

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 48

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

WINTER 2012

## Successful silent auction at Annual Dinner

At the Annual Dinner of the Society on 28 September 2012, the Bhutan Society Trust Fund launched an appeal for contributions from members and friends to support the fund which the King of Bhutan has established to assist the rebuilding of the Dzong at Wangduephodrang. It was destroyed by fire on 24 June this year



Dorothea von Friesen – an active and talented member of the Committee – recently painted a watercolour of the Wangduephodrang Dzong. She presented this to the Society and it was offered by 'silent auction' at the Annual Dinner. There it attracted several bids and inspired donations; the lucky and generous winner was Matthew Heasman. Enclosed with this Newsletter is a copy of the Appeal Letter which includes a form which can be returned to Lucy Hornberger, Treasurer of the Trust Fund. UK taxpayers should make their donations under Gift Aid so permitting the Trust Fund to recover related tax and add this to the funds transferred to Bhutan.

## Forthcoming Meeting

### Bhutan: Transition and Possibilities

**7pm Monday 4 February 2013**

**Speaker: Dorji Wangchuck**

This talk will look at the progress made by Bhutan since the first democratic election that was held in 2008. Dorji Wangchuck will consider the political and economic challenges currently faced by the country and will explore what promises the next national election, due to be held in February 2013, will hold.

Dorji Wangchuck, who read for an MBA at the Judge Business School in Cambridge 2007-2008 now works in the financial services industry in London. Prior to coming to the UK, Dorji worked for the Royal Government in Bhutan.

**Meeting will be held at The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE**

*Drinks will be available from 6.30pm*

## Druk Air services on the increase

With the arrival of a leased 138-seater Airbus in the country, Druk Air now has a total of five aircraft.

Airline officials confirmed that the leased Airbus from Greece landed at Paro International Airport on September 1 and was received by a religious ceremony performed by monks.

Druk Air claimed that the additional aircraft would reduce congestion during the busy tourist season. The airline, which started connecting Paro with Singapore from September 1 this year, is preparing to introduce new routes to Hong Kong and Mumbai in the near future.

*The AGM of the Society took place at The Travellers Club in London on September 19 and was followed by a talk from our Chairman, Michael Rutland, on "Recent Developments in Bhutan. Thirty eight members attended and a copy of the minutes of the AGM are enclosed.*

# MEETING REPORT

## Environmental Conservation in Bhutan – a middle path to Happiness?

When environmental degradation continued in many parts of the world as a trade-off to economic development, Bhutan followed the opposite course. Today, we have the largest portion of area under protected areas and highest bio-diversity for a country of its size. Several factors attributed to this success; religious ethos, cultural values, low population density, and underlying all these – Leadership. Bhutan stepped into modernization as late as the early 1960's; concurrently, conservation agendas were flourishing globally and the concept of sustainable development burgeoning. We could thus bank on our rich natural capital, adapt to lessons learnt from the world and design our very own unique sustainable development model -The Middle Path, based on the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH). As well as the GNH development philosophy, environmental conservation is also unique and local. Indeed, environmental conservation is a pillar to conditioning happiness.

But conservation comes with huge cost – economic and social, with implications on happiness. Human wildlife conflict results in not only significant economic losses (livestock depredation and crop raiding by wild animals) but also social costs (stress, fear and loss of valuable time in guarding) throughout the season. That half of the country is within protected areas also means restriction on major infrastructure developments in these areas. Opportunity costs therefore go unaccounted. Despite pledging to remain a carbon-neutral country, the Himalayan region is now being turned from a bio-diversity hotspot to a climate change hotspot and we are already battling climate change consequences. Our dense forest cover and rich natural resources also attracted foreign insurgents and illegal immigrants that threatened national sovereignty as well as bio-diversity wealth. Ideally GNH promotes mutual conditioning of environment and

happiness; and is not biased to any with undesirable trade-offs. There are lots of opportunities - to bank on the natural capital and continuously evolve to find creative means of connecting conservation with the happiness and well being of the Bhutanese people in their mountain stronghold. Human wildlife conflict mitigation and management are iteratively developed. Livelihood approaches are mainstreamed in national policies to alleviate poverty through creation of community forests, eco tourism, and sale of medicinal plants and non-wood forest products etc. From recent International Conventions, we can also benefit from mechanisms such as



REDD+, Payment for Ecosystem Services, Sustainable/Green Business and so on.

