

[25/10/94]



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THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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*J o u r n a l*

Number 18

1994

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*Remote Welfare Centre at Pirthi  
Set in the wilds of mid-eastern Nepal*

*See article Aid in Nepal, page 21*

*Photo: Captain Sean Elliott*

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**THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY**

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**Journal**  
Number 18  
1994

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and the Lord Mayor of  
London with our Chairman  
and Mr Madhab P. Khanal,  
Minister Counsellor, Royal  
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Members who were present at Burlington House to hear about 'The Wanderings of a Military Attache in Nepal', the reminiscences of Lieutenant Colonel Gerry Birch, and who enjoyed his dramatic account of those wanderings, with the wonderful pictures which accompanied it, will be pleased to find the substance of his talk and some of the pictures in this the eighteenth number of our Journal under the title 'A Flying Visit to Lo Mantang'. We feel sure members who could not be at the talk will appreciate them no less.

As usual the major part of the Journal is taken up with interesting reports on the Society's activities during the year, so well recalled in 'The Society's News' by Pat Mellor. Among the many notable activities of the year must be mentioned the Summer Outing to Blenheim Palace (Woodstock) organised by Iris Perowne Bolton and greatly enjoyed by two full coaches of enthusiastic members of the Yeti Association supported by many members of the Society either in the coaches or in cars. With us throughout was our Chairman Sir Neil Thorne. Our readers are referred to the excellent report by the organiser herself elsewhere in this Journal.

Situated close to Oxford, Blenheim Palace and its environs are inexhaustibly interesting. For those whose thoughts wander back in time there was nearby Woodstock with associations reaching beyond even King Charles I and the Civil War to Chaucer composing his Canterbury Tales and the great warrior and scholar King Alfred (ninth century) translating a Latin classic into Anglo-Saxon - and of

course the Fair Rosamund (twelfth century) and her well.

Last year we printed a fascinating contribution from Mark Temple on 'The Ruins of Khola Songbre'. When sending us his review of 'Himalayan Voices' this year he kindly passed on a message he had received from Professor Alan Macfarlane (Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University) which says: 'An archaeological expedition from Cambridge is even now excavating in Khola Songbre...' We wish them every success and look forward to hearing more about it.

While thanking all our contributors, we feel special thanks are due to Sir Michael Scott, formerly HM Ambassador in Nepal and a staunch supporter of our Society, for his contribution on the British Cemetery in Kathmandu which some of our members will have visited.

We are asked from time to time about the welfare of Gurkha Soldiers who have served in the British Army, a topical subject in view of current reductions in the Armed Forces, and are grateful to the contributor of 'Aid in Nepal' which reports directly on the twenty-three Gurkha Welfare Centres and the remarkable help they provide in even the remotest areas.

The availability in this country of Nepalese textiles was referred to in last year's Journal and is now, in this number, the subject of a review by Mayura Brown of Susi Dunsmore's remarkable book 'Nepalese Textiles' (British Museum Press). Mayura keeps us in touch with our sister Society in Kathmandu and with events in Nepal which are likely to be of special interest to our members.

Before concluding these remarks, we feel compelled to applaud the setting up this year of the British-Nepalese Chamber of Commerce, still in its very early stages but with so much promise for the future. All success to those involved in this ambitious project and we look forward to reporting progress in due course.

Anyone requiring further information should contact Jimmy Evans (Sylrock Farm, Lower Froyle, Alton, Hants GU34 4LL Tel: 0420 22134).

Recorded on page 32 are some addresses of special interest to our members and we are grateful to the important organisations mentioned there for keeping in touch.

Our final word must be one of praise for The Gurkha Museum in Peninsular Barracks Winchester. It has made tremendous progress and is now in the front rank of modern museums but with a character and appeal all of its own which of course could also be said of the ancient city of Winchester.

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## THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

by Pat Mellor

At the AGM in 1993, Joanna Thomas relinquished her task as Honorary Secretary after three years of efficiently taking care of all the events of the Society. Sir Neil Thorne, our Chairman, voiced the Society's appreciation of all that Joanna had undertaken on behalf of the Society. I have now been in her place for one year.

The Committee is pleased to report that the Society has recently been able to react promptly to help major disaster appeals in Nepal. This ability is, to a large extent, due to the contributions made by members attending the Annual Supper. The Committee feel that members would wish to know that it has been decided to use those contributions in future especially for this purpose.

