

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 49

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2013

Progress of the Wangduephodrang Dzong Appeal

We are delighted to announce that following our appeal at the Annual Dinner and in the last Newsletter, we have received a large number of donations in support of the rebuilding of Wangduephodrang Dzong, which was razed to the ground by fire on June 24th last year. Donations currently stand at £7345 which, with Gift Aid provisions, gives a total just shy of £9000. This is an excellent result and a figure that we can be proud of.

The funds, together with a list of names of everyone who has contributed to the appeal, will shortly be presented by our Chairman Michael Rutland to The Royal Chamberlain, who is responsible for the management of the King's Appeal for Wangduephodrang Dzong. As noted in the last Newsletter, Society member, artist and plantsman Michael Blooman very generously offered his painting of Wangduephodrang Dzong as it was in 1992 to the person giving the largest donation to the appeal by 14th December 2012. Our Treasurer Lucy Hornberger reports that this person was Andrew Sutton, and the painting was displayed and presented to its proud new owner at the Society's lecture on 4th February. Plans for the reconstruction of the Dzong, which has played such an important and symbolic role in



Wangduephodrang Dzong in December 2012

Bhutan's history, are already underway under the direction of HM The King. Excavation work and the recovery of relics are almost complete and an assessment has been prepared by Bhutan's Culture Department, with the assistance of specialists from Germany and Japan. The aim is to recreate, as far as possible, the magnificent structure which has been destroyed. Needless to say the restoration will be extremely costly. The King's Fund will remain open for some time, so if you have not yet made a donation it is not too late!

Please make checks payable to The Bhutan Society Trust Fund, and send to: Lucy Hornberger, Treasurer, The Bhutan Society Trust Fund, 12 Burleigh Mead, Hatfield, Herts. AL9 5ED. Thank you.

Forthcoming Meeting

WHERE THE WILD THINGS WERE

7pm Tuesday 11 June 2013

Speaker: Stanley Johnson

Stanley Johnson is a writer, former politician and expert in environmental and conservation issues. He published 'Where The Wild Things Were' in 2012. In it he relates his adventures to various parts of the world where different animals are under threat. His tales from Bhutan to Antarctica and from Kamchatka to Exmoor – meeting tigers, gorillas, whales and blue footed boobies amongst others on the way – are illuminating, entertaining and challenging. 'If animals could vote, Stanley Johnson would be President of the World and this book tells you why.' Simon Pope, World Society for the Protection of Animals.

Members of the Society will join members of the Travellers for a Library Talk. Reception drinks from 6.30pm. Members wishing to dine with the speaker at the Travellers after the talk may contact Dawn Barnett (020 7930 8688; dawn@thetravellersclub.org.uk) to book a place; the Club's charge for dinner is £42.50.

Meeting will be held at The Travellers Club, 106 Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5EP

SOCIETY NEWS

New Diplomatic Appointment for Michael Rutland



In early February, during the visit of the Bhutan Delegation to London as guests of the British Government, it was announced that our Chairman, Michael Rutland, will, as from 1st April 2013, be the British Honorary Consul in Bhutan. This is a new appointment and significantly, the United Kingdom will be the first of the UN Security Council P5 to have a representative in Bhutan. This is an unusual Honorary Consul appointment in that the FCO intend it to be more representational than consular. Consular matters, for example lost passports, will continue to be dealt with by the Deputy High Commission in Kolkata. However, in the event of a disaster or emergency, the Honorary Consul will assist in whatever ways possible. And, of course, Michael will be delighted to meet any Society members or their friends when they are in Thimphu.

For a fuller report on the visiting delegation from Bhutan see page 6.

Michael Rutland with The Honourable Chief Justice of Bhutan, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye

An exciting opportunity to visit Harewood House

The Earl of Harewood has kindly agreed for Society members to visit Harewood House, his home and estate near Leeds in Yorkshire. The visit will take place on Monday April 29th.

Members will travel to Leeds by train leaving London Kings Cross station at 9.00 am. From Leeds station we will travel by coach to Harewood House, where we will be received by the Earl of Harewood. He will take us to view the famous Harewood Stupa built in the Himalayan Garden in the grounds and tell us all about it. The Stupa, a Buddhist monument was built in 2004 by Bhutanese monks in a traditional way and is the only one of its kind in the UK.



