are down by 34%.

CD of the Bhutan Coronation trip now available

Copies of the CD of photographs taken during the Bhutan Society Coronation tour are still available.

The CD features highlights of Bhutan as well as Coronation celebrations in Thimphu and the CD is playable on both standard DVD and computer.

If you would like to purchase a copy please contact:

Andrew Sutton
7 Court Hill
Chipstead
Surrey CR5 3NQ

Cheques for £10 (including p+p) per copy should be made payable to
The Bhutan Society Trust Fund.

Meeting Report

Researching the Buddhist Wall Paintings of Bhutan

Anyone who has visited Bhutan will be aware of its extraordinarily rich heritage of wall paintings, and of the fundamentally important role these paintings continue to serve in Buddhist temples and monasteries. It is less commonly appreciated how vulnerable these paintings are to factors such as tourism, building works and misguided conservation efforts.

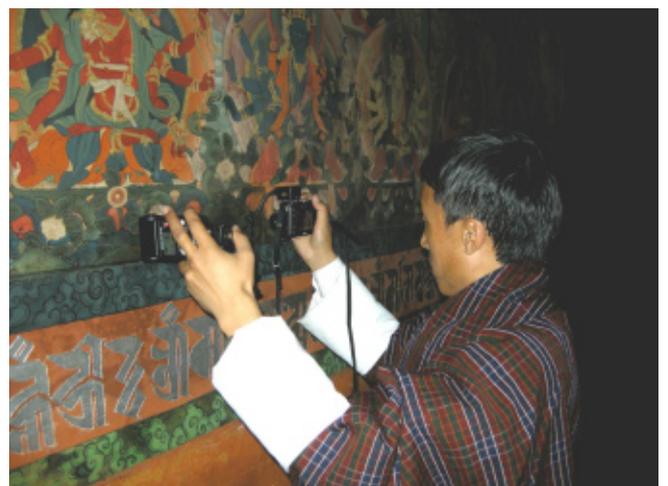


The wall paintings of Bhutan have never been seriously studied, so at present no one has a clear idea of how many paintings exist, or of their dating, condition, or relative significance. Similarly, there is no adequate understanding of their original materials and techniques, without which appropriate conservation measures cannot be designed. Such an understanding can only be achieved through sophisticated scientific examination, which might at first sight seem out of place in Bhutan. Yet Buddhism and western science need not be antithetical, and in a typically enlightened measure the Bhutanese Government has recently recognised such research as 'an essential prerequisite for future conservation efforts'.

Bhutan's Department of Culture and the Courtauld Institute of Art have therefore recently joined forces in a three-year study of the materials and techniques of Bhutanese wall paintings, generously funded by an anonymous US donor. In our lecture to the Bhutan Society in April, I presented an introduction to this project together with my colleagues Lisa Shekede and Stephen Rickerby, who undertake the necessary fieldwork each summer in Bhutan, and then the painstaking follow-up analysis at the Courtauld. No more appropriate or skilled specialists could have been selected than Lisa and Stephen, who have worked for many years on wall paintings in China and other countries throughout the world.

The illustration above shows the sites examined in 2008, and below is one of the Department's conservators – Tashi Llendup – recording wall paintings with equipment provided by the Courtauld (such assistance with materials and equipment is an essential part of the project). During the lecture, Lisa and Stephen presented some of the major analytical findings that have already been made, particularly through the examination of cross-sections of microscopic samples of painting.

These demonstrate the immense sophistication of many of the wall paintings, including materials such as gilding and fugitive organic colorants which can all too easily be lost in conservation work if their presence is not realised. In other cases – as at Dumtse Lhakhang and Tamshing monastery – examination was able to demonstrate for the first time that more than one period of painting is present, which obviously has immense implications for our understanding of the history and development of Bhutanese wall paintings. By the end of the project in 2011, it should be the case that the materials and techniques of the wall paintings of Bhutan have been more systematically studied and understood than those of any other country in Asia.



Professor David Park
Director, Conservation of Wall Painting Department
Courtauld Institute of Art

This summary is based on a presentation given at a meeting of the Society in April 2009

Profile: Bhutanese in the UK

Continuing our series of profiles of Bhutanese studying and/or working in the UK, Dr. Thinley Yangzom talks about her life and experiences here

1. Where is 'home' in Bhutan? What family have you left behind?

My parents are from Bumthang but I was born and brought up in Thimphu. I live in Thimphu with my husband and two daughters, aged 5 and 11. Thanks to technology I can 'Skype' my family almost on a daily basis.