Over the year, the Committee has received a letter from Lakshmi Thapa thanking the Society for their contribution to her School in Kathmandu, and also a letter from the British Ambassador in Kathmandu on behalf of the Prime Minister Mr Koirala, expressing his warm thanks to the Society for the contribution to the Prime Minister's Flood Disaster Relief Fund. GAP were also very appreciative of the Society's contribution which has helped to successfully bring three teachers over here to gain experience of teaching in this country.

I am also pleased to announce that during the year, 15 new members have joined the Society.

### Winter Lectures

On the 11th January, Mr Dudley Spain gave a most successful talk on 'Developments in Nepal and the King Mahendra Trust', with beautiful slides. This talk took place in the House of Commons IPU Room.

■ On Tuesday, 8th March, Dr Andrew Russell, a lecturer at Durham University, gave a talk to the Society on 'Anthropology in East Nepal - the Yakha People', with slides which he had taken whilst living with the Yakha people.

■ On Monday, 8th April, Lt. Col. Gerry Birch spoke to the Society on his experiences and the 'Wanderings of a Military Attache in Nepal'. This talk was also beautifully illustrated with slides.

The last two talks were held at the Society of Antiquaries in Piccadilly.

### Other Events

The Annual General Meeting was held at the Nepalese Embassy on Tuesday, 16th November by kind permission of His Excellency, The Ambassador. This AGM was attended by the Society's President, His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester. The meeting was followed by a fine dinner provided by Mr Thapa of the Wembley Tandoori Restaurant.

■ The Nepali Supper on Tuesday 17th February was once again held at St Columba's Hall in Pont Street. This was a most successful event and a record number of members attended. His Excellency The Ambassador kindly made the after dinner speech. Mr I.P. Manandhar and his family from the Natraj Restaurant in Charlotte Street, provided an excellent and much appreciated Nepalese curry supper.

The Summer Outing this year was a joint one with the Yeti Association and consisted of a day trip to Blenheim Palace on Sunday, 17th July. 23 members of the Society and their friends were able to attend, and 74 Yeti members joined in and helped to make this a most jolly outing.

The Annual Dinner of the Society was held on December 10th at the Hotel Shangri-La. There was the usual large gathering which included the President, Dr. Hemang Dixit, and the two Vice-Presidents, Mr. Hrubra Shrestha and His Excellency the British Ambassador who read our message of greetings and good wishes to the members and guests. The Guest of Honour was Dr. Ram Sharan Mahat, Vice-Chairman of the National Planning Commission.

The Society had a very busy year with several meetings. Colonel Mike Kefford, the Defence Attache at the Embassy in Kathmandu, gave a talk on the Gurkhas. It was very well attended. Dr. Rita Gard-

ner's subject, which attracted much interest, was on Soil Conservation, a very important matter in Nepal. (She will be the speaker at our Society's meeting in January 1995. The meeting at the Royal Geographical Society last February convened by Dr. Gardner was very successful. It was 'Himalayan Crisis? Environment and Development Conflicts').

The Society announced, with much sorrow, the passing of Colonel J.P. Rana, Trustee and Past President of the Nepal-Britain Society. His loss will be deeply felt. We send sincere condolences to our sister Society.

*Mayura Brown*

by Lieutenant-Colonel G.D. Birch

Any forbidden territory exerts a great power of attraction and curiosity, more especially if it is remote, and one where few, if any, Westerners have ever penetrated. I had always had a great longing to visit the remote province of Mustang and its capital, Lo Mantang, ever since my first posting to Nepal in 1962/3. My interest was awakened on reading Tony Hagen's book 'Nepal', the first 'coffee table' book on Nepal published in 1961. Tony Hagen, a Swiss geologist, was given carte blanche by HMG Nepal in the early 1950's to travel throughout Nepal whilst carrying out a survey at their request. He travelled extensively in the trans-Himalayan areas including Mustang and Lo Mantang, situated in the upper reaches of the Kali Gandaki, and was probably the first Westerner

to have visited that place. His photographs of Lo Mantang, the approach up the Kali Gandaki and the surrounding areas on the edge of the Tibetan plateau were dramatic.