We will then proceed to the House where we shall enjoy a light lunch and afterwards take a tour of the House itself. This will be followed by a walk around the gardens and a visit to the bird sanctuary. With paths through a gorge and a bridge across the beck, this is somewhere for all garden-lovers to visit, with primulas, orchids, cobra lilies, blue poppies and more than 50 kinds of rhododendron. Alan Titchmarsh, who opened the garden in May 2009, says "The Harewood Himalayan Garden is a hidden gem and second to none in the UK."

Members will then return by coach to Leeds station for a train back to London. Cost of the tour will be approximately £ 45. This will include coach, lunch, entrance fees and guided tour. The train fare (if we are more than a

group of 10) will be a group-ticket price of £21 per person. If members want to purchase their own tickets, or make their own travel arrangements, please advise Dorry Friesen - who is kindly organising this Society visit - when you contact her.

Contact details:

E: dorotheafriesen@gmail.com

T: 020-7351-0953 (after March 17th)

MEETING REPORT

Bhutan – Transition and Possibilities

Bhutan embarked on a historical journey in 2008 with the establishment of the Constitutional Monarchy. The gift of democracy from the Throne was a sign of confidence in the Bhutanese to take ownership of the overall direction of the country. The masterstroke by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo in inspiring and leading a nation culminated with the elections in March 2008.

Many observers, however, expected to see significant changes. This was not to be. Bhutan already had a sound working system in place. Both the political parties saw the period between 2008 and 2013 as an opportunity to consolidate what Bhutan had achieved so far and embed the principles of democracy firmly within the Bhutanese society. The Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) government has impressed in the last five years. Both the Government and the Opposition Party have, where possible, engaged the public in a number of discussions.

As of now, there are five parties registered for 2013 elections, and each one of them has the challenge of differentiating itself from the rest. Gross National Happiness (GNH) will largely drive their priorities, policies and plans. Expect increased youth participation and greater scrutiny of party proposals. There is a possibility that people will favour the party that will talk about the ground realities and the immediate needs of the people.



Bhutan grew at around 7% under the current government. Initiatives included the accelerated investment in hydroelectricity, development of an economic policy to explore areas of economic opportunities and liberalisation of the economy through Foreign Direct Investments. The private sector, whilst developing, continues to be subsidised by the Government in certain areas. We also saw the globalisation of GNH.

However, these achievements have not been without challenges.

Bhutan saw a number of ad-hoc policy and economic decisions creating significant uncertainty and distress, particularly for the people – an approach significantly different from that taken by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo when he first introduced the concept of democracy in Bhutan. Examples include most decisions around the rupee crunch.

Bhutan also faces an immediate and a serious challenge around credible leaders in many areas, within the government and the private sector, including politics. Further, allegations of corruption have eroded the confidence of many people in our leaders.

Government debt has steadily increased and is projected to reach 112% of GDP in 2014-15. The 2012 rupee crunch, a result of significant Government spending and the pace of development of hydroelectricity, is a sign of economic stresses to come for Bhutan. Inflation, imported from India between 8% and 10% also is highly detrimental to most Bhutanese. Unemployment among the youth around 7.3% is a dismal figure for a country that is growing between

7-12% annually.

Some additional risks to consider are: ensuring growth of the private sector without transfer of wealth from the state, risk of creating oligarchies, maintaining a corruption free economic development and achieving sustainable economic growth without increasing inequality. As Bhutan increasingly focuses on GNH, there is a need to ensure that GNH does not put imaginary boundaries around our thinking, limit how we see things or evidences and make us blind to possibilities. GNH risks becoming a Procrustean bed: with the Government fitting everything within GNH, conversations being driven by GNH and outsiders judging Bhutan through the lens of GNH.

There is an immediate need for the Government to engage the common Bhutanese on what GNH really means, take the GNH debate and discussions to the villages and bring GNH back home. Only then will Bhutan have a common vision which will enable us to overcome the many challenges we face and secure our economic and political future.

This is a summary of a talk given by Dorji Wangchuk to the Society at our meeting in February 2013.

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

During 2013 three issues of the Society Newsletter will be published - end of February, June and September. Notices of any Society meetings not included in the Newsletters will be notified directly to members via e-mail and on the Society's web site. Please make sure that the Membership Secretary, Rosie Glazebrook, has your latest e-mail address.

All contact details are shown on page 8.

NEWS FROM THE

Seventh Meeting of European Bhutan Friendship Societies

History was made at the end of November 2012 when ten Bhutan Friendship Societies from Europe along with two European non-governmental organisations visited Bhutan at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Royal Government of Bhutan (MoFA).