2. What are you studying in England and why did you choose London for the course?

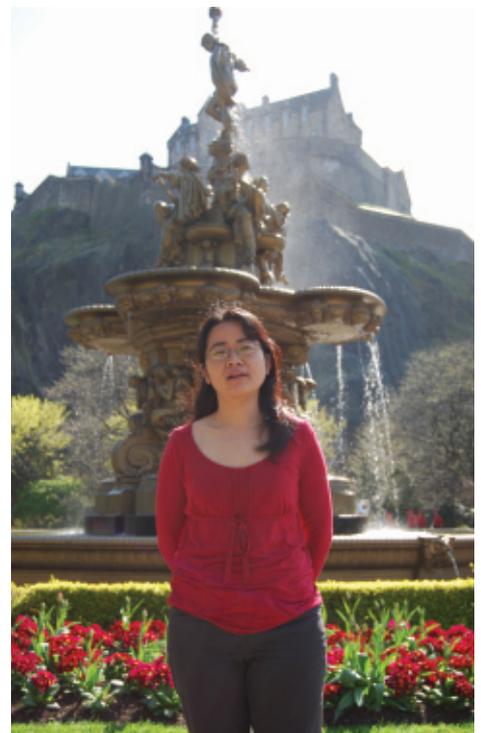
Having completed my MBBS from Mymensingh Medical College, Bangladesh, I am doing my masters in Tropical Medicine & International Health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. I chose London as I had heard about the reputation of the school. Besides that I also wanted to experience life in London, having read and heard so much about it since my school days. In my class there are about 30 doctors from 15 countries. So it is quite a mix of people from different backgrounds. Apart from the routine lectures and seminars we have fun sharing our experiences, professionally and also culturally. We learn a lot from one another.

3. Did you get much advice about living in London before you came? Is there anything in particular which you would have liked to know in advance?

Apart from asking friends and family who had been to London, I browsed the Internet for more information. But being here in person was altogether a different experience from what I had read and heard about. I was totally unaware that Londoners love to queue for everything! So it was a shock to see long lines of people everywhere I went - from bus stops to supermarkets - and even toilets.

4. Have you had time to see the country around or away from London? Will there be any time for travel later in your stay?

Oh yes. One good thing in London is the free entrance to the museums. I have visited almost all the museums and it was very enlightening. Among the important and historic places that I have visited was the birth place of William Shakespeare, Stratford-Upon-Avon. It was quite thrilling because I grew up reading his masterpieces - from plays to sonnets to poems - in my high school.



5. You have seen some 'good' snowfalls in February. Have you been surprised by the way that many people react – building snowmen, sledging, throwing snowballs?

No, not really. It is exactly how people react back home. However it was quite an experience to be here during the snowfall as the whole public transport system was grounded on that day, I couldn't go to the college. So, I went out with my friends to take some pictures and posted on *Facebook* so that my friends and family back home could see it all. In Thimphu, it is usually declared a holiday and in the villages people await expectantly because it is believed to be a sign for a good harvest.

6. Apart from family and friends, what do you miss most of Bhutan?

I miss the simplicity of life in Bhutan. Life is so fast here and everything is on the go. In the buses and tubes, people would be either reading newspapers or listening to music. It is sad that such kind of behavioural changes are beginning to emerge in Bhutan, especially in Thimphu. I also miss my workplace. I used to work in the emergency room in JDWNR Hospital- the busiest ER in Bhutan.

SOCIETY UPDATES

Restoration works at Trongsa Ta Dzong

In December 2008, after four years of extensive renovation, parts of the ancient watch tower have been transformed into a "State of the Art Museum" and two hermits could finally return into their newly refurbished homes in the south wing for lifelong meditation.

The Ta Dzong renovation project was initiated by Marie Christine Weinberger (the former Coordinator of the Austrian Development Agency in Bhutan), who with her enthusiasm and energy kept the project going until the inauguration. Most spectacular of all was the reconstruction of the great Utse tower after its unexpected collapse during the restoration works in 2006. Bhutanese and Austrian craftsman and other experts worked alongside each other, facing the unnerving pressure of finishing the museum before the Coronation year, 2008.

The author came to Bhutan in 2007, to help with the restoration works on the museum objects, and stayed seven months in Trongsa, working with local monks, conservators and craftsmen. Most of the exhibited statues are on loan from the temples of Trongsa Dzong. Years of dust, incense and butter lamps had tarnished the initial splendour of the gold and mineral colours. They are usually made from unburned clay mixed with Bhutanese paper fibres and thus are very heavy and brittle. Many had suffered broken limbs and other damage during previous transportation.

The repair work carried out on most objects can hardly be described as conservation work in the Western sense. The circumstances, special requests and the state of the objects required to a large extent restoration. One of the main and interesting features was the integration of traditional Bhutanese craft methods into the repair works, such as the use of paper-clay, high quality pigments and real gold. Also the painting of the new objects for the Museum "in the old style" was carried out by the conservators and monks.

Timea Tallian

This summary is based on a presentation given by the author at a meeting of the Society in May 2009

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NOTE

While many Members do use the Internet, we believe that a real minority prefer (or rely upon) 'hard copy' communications. 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.

Members with e-addresses are invited to send an e-mail to the Membership Secretary Elizabeth Lee with their current e-mail address.

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