The first reference to Mustang in English literature was by W J Kirkpatrick in 1793. In his book on his travels to Nepal, he mentions 'Moostang is a place of some note in Tibet or Boot'. Mustang appeared to be at that time a semi independent province owing tribute to the 'Gurkha Kings' in Kathmandu, although originally it was part of a Tibetan province. Today Mustang is part of Nepal but it still retains the 'Mustang Rajah' or more correctly in Tibetan the Lo Gyalpo.

In 1962 the chances of a visit to the northern border regions of Nepal were nil. Dramatic events had taken place to the

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*An aerial view of Lo Mantang*



*Some of the inhabitants of Lo Mantang; the Lo-Bas outside the city wall*

north of the Himalayas forcing the Dalai Lama to flee to India in 1959 as the Chinese tightened their hold on Tibet. Following his flight, Khampa tribesmen from Kham in Eastern Tibet, fiercely loyal to the Dalai Lama, moved into remote areas of Nepal along the Tibetan border and commenced guerrilla operations against the Chinese army. The main centre from where such operations were launched was Upper Mustang. Accounts of life there are graphically recorded by Michael Peissel in his two books 'Mustang - a lost Tibetan Kingdom' and 'Cavaliers of Kham'. By amazing luck, Peissel was granted permission to carry out a cultural survey of Mustang in 1964. It was on reading those two books in the British Embassy library in Kathmandu that my interest was rekindled. My posting to Kathmandu would in all probability present my last chance of reaching Lo Mantang.

By 1989 the situation in Mustang had greatly changed. Following political pressure from the Chinese, the Khampa guerrillas were cleared out of Mustang in 1974. (On trek in 1977 the closest I could reach was to the check point at Dana, above Tatopani in the Kali Gandaki Valley). Although political tension had significantly decreased, HMG Nepal kept Upper Mustang firmly 'off limits' for trekkers, but trekking had been opened to Muktinath and as far as Kagbeni in the Kali Gandaki valley in Lower Mustang. Large numbers of backpackers venturing into such a remote area as Upper Mustang would create many problems for the fragile economy of the region, and inexperience would lead to many dangers and difficulties for the tourists themselves.

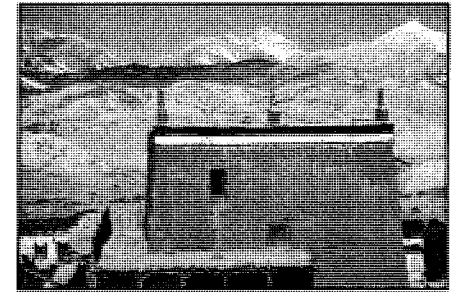
During the visit to Kathmandu in 1991 of Major General Peter Duffell, then Major General Brigade of Gurkhas, it

turned out in discussion that he too had harboured a wish to visit Mustang since his first trip to Nepal in the early 1960's. A chance remark to Major General Shanta Kumar Malla, principal Military Secretary to HM The King, during an Embassy dinner party, led to some initial planning. General Malla was very encouraging and thought that some help could be provided by the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA). First thoughts were for a trek but General Duffell's Hong Kong programme could not accommodate the minimum ten days away from the Colony that such a trip would require.

However, the Chief of Army Staff, RNA, General Gadul S.J.B. Rana very kindly offered the chance of a flying visit by helicopter during General Duffell's final visit from Hong Kong. The flight was fixed for 1st March, 1992.

The day dawned clear and cold, and I took off from the military end of the airport at 0630 hours in the RNA Alouette piloted by Colonel Puspa K.C. and Captain Koirala with whom I had previously flown on other sorties around Nepal. We picked up General Duffell in Pokhara and refuelled and headed Northwest towards Jomsom. The route up the Kali Gandaki gorge must be one of the most dramatic with Annapurna and Dhaulagiri rising steeply up on each side. Visibility was excellent, and again we refuelled before making the final leg to Lo Mantang. We were now behind the main Himalayan range and into the dry arid semi-desert with all shades of grey, brown and orange. The tiny scattered villages that eke out a meagre existence were laid out below. From the helicopter it was possible to see the bleak treeless hills of the Tibetan plateau in serried ranks to the far horizon as

by now we were clear of the gorge and could see the whole of the Upper Mustang basin. We were flying at around 14,000 feet and the pilots had their oxygen supply at the ready. It was a magical moment as Lo Mantang came into view. We circled round several times and cameras were 'clicking'. Little appeared to have changed since the photos taken by Toni Hagen in the 1950s. The city was still tightly walled with its single entrance



*Hall of the great statue, Lo Mantang; looking north towards Tibet*

maintained although there were some small extensions just outside the main walls. The outline of tiny fields could be seen where with artificial irrigation barley can be grown.