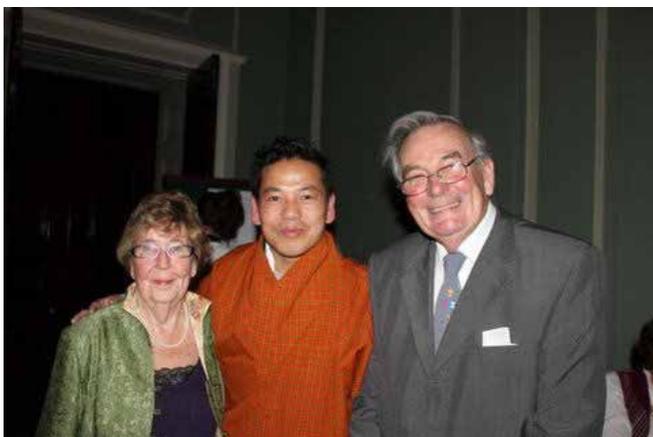
For Bhutan to benefit from and to continue on a sustainable middle path to environmental conservation, managing current and emerging challenges are inevitable. Environmental governance at all levels; from international to local will be a key factor. Conservation must benefit the people, and help the poor escape poverty via different livelihood strategies and interventions. Adaptive, but careful management is necessary. Historically, leadership and political commitment has conserved Bhutan's forests and must continue to do so. Perhaps, our model of conservation can be used or replicated in some other developing countries with contextual similarities.

***This is a summary of a talk given by Nawang Gyeltshen at a Society meeting on 3 July 2012.***

# SOCIETY EVENT

## The Society's 21st Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner to celebrate the 21st Anniversary of the Bhutan Society, held at Brooks's Club in London on 28th September, 2012, was again a great success. Eighty eight people attended and our guests included H E Mr Sonam Tshong, who this summer took up his appointment as Head of Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the European Union. Many Bhutanese students also attended along with our members and their guests. The photographs below reflect this joyous celebratory evening together.



### **NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE**

*During 2012 three issues of the Society Newsletter have been published. Notices of any Society meetings not included in the Newsletter will be notified directly to members via e-mail. Please make sure that the Membership Secretary, Rosie Glazebrook, has your latest e-mail address. Contact details as shown on page 8.*

# NEWS FROM THE

## Bhutan at the Olympics

Bhutan had one of the smallest teams of the 204 nations participating at the London 2012 Olympics this summer with only two athletes competing - archer Sherab Zam and shooter Kuzang Choden. Bhutan entered on wild cards that are given to encourage developing countries at the Olympics and uphold the Olympic spirit that participation is more important than winning. Both women knew they stood little chance against rivals from well-funded nations with state-of-the-art equipment, but they were pleased with their performances and for the chance to participate.



"I am not that good at archery but I love it. It was so good to meet world ranking archers who are famous and to watch how they do it. I have learnt a lot from them," said Sherab, who developed a liking for fish and chips when in Britain. Kunzang, who is coached by her husband, agreed. "I really enjoyed it. Now we can see how hard we need to work to be really good," she said. Sherab, who took up archery seven years ago, said she hoped that her participation at London would encourage other Bhutanese to aim high, particularly the youth, with rising unemployment and discontent in Bhutan. "When I grew up I never dreamt I would come to London, let alone compete in an Olympics," said Sherab. "This just shows that anything is possible. The Olympics is great for that."

## Back to school

Many full-time mothers whose children are studying at Rinchen Kuenphen Primary school in Thimphu have found productive ways to be involved in their children's lives. Every day, in between dropping off their children to school and waiting for them until their classes are over, these mothers clean the school campus. Pema Lhazom is one of the regular helpers.