Previous meetings of these Societies have been held every other year in different European cities. However, early in 2012, Francoise Pommaret, Marianne Frei and Michael Rutland discussed the possibility of a meeting in Thimphu with Government officials and the programme for the seventh meeting began to evolve.

Societies were invited to nominate up to four delegates for special visas. In the event, there were a total of thirty-five Europeans at the meeting. The UK Society was represented by Dorry Friesen, Sylvia Robert-Sargeant, Andrew and Jane Sutton and Michael Rutland (who did not need a visa!).

Meetings and presentations

The formal meetings were organised for four days including presentations and discussions with the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Tourism Council of Bhutan and the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

On Wednesday 28 November, delegates were delighted to be received by H.E. the Prime Minister, Lyonchen Jigme Y Thinley, in his office in the National Assembly and to see the spectacular Assembly Hall. That evening, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted a reception at the Tashi Taj Hotel. Amongst many there it was good to see Sonam T Rabgye, as well as Andrew and Melanie Bowes Lyon – we saw Mel on the BBS TV later in the week when her first 'practical maths' lecture was broadcast!

To alert delegates to some of the many Civil Society Organisations pursuing charitable initiatives in Thimphu and other parts of the country, Francoise Pommaret invited fifteen to make short presentations and discuss these informally afterwards with delegates.

Formal meetings finished with discussions between delegates – at which the Friends of Bhutan of The Netherlands agreed to host the eighth meeting in 2014. We were delighted to meet and hear from Ashi Kunzang Choden – a noted writer on Bhutanese history, customs and food as well as fiction. Through reminiscences of her life at Ogyenchoeling Manor in

the Tang valley, she spoke of the significance of Losar and the tradition of feasting during the otherwise sparse winter months. Her talk was followed by a splendid buffet lunch prepared by the Folk Heritage Museum restaurant (one to remember when visiting Thimphu).

Out and about

During the first week, many informal visits were possible. The whole group was able to

- walk up to Tango Monastery in the forest, north of the city
- eat a picnic lunch alfresco chez Rutland in Begana
- see the National Library
- visit the Zorig Chusum School of Traditional Arts.



The UK team also made it to the Big Bakery and its café in Thimphu; this opened in 2009 and offers employment to young disabled people; the UK Society's Trust Fund donated equipment when it started. They then drove to the enormous, stunning Buddha image now installed above the city at Kuensel Phodrang.



KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Societies' Meeting cont'd

Touring to Punakha and beyond

In addition to helping to organise the formal meetings in Thimphu, MoFA invited delegates to visit Punakha, Phobjikha and Paro. Fourteen of us did so – including all from the UK. Moreover, it proved to be a very entertaining trip and all are eternally grateful to Marianne Frei who kept the trip running smoothly.



Amongst the classic buildings we saw were Punakha Dzong in all its glory and Wangduephodrang Dzong as a sad burned out shell, as well as the Chimi Lhakhang, the Gangtey Monastery and, later near Paro and after a healthy climb, the now-restored Taktshang Lhakhang and the Kyichi Lhankhang nearby.



Both times on the Dochu-la we had great views; returning to Thimphu the sky was cloudless, all mountains were crystal clear and we could

even see Gasa Dzong. Below Wangdue we saw the simply gigantic civil works creating the first phase of a major hydroelectric generation project; currently the river has been diverted through tunnels to allow work to be done on the valley floor and for further tunnels to be excavated. At Basochhu, beyond all this activity, we visited the smaller hydro turbines which, installed with the help of Austria, began generating power in 2002.

The black necked cranes were roosting in Phobjikha in great numbers and fascinated us with their calls and flights during a walk in the sun in the valley. Some of us were able to go to the Royal Society for Protection of Nature cabin to view the valley and learn more of the local ecology.

Even while touring, there were still some official visits. We were received by the Principals of the College of Natural Resources in Lobesa and the Paro College of Education; at both the end of term was nigh.

A Royal Audience

On our way back through Thimphu we learned that the King and Queen wished to grant us an audience. We were entertained in the main courtyard of Tashichho Dzong, which His Majesty explained was an experiment, only possible while the Je Kenpho was in Punakha. This was one of the special memories from two privileged weeks in Bhutan. After the audience, we found we were 'hot news' featured on the evening television news casts and pictured in most newspapers the following day.