On landing, we were quickly surrounded by an eager crows of locals known as Lo-Bas. The arrival of a helicopter is not an every day occurrence; so we were the object of considerable curiosity. The Lo Gyalpo, King Jigme Parbal Bista, was not in residence, but a member of his staff came out to meet us and took us to the Palace. We were now at 12,000 feet and although the sun was strong, it was very cold. We were ushered into the city and into the Palace, a tall impressive

building in the Tibetan style. At the time of our visit, I saw little evidence of any new architecture. The city has changed little since the Middle Ages, but with the closure of the trans Himalayan salt trade resulting from the Chinese invasion of Tibet, it is no longer the trading centre that it once was although some local cross-border trade is still permitted. The once large caravans of yaks, goats and sheep that travelled across the plateaus or along the Kali Gandaki have passed away. Recently though there are signs that an increase in cross border trade may be permitted as China and India begin to reconcile their differences in the Himalayan region.

The Palace, on five floors, is made of mud brick, and like all Tibetan houses in the area has a flat mud roof. Roofs are edged with low brick walls topped by stocks of juniper for firewood, and prayer flags flutter from pots that project from the roofs like chimneys. The Palace has Tibetan mastiffs on each floor. They were usually tied up or behind thick doors that had been closed prior to our arrival. In one case, the drill had failed and we were forced to climb very quickly up an old ladder to avoid teeth snapping at our heels. Rapid acceleration at 12,000 feet leaves one breathless but the thought of those powerful jaws got the adrenaline flowing. The view from the roof was the most spectacular of any of my trips around Nepal. Outlying forts on surrounding hill-tops gave evidence of the past importance of Lo Mantang. We could see small villages and herds of yak as well as a view over the whole city.

Time was against us as during the day strong winds build up preventing flying which meant that the pilots were keen not

to stay too long. After looking around the narrow streets and outside the walls we finally and sadly had to leave. However, it proved to be the most exciting trip of my tour in Nepal. We felt that we had truly visited a place where time had stood still



*House extensions Lo Matang style  
outside the city walls*

for several centuries. For the privilege of such a visit and the fulfilment of a lifetime's ambition, I am in the debt of the Royal Nepalese Army.

#### **Postscript**

Since our visit, HMG Nepal has opened Upper Mustang for limited tourism by groups only, and several firms are offering treks to Lo Mantang. The cost of a 10 day trek permit alone is US\$700, and numbers are limited to an annual quota. The responsibility, in conjunction with the Ministry of Tourism, for tourism and development has been passed to the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation by widening the Annapurna Conservation Area to include Upper Mustang (and also Upper Manang). Very careful management will be needed if the fragile ecology of this region is to be preserved.

## SOCIETY SUMMER OUTING A JOINT VISIT WITH THE YETIS TO BLENHEIM PALACE

by Iris Perowne Bolton

The big question was, would the uncommonly hot fine weather hold until the day of our summer outing? In the event, we woke yet again to cloudless blue skies and sunshine, so that when some one hundred and forty members, families and friends converged on Blenheim at noon, the Palace and its park were looking their glorious best.

Members had come by coach and car from places as far afield as Manchester, Peacehaven, Cliftonville and Bath, confirming the attraction of the Committees' choice of venue. Attractions in the plural might be more apt. Games and races for the children (and their parents) were scheduled for the afternoon; otherwise everyone was free to do what they liked and what a choice they had! There was the landscaped park with rowing boats for hire on the lake below Vanbrugh's Grand Bridge; a narrow-gauge railway took passengers to the old Walled Kitchen Garden where among other delights were a Butterfly House and the World's largest symbolic hedge maze. (It is designed to represent military trophies, based on Grinling Gibbons carvings in the Palace, but it is doubtful whether one could recognise them as such if one were lost inside!). There were the lovely formal gardens adjacent to the Palace, the Water Terrace fountains playing coolly in the heat, and down below, the Arboretum with the Temple of Diana wherein Winston Churchill proposed to Clementine Hosier, a delightful Rose Garden and Capability Brown's picturesque Grand Cascade.