"I come here every morning to drop my children and then stay with them the whole day. In between I also attend the Non Formal Education classes for two hours and after that I sweep the ground and see if the children are dressed properly," she said. Likewise Ugyen Peday and Tshering Zam, grandmothers of two other students in the school, help maintain the school's garden. It is no trouble at all, they say. "The teachers haven't asked us to do this, but we are doing it on our own for our grandchildren's sake". It is because of these mothers and grandmothers that children have easy access to clean water for washing. Most classrooms now have jerry-cans right outside their classes made by the mothers during their free time.

The School's principal also acknowledges the efforts this group of women is making. "They are making so much difference. Although in little ways their help is immense. Since we are a primary school, our children are not strong enough to do the heavy work and that is where these mothers can help." The Principal also said it is because of them that their school is one of the cleanest.

### Holiday souvenirs!

***The traditional and brightly coloured drawings on Bhutanese houses always attracts comments from visitors. One enterprising store in Thimphu decided to take advantage of this interest.***



# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## Yet another Yeti?

In what could reignite Bhutan's long held fascination for the yeti or 'migo' an official report filed by a Ranger of the Thrumshingla National Park in early September, claims the discovery of 'Yeti droppings'. The Park Ranger who had gone to the Bumthang area to file a report of cattle killed by a tiger, collected the droppings from a local farmer who claims he had recently collected them from the nearby blue pine forest. The farmer enjoys some credibility among yeti watchers as sometime in the 1980's he had also sighted the foot print of a yeti, collected the scat (droppings) and handed it over to His Majesty the Fourth King. The park officials have collected the droppings for DNA analysis to confirm the 'species'. Internationally the scientific community generally regards the yeti as a legend, given the lack of conclusive evidence, but there are those who also believe in its probable existence due to the partial evidence made available so far. Some of the most significant evidence was discovered in 2001 in Bhutan when British scientists came across a strand of hair deep in a forest which, on DNA analysis, did not match any known animal like bear,ape etc. The hair was found on the inside of the hollow of a cedar tree. The team found foot prints near the tree and scratches inside the hollow.



**This set of stamps issued in 1966 presents traditional Bhutanese images of the Yeti.**

According to local folklore there are three kinds of yeti - a big, gentle one, a little, shy one, and a crazy carnivorous one. Apparently, about all they have in common is that they smell really, really bad. Many traditional beliefs remain that the yeti exists while among the modern and educated community the yeti is more myth than real. However the Sakten Wildlife Sanctuary, which is located in the easternmost part of Bhutan, is a 650 sq km temperate forests area of eastern blue pine and rhododendron and has been established to protect the habitat of yetis.

Some of the hair was taken back to the UK for DNA testing. Bryan Sykes, Professor of Human Genetics at the Oxford Institute of Molecular Medicine, and one of the world's leading experts on DNA analysis, examined the hair. He had then said in an interview, "We found some DNA in it, but we don't know what it is. It's not a human, not a bear nor anything else we have so far been able to identify. I never thought this would end in a mystery. We have never encountered DNA that we couldn't recognize before". He also said that a team was sent to various suspected places in the country in a hunt of yeti after people who believed in its Existence, but had not encountered it. He added that scientifically he believed that the Apes and Bigfoot once existed, but that due to the effects of climate change they might have disappeared. Bhutan's Nature Conservation Department has around half a dozen framed plaster casts mounted on the wall. The frames show the outline of irregular greyish footprints around 12 inches long. All, according to small display signs, come from yetis.

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## A place called Halfway Home

People suffering from leprosy have faced societal ostracism. The disease which causes permanent damage to skin, nerves, limbs and eyes makes them an easy target for forced segregations and quarantines. Their families have often given up on them fearing the same fate. But a group of sufferers have found a place to call home at Riserboo in Trashigang Dzongkhag. In the woods, below Riserboo Hospital, a group of leprosy patients have formed a small community called Halfway Home. The government had helped them built the houses.

Jigme Namgay, 69, from Mongar has been living at the Halfway Home community for 19 years. He said he caught the disease when he was just a child. Tarayana Foundation and the Riserboo Hospital provide the patients with a monthly ration including Nu.500. They have little or no connect with the outside world. But they have each other in the place they call their own, a solace called Halfway Home.