We visitors are most grateful to MoFA and other Government departments for their hospitality. We were given many insights into the country's affairs including the challenges of foreign exchange imbalances, possible ways of expanding the tourism industry, the need to provide finance to emerging entrepreneurial enterprises, the continuing growth of Thimphu, ensuring employment for the young and preparing for the 2013 elections – to mention a few. We come away with friendships strengthened and our wish to support this special country refreshed.

Andrew Sutton

NEWS AND UPDATES

Bhutanese Delegation in London as guests of the British Government

A high level Delegation from Bhutan led by the Honourable Chief Justice of Bhutan, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, accompanied by Supreme Court Justice Tshering Wangchuk, Director of the National Legal Institute Judge Pema Wangchuk, Honourable Secretary of the Ministry of Education Aum Sangay Zam and the President of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce Dasho Ugen Tshechup Dorji, visited London from 5th to 12th February as guests of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

The overall purpose of the visit was to explore future cooperation in legal and judicial training between Bhutan's National Legal Institute, the Judicial College and the Bar Association, and to explore future links in the field of education as well as mutually beneficial trade links between Bhutan and the UK.



Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding at the FCO

During the signing of The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which will allow judiciaries in both countries to work together on developing the rule of law in Bhutan, Foreign Office Minister the Rt Hon Hugo Swire MP, said "I am pleased that we are deepening our relationship and that the UK is able to support Bhutan through our knowledge of judicial systems. I hope that this will be just the start of a long and mutually beneficial friendship".

In relation to the meetings with other delegates involved with Education and with Trade and Industry, the Rt Hon Hugo Swire MP, went on to say. "For the first time, a Bhutanese scholar will join this year's

Chevening South Asia Journalist Programme, which is great news for the programme's growing appeal. I am sure Mr Samten Yeshe will use the opportunity of the scholarship to make his mark in Bhutan's rapidly evolving media scene."

The Delegation was delighted with the warmth of their reception by all those they met.

Thanks must go to Bhutan Society member HH Judge Donald Cryan who worked tirelessly to organise the various legal visits. The programme organised by the FCO was so busy and packed that unfortunately it was not possible to arrange a Bhutan Society function in honour of the Delegation, for which sincere apologies.

MICHAEL RUTLAND

What I did during my holidays.....

Richard Gould, one of the oldest members of the Society, recalls the fascinating experiences of his early travels in Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan. Part 1 tells of his adventures getting to Sikkim and beyond.

Before World War II, it was virtually unheard of that the children of British personnel serving in Imperial posts overseas should join their parents for the school holidays. However, in 1939, my father (BJ) decided to have my friend Bob and I join him in Sikkim during that summer. I was 16 at the time.

The journey to Calcutta was memorable. All aircraft landed and took off in daylight, so the journey took three to four days, with nights in Amsterdam, Athens and then in Basra and Karachi. The KLM plane was a passenger version of the wartime DC3. It was not pressurised or heated, and normally flew at 10,000 feet or less.

Luggage was not only restricted in weight but also had to be packed in two blue suitcases provided by KLM. These cases fitted into made to measure slots in the cabin. Landing at Athens was interesting - we touched down short of the runway, hopped off again, clearing a road and a fence and then landed safely! The other vivid memory of that journey was the time we had to fly really "high" (i.e. at over 16,000 feet). The resulting airsickness, cold and discomfort in the ears, was really unpleasant.

From the hectic bustle and noise of Calcutta we travelled by sleeper overnight to the North of Bengal to the railhead at Siliguri. My father met us there and we then drove in an open tourer on to Gangtok. BJ's house, the Residency, was set on a hillside looking across the valley to the permanent snowcapped Mt Kinchinjunga.

NEWS AND UPDATES

Honey makes good money

The Beekeepers' Cooperative of Bumthang is finding it difficult to meet the ever-increasing demand for honey. Currently, honey produced in Bumthang is not sufficient even for the local market. There are more than 32 members in the Cooperative, not only from Bumthang but also from different Dzongkhags. Last year, the Cooperative received over 15 metric tonnes of honey.



The Chairman of the Cooperative says Bumthang has the maximum number of commercial beekeepers, but it is claimed that, despite a doubling in the number of beehives, production has declined due to all the construction works which has reduced the pasture land for bees. In an attempt to respond to the pressure of growing demand for honey, farmers are being encouraged to practise beekeeping. In addition there are plans to move some bees to other places like Haa. "If we are successful in increasing our product from migratory beekeeping we think we can meet the increasing demand of the local market," said the Chairman Tek Bahadur Pulami.

The Beekeepers' Cooperative aims to achieve self-sufficiency in honey production, and will consider export when local demand has been met.