Above all else there was the Palace itself, Sir John Vanbrugh's great Baroque masterpiece built in the years 1705-22 for the 1st Duke of Marlborough in the Manor of Woodstock, which together with a grant of £240,000 had been given to him by Queen Anne (and confirmed by Act of Parliament) in recognition of his victories in the War of the Spanish Succession. The name Blenheim is the anglicised version of Blindheim, the village on the Danube where, in command of the allied forces, he scored his greatest victory of all over the French troops of Louis XIV.

Across the vast main entrance forecourt the Palace building looks truly theatrical, with its receding planes, heavy detailing and elaborate roof decorations. But then it was designed, as Vanbrugh said, as a 'Monument to the Queen's glory (rather) than a private Habitation', and Vanbrugh was also a playwright. The entrance is into the lofty Great Hall, with splendid carved stone enrichments by Grinling Gibbons below a ceiling painted by Sir James Thornhill in 1716 depicting Marlborough proffering a plan of the Battle of Blenheim to Britannia. Apart from a small suite of rooms given over to an exhibition on Sir Winston Churchill who was actually born in one of them in 1874, progress thereafter was from one huge grandiose gilded and painted State Room to another, with wonderful porcelain, paintings and furniture and a superb set of Brussels tapestries, commissioned by the 1st Duke of Marlborough himself to illustrate his campaigns and exquisite in every detail. The Long Library and the



Chapel alone are not gilded, (perhaps the money was giving out), but nevertheless contain beautiful stucco work by the master plasterer Isaac Mansfield.

Not everyone admires (or admired) the architecture of Vanbrugh or of Nicholas Hawksmoor, his assistant at Blenheim. An epitaph for Vanburgh by Abel Evans (1679-1737) reads:

*Under this stone, reader, survey  
Dead Sir John Vanburgh's house of clay.  
Lie heavy on him, Earth! for he  
Laid many heavy loads on thee!*

By contrast, out in the park all was freedom and lightness. A large group of Yetis were having their photograph taken against Capability Brown's classic landscape of bridge, lake and, in the distance, the Column of Victory. Families and friends were gathered under trees, chatting and picnicking; curry, samosas, pak-

horas and jellabies; sausage rolls, hard-boiled eggs, salads and strawberries.

In due course the call came to assemble for the planned games and races. It was hot and once again people clustered under the trees. Dr. Dhital, Pat Mellor and David Jefford worked hard to arrange a number of running races, the participant children willing, the adults perhaps less so. The rough grass and numbers involved made each event quite exciting; several took a tumble but no-one hurt more than his or her pride! Then refreshment became necessary once more and people began to drift back to their picnic spots to quench their thirst and, all too soon, to embark on the coaches for the return trip to London, or their cars for home.

It had been a splendid day, enjoyed by everyone, and many grateful thanks are due to Pat Mellor, Harish Karki, and to all those others who so kindly helped to organise it for us all.

## THE BRITISH CEMETERY, KATHMANDU

by Sir Michael Scott

A few hundred yards north of the old British Residency (now the Indian Embassy) and just a little further from the British Embassy lies a small walled cemetery on a forward slope facing across the Kathmandu Valley towards the Himalayas. It is in a quiet area served by an unmetalled road which leads to the fields and tracks on the floor of the valley.

The Treaty of Segauli which concluded the 1814-1816 war between Britain and Nepal included a clause which was accepted only with great reluctance by the Nepalese Durbar. It was for an exchange of accredited Ministers which meant the permanent presence in Kathmandu of a British Resident. In keeping with their displeasure the Nepalese allocated him land in an outlying area called Lainchaur,

locally believed to be unhealthy and inhabited by spirits.

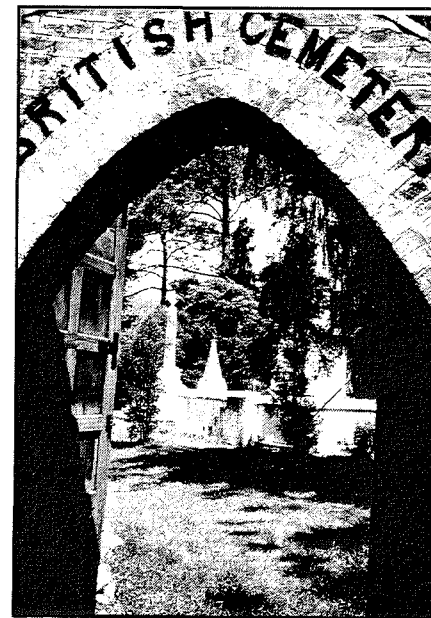
Within four years the need for a Christian cemetery arose and a site was provided. The earliest inscription dated 1820 reads:

*Robert Stuart Esquire  
3rd son of Sir John Stuart, Bart.,  
of Allenbank, North Britain  
and Assistant to the 1st British Resident  
at the Court of the Raja of Nipal  
who died at this capital on the  
14th March, 1820*

(There follows a lengthy eulogy on one who seems to have had many fine qualities)

Stuart's successor as Assistant to Gardiner, the Resident in 1820, was the great Brian Houghton Hodgson, FRS (1800-1894) who himself became the Resident in 1833 and stayed for ten years. His studies and records of the people, languages, customs, flora and fauna of Nepal were so accurate and detailed that to this day they provide mines of valid material for scholars.

Among the inscriptions on the gravestones are many which reveal the hardships and heartbreaks of life in a remote kingdom. Alice Mary, daughter of Captain William Boyd Irwin, 10th Regiment of Native Infantry and of Elizabeth Mary his wife, died on 17th August 1869 aged 13 days; Philip Henry, son of Dr. Oldfield the Resident Surgeon, died in 1865 at the age of 5; Hastings Young of the 83rd Regi-



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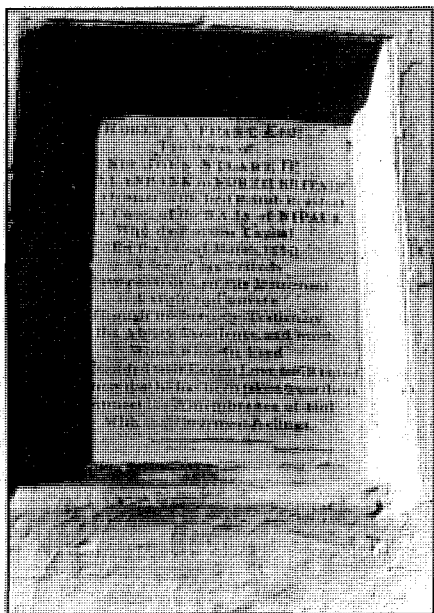
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ment of Bengal Native Infantry, was only 20 at his death on 31 March 1840.

Because Nepal remained a closed kingdom until the mid-20th Century, only a handful of British and virtually no other foreigners lived in the country and Christian burials were infrequent. However, by the mid-1970s the level ground was almost used up and only a half a dozen



*Memorial to Robert Stuart:  
See inscription on previous page*

suitable burial sites remained, the area being taken up by a steep mound. The recurrent nightmare of successive British Ambassadors (who were entirely responsible for the cemetery without the help of official funds) was of a major disaster claiming the lives of numerous victims. The only alternative to burial in the absence of a crematorium was a funeral pyre

in Hindu fashion on the banks of the Bagmati River.

A solution to the problem would have been to create more space by terracing the mound but applications to the Commonwealth War Graves organisation and the British Government for financial help were rejected. Elsewhere cemeteries find support from the local church but the resident British community in Kathmandu was very small and there was no parish church to provide a focus and a source of income. It seemed in 1974 that only Providence could help.

In November of that year one John Sims of London who was an experienced trekker died at the age of 54 in the Shanta Bhavan Mission Hospital in Kathmandu from altitude sickness suffered while trekking up towards Everest Base Camp. His brother, Peter Sims of Beaconsfield, attended the funeral at the British cemetery. Shortly afterwards he wrote to the Ambassador seeking advice on a suitable memorial for his brother whose many colleagues and friends in the City had donated several hundred pounds for the purpose. The hand of Providence was manifest.

Agreement was quickly reached on the allocation of the fund. A donation was made to the Shanta Bhavan hospital. Then a plinth was designed by John Sanday, a British architect then carrying out restoration of the Hanuman Dhoka, a Royal Palace in the old city. The plinth represents Mount Everest and a marble facing carries the inscription:

*John Sims  
1920-1974*

*This stone was placed by his brother and friends whose generosity has enabled the extension of this cemetery*

**Best Wishes for a Very Successful Year**






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## THE ANNUAL NEPALI SUPPER

by Mayura Brown

On the day of our Nepali Supper, February 22nd, the skies were leaden and it was snowing. Undeterred, our members travelled to London from distant parts including Scotland. We found St. Columba's Hall warm and welcoming. Our sincere thanks to our lady members who decorate the Hall so skilfully, and to Mr Tony Wieler who donates the floral decorations generously every year.