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## Going Organic

Bhutan is aiming to become the first nation in the world to turn its home-grown food and farmers 100 per cent organic. With its new policy to phase out artificial chemicals in farming in the next 10 years, it will result in its staple foods of wheat and potatoes, as well as its fruits, becoming totally organic. By shunning fertilisers and other chemicals, the country also stands to gain by reducing its import bill -- a particular concern for a country short on foreign currency. With no pesticides or other chemicals on sale in Bhutan, suppliers would be able to offer high level of guarantees to its customers that products are organic.

Currently Bhutan sends rare mushrooms to Japan, vegetables to upmarket hotels in Thailand, its highly prized apples to India and elsewhere, as well as red rice to the United States.

Jurmi Dorji, a member of the 103-strong Farmers' Association in southern Bhutan, says his fellow members are in favour of the policy.

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## APPEAL TO SUPPORT THE KING'S FUND FOR THE REBUILDING OF WANGDUEPHODRANG DZONG



We are fortunate now to have a further offer of this painting in connection with this Appeal. Michael Blooman – Society member, artist, plantsman and adventurer – painted a watercolour of the Wangduephodrang Dzong in 1992. This painting is one of a series he painted across Bhutan during that period. He has decided to release it from his own collection and to offer it to the most generous contributor to the Trust Fund's Appeal. For the purposes of this award, generosity will be assessed simply by the amount of the gift together with any related tax recovery. We are most grateful to Michael for this thoughtful and generous offer.

Members and friends of the Bhutan

Society are asked to ensure that their cheques are with Lucy Hornberger on or before 14 December 2012 to be sure that their donations will be considered by Michael Blooman when awarding his painting. Donations after that date will still be most welcome, but will be too late for the painting. (The Appeal letter including the form is enclosed). For more details of Michael Blooman's travels in Bhutan, please refer to his article in the RHS Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias Year Book 2011 which was reviewed in Newsletter 45, Winter 2011.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Straight Up. Himalayan Tales of the Unexpected**

by Steve Berry

published by Himalayan Kingdoms Limited, 2012

ISBN 978-1-906148-47-8 148 pp, illustrated

available from: [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com)

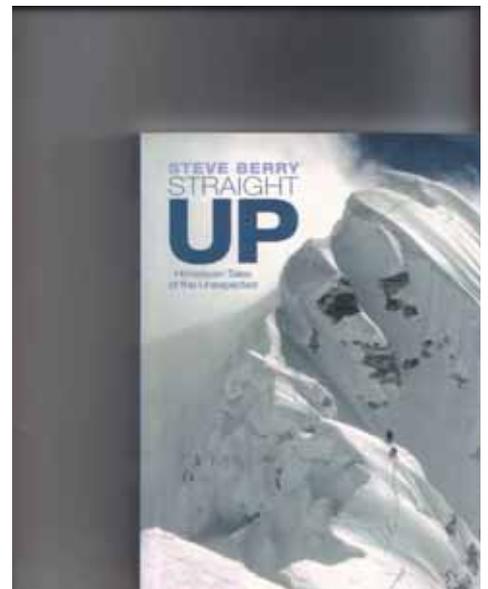
Steve Berry is a great friend of Bhutan and a long time supporter of the Society. He also loves the mountains, is an accomplished climber and a very experienced trekker. His expedition to climb Gangkar Punsum in 1986 is the subject of an earlier book – *The Thunder Dragon Kingdom*.

In **Straight Up**, Steve relates the tales of 1986 and his earlier significant climbing adventures. In this period, we understand there was a happy (even hippie) Berry deep into the Bristol climbing scene, willing and able to leave jobs in order to climb in distant places. In 1987, he established Himalayan Kingdoms with Steve Bell and, significantly, soon met and married Seraphina – his life then entered a different phase.

**Straight Up** tells us of how Steve and his younger brother were brought up with stories of their father's attempts to climb Nun Kun in the Ladakh Himalaya and of their introduction to climbing.