What I did during my holidays..... *Cont'd*

The architecture was very much in the English style, but it had a corrugated iron roof. At the back was a courtyard with two one-bedroomed bungalows. Bob and I were each given one of these. We were thrilled. There was no running water, and all the water, hot and cold, for washing and baths had to be carried in.

My father always insisted that his guests should stay several days in Gangtok at 6,000 feet before proceeding any higher, so that they could adjust and acclimatise. During his 10 years as Resident, several Everest expeditions came up through Gangtok, and he strongly recommended this policy even to them.

The highlight of our visit was to be a trek through a corner of Tibet and on to Bhutan. There was no wheeled transport once we left Gangtok. Ponies provided our transport, but the Tibetans used yaks. One disconcerting feature was that the animals would always try to walk on the extreme outside of the track, however precipitous. This was, we were told, because if they or their burdens (often very bulky) hit the hillside they would lose their balance and fall down into the abyss. That certainly made sense, but it was alarming!

The road to Lhasa was in sections of about 10 miles. At the end of each section, there was a reasonably civilised bungalow, known as a dak. It was staffed by a caretaker (chowkidar) and stocked with firewood (or dried dung) and water. A train like ours only made one stage per day. Along the same route, a telegraph line was laid, operated by signallers using Morse. When necessary there was also a postal service of dak runners, who ran in relays between the stages. On the second day, we had a steep climb up to the Natu La pass at about 14,000 feet.



Not trained for the rigours I was unable, both from fatigue and altitude breathlessness, to enjoy the magnificent scenery. We descended the other side into the Yatung valley where I was surprised to find a barracks tenanted by British Indian Troops. This garrison was the result of the peace settlement Francis Younghusband made with the Tibetans after he had defeated their army in 1904. We met a very well known Tibetan, Rai Sahib Norbu. He was British Trade Agent in Yatung. He was middle-aged, small and lightly built, always smiling through his crooked, bad teeth. He spoke good English. His wife was in marked contrast. She was very round, shy and spoke no English. Both were very friendly to us. We spent a couple of days there before taking the next exciting part of our journey - the road east into Bhutan.

Next time, in Part 2, we will share the story of his memorable stay in Bhutan, nearly 75 years ago.

Bird watching in Bhutan

Despite its small size, nearly 700 species of birds have been recorded in Bhutan and the kingdom is recognized as one of the 221 global endemic bird areas and is very rich in bird diversity. Of the 675 species actually recorded, 78% are resident and breeding, 7% are passage migrant, 8% are winter visitors, 6% are uncertain and 1% fall in the data deficient category.

Many of these species are also endangered, threatened or on a restricted bird list. This includes the Imperial Heron, which is one of the fifty rarest birds in the world. Within the country's borders there are an extraordinary range of habitats, from some of the Himalaya's most extensive and least disturbed tropical forests to cool broad leaved and towering evergreen forests of fir, hemlock and spruce. The diversity of bird life of Bhutan is also accentuated by the migrations of hundreds of species between breeding grounds across a vast expanse of Asia to the north of Bhutan and wintering grounds of the subcontinent of India. The best known of these migrants is the black-necked cranes that breed in Tibet and then migrate over the Himalayas to spend the winter in isolated valleys of Phobjikha in western Bhutan and Bomdeling in Eastern Bhutan.



On a global scale, the country is recognized as forming a part of several important bird regions. It is a part of the Sino-Himalayan mountain forests, Indo-Burmese forests, Indo-Gangetic grasslands, South Asian arid habitats, and Tibetan plateau wetlands – all categorized as globally important bird regions by BirdLife International.

Understandably such a richness of species has attracted bird watchers from all over the world and there are now many travel

companies both in Bhutan and elsewhere that can offer tours specifically for bird watching.

Birding is especially good in mid-late spring (late March to late May) virtually anywhere below 3,100 m. Unlike many part of Asia, one is not obliged to seek out a park or reserve or remnant patch of 'good looking' habitat, since at any stop even in the midst of farmland, exciting birds are visible. The mixed broadleaf forests are much richer, and therefore more exciting for birding, than the rather slow growing monotypic stands of blue pine and particularly chir pine.

So it is understandable that it is not necessary to travel to more remote parts of the country. In Bhutan bird watching tours start in and around Paro and Thimphu, move on to Punakha and beyond and there you will find yet more exciting and rare species to spot.

For more information contact Tourist Council of Bhutan www.tourism.gov.bt

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

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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:

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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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