The book focuses on successively more ambitious expeditions – some reaching peaks, others not – with reflections on the author's gradual emotional development. First we are taken to Himachal Pradesh. Then we are off into Ladakh and Kashmir; here Steve and brother Richard try their luck on Nun (7,135m) where their father had been before. Next there is an attempt on Cho Oyu (an 8,201m neighbour of Everest) using its East Ridge. Finally Steve has us to north-central Bhutan and Gangkar Punsum (7,541m) with nail-biting descriptions of snow, wind, food shortages and helicopters.

Steve is not shy to speak (entertainingly) of exhaustion, exhilaration, fear, sunsets and the interactions between team members – using his diary to assist his memory. This makes it a good read as the memories and descriptions are fresh and clear.



**Andrew Sutton**

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## The Inner Temple and the Kingdom of Bhutan

Bhutan's links with the Inner Temple probably started over 50 years ago with the visit in 1958 of Jawaharlal Nehru, an Inner Templar, and the then Prime Minister of India. At the time there were no paved roads or airports and the journey from the Indian border to Paro had to be completed over many days on the backs of horses and yaks.

During his visit, Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "Some may think that since India is a great and powerful country and Bhutan a small one, the former might wish to exercise pressure on Bhutan. It is, therefore, essential that I make it clear to you that our only wish is that you should remain an independent country choosing your own way of life and taking the path of progress according to your will".

At that time India essentially had control of Bhutan's foreign affairs and honoured the Prime Minister's promise of 1958. However towards the end of the reign of the previous King, the Bhutan-India Treaty was revised and now the kingdom has full control of its own affairs.

Under the leadership of the present King's father, HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and his grandfather King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the country has moved rapidly forward and the education of its young people, often concluded in leading academic centres across the world, has become a feature of the kingdom's drive towards modernisation. Obviously modernisation of an entire society is an extraordinarily complex venture, particularly when it is undertaken with the determination to retain the essential ethos of the country's traditional way of life. Near neighbours such as Nepal, and Tibet, where major changes occurred in the late Twentieth century are riven with strife. Communist insurgency in Northeast India even at times spread over into southeast Bhutan as Indian insurgents sought illegal refuge in the jungles there.

Whilst there was no apparent internal call for what was essentially a medieval, feudal state to change, the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck resolved that Bhutan should move rapidly towards democracy to help ensure that the country remained strong and independent in the modern world.

After a series of reforms, the first constitution was established and in 2008 the first elections took place. Bhutan now has an independent parliament led by a "conservative party" (the DTP) which hold 45 of the 47 seats. His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, the Fifth Druk Gyalpo, has embraced and continued these reforms. A Supreme Court was established as part of the constitution and through the King's initiative, a Law Institute has also been established. The judiciary and judicial training are still evolving to meet the needs of a democratic society, and the Chief Justice of Bhutan has identified a need to seek help internationally with its judicial training.

This is where the Inner Temple again came on the scene. Lady Justice Hallett, as the newly appointed Head of the Judicial College in 2010, anxious to encourage the international work of the College, was keen to respond positively to the request for assistance by the Chief Justice of Bhutan. The idea emerged for His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, to be invited to be an Honorary Bencher and be called to the Bar. This ceremony took place at the Michaelmas Call night in 2011 in the Temple Church in London. This then enabled the work of the King in promoting the rule of law to be recognised in the context of the Judicial College's engagement with judicial training. To establish how the College could assist with development of judicial training in Bhutan, a comprehensive scoping study was carried out by a small team visiting the country. Reciprocal visits are being planned and a programme of assistance is being formulated.

That Bhutan is open to assistance is in many ways remarkable. That those with influence there appreciate the complexity of the problems facing them and tackling them with integrity, must command respect. That the leaders of the world's oldest and most respected institutions for promoting legal training and the rule of law have been able to help, is apt and gratifying and that The Inn has a new Honorary Bencher of such personal distinction does justice to the situation.

It is hoped that the Memorandum of Understanding between the legal Institute in Bhutan and the Judicial College in England and Wales will be signed in early 2013.

*This is a shorter version of an article written for the 2012-2013 Inner Temple Yearbook by His Honour Judge Donald Cryan, who is also a member of the Bhutan Society.*



*Their Majesties the King and Queen of Bhutan with Judge Donald Cryan visiting the Inner Temple in November 2011*

## Culture v. Trekking in Bhutan

With its pristine natural environment, Bhutan is often quoted as one of the best trekking locations in the world but, for a growing number of visitors, the kingdom is now seen more as a cultural destination.

Tour operators said this is largely attributed to the visitors' profile, and a lack of development on trek routes. The majority of dollar-paying tourists were over 45 years and the government's pricing policy attracted older people, rather than young people seeking an adventurous holiday.

Tourists always complained that trekking routes lacked development, and that the services provided for treks weren't worth the money, some tour operators said. One constant feedback was that trekking in Nepal was much better and cheaper.

There were teahouses, proper campsites and smoother trails in Nepal. "In Bhutan, tourists have no other choices but to camp," a tour operator said. "The campsites are usually dirty and congested." During the peak season, trekkers often had to rush to reach a campsite, before the other groups could get there and rarely were they a hassle-free trekking experience.

The development of a tourism master plan was now considered necessary, where trekking could be diversified and developed further, with a commercial perspective to it. "It can be either privatised or come under park services," suggested one tour operator.

Of the 64,028 tourists last year, 3,402 were trekking tourists; whilst in 2008 of the 27,636 tourists there were 2,989 trekking tourists with combined itineraries, of which 1,210 came for trekking alone. Trekking in Bhutan is a part of a nature-based tourism activity, and varies from stays of one night to about forty nights for the Snowman Trek.

**NOTE: In future issues we will be exploring in more detail the many other activities that attract visitors to Bhutan.**

### OBITUARY

#### DR AUBREY G. LEATHAM

Aubrey Leatham, who has died aged 91, was the cardiologist that led the team at St George's Hospital, Hyde Park Corner, London which, in 1955, devised the first heart pacemaker.

As well as the pacemaker, Leatham made many other contributions to cardiology. In 1958 he designed a new stethoscope, the Leatham stethoscope, that became a clinicians' favourite; in 1963 he was the first in Europe to introduce the new technique of coronary arteriography.

Leatham's international reputation was such that, in 1963, he was also summoned to examine the 3rd King of Bhutan, who had been confined to his bed for several months by his own doctors with a "life-threatening heart problem". When he arrived in the King's private chamber which, he was pleased to note, was lined with the works of Winston Churchill, Leatham was soon able to tell that there was very little wrong with the King's heart and after some further observation his diagnosis of indigestion turned out to be the correct one and the King lived for a further nine years.

Leatham was subsequently decorated with the Order of Bhutan and invited back to visit the country with his wife and two elder daughters.

*Aubrey Leatham, born August 23 1920, died August 7 2012*

## CONTACT LIST

Chairman	Michael Rutland OBE (Bhutan) PO Box 1044 Thimphu 00975 1761 8553  (UK) 2 Windacres, Warren Rd, Guildford Surrey. <a href="mailto:rutland.michael@gmail.com">rutland.michael@gmail.com</a>
Secretary	Andrew Sutton 01306 88 43 49 <a href="mailto:andrewsutton001@aol.com">andrewsutton001@aol.com</a>
Treasurer	Lucy Hornberger 01707 256 249 <a href="mailto:lucy@globeflower.com">lucy@globeflower.com</a>
Membership	Rosie Glazebrook <a href="mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com">rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com</a>
Newsletter Editor	Sylvia Robert-Sargeant <a href="mailto:editor@bhutansociety.org">editor@bhutansociety.org</a>
Programme Secretary	John Davey <a href="mailto:jhhdavey@yahoo.co.uk">jhhdavey@yahoo.co.uk</a>
Events	Dorothea von Friesen <a href="mailto:dorriefriesen@yahoo.co.uk">dorriefriesen@yahoo.co.uk</a>
Web Master	Chris Watt <a href="mailto:website@bhutansociety.org">website@bhutansociety.org</a>
General Enquiries	<a href="mailto:info@bhutansociety.org">info@bhutansociety.org</a> West Walls, Cotmandene Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2BL
Website	<a href="http://www.bhutansociety.org">www.bhutansociety.org</a>

### 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](mailto: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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