Our Chairman, Sir Neil Thorne, greeted the Nepalese Ambassador, Madame Shrestha, the Embassy party, and our members and guests while the pipers of the 7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles kept us entertained. After a delicious supper, prepared and served with the usual care and attention by Mr Ishwar Manandhar and family, our Chairman read the gracious message of good wishes from Her Majesty the Queen. Then the Nepalese Ambassador was invited to speak. He referred to the long-standing friendship between the two countries "almost 200 years" and his appreciation of the help given by the Society and its interest in the well-being of Nepal. Efforts were in hand to lessen the pollution that afflicts the Kathmandu Valley. (This seems to have become a universal problem). The Ambassador also mentioned the proposed Arun 3 Hydro-Electric Project.

(The plan requires the most careful consideration on several points - its potential environmental impact on a sensitive area, its benefits or otherwise to the local communities, attention to the tectonic plate in the Himalayas, and the high risk of floods).

In his speech, Sir Neil spoke of our aid to flood relief. A preliminary donation of £500 was given to the Ambassador's Flood Relief Fund. A larger sum, subscribed by our members, was forwarded to Nepal later. We raised £1,250 for the Lakshmi Thapa School outside Bhaktapur, and a similar amount for GAP (See Appeal pp 29-30 Journal 1992). Our Chairman introduced the three Nepali teachers brought to Britain by GAP. They were Mrs Sudha Regmi from Surket, Mr Norchung Lama from Sindhupalchok, and Mr B.N. Yogi from Ghorahi, Dang. They were warmly applauded when they stood up to be recognised, and we were delighted to know how much they enjoyed the evening with us.

The Nepal-Britain Society's message of greetings and good wishes was read to the assembly, and the two loyal toasts were drunk. Another happy evening was over. We said our farewells with promises to meet at next year's Supper.

In addition, twenty-three small marble plaques were provided for those graves which although known and recorded in the Embassy archives were unmarked by headstones.

The major part of the donation was devoted to terracing the mound inside the cemetery. When the work was completed in 1975 space had been created for sixty additional graves. Peter Sims and all those who had contributed to the memory of John Sims performed at the same time a great service to those unfortunates who may lose their lives while working, holidaying or trekking in the Kingdom of

Nepal and for their families. They also relieved the British Ambassador for some time to come of a nagging concern.

As the photograph (page 15) shows there is an old and impressive entrance arch. There is a wall round the cemetery and nowadays a resident chowkidar ensures the security of the site. Considering their age, the monuments and headstones are in remarkably good condition and records of all burials are retained in the archives of the British Embassy. The cemetery remains a quiet and peaceful corner of the Kathmandu Valley and can be visited on application to the Embassy.



## LIGHT OF NEPAL



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## AID IN NEPAL – THE GURKHA WELFARE SCHEME

by Captain Sean Elliott

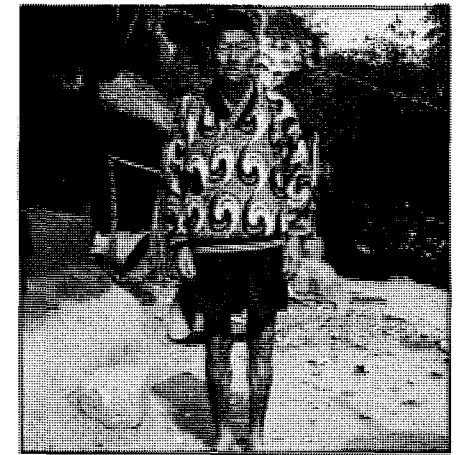
Most members of the Britain-Nepal Society will be aware of the existence of a Charity established specifically for the benefit of Gurkha Ex-Servicemen, The Gurkha Welfare Trust. Most will have a reasonable idea of how Gurkhas have served the British Crown over the past 180 odd years, and all will no doubt have more than a passing interest as to what the future holds for Gurkhas. Naturally there is concern for those still serving, their Regiments and traditions, but what of the unavoidable Ex-Servicemen legacy that is sent back to Nepal at the end of the production line? Although unable to match the welfare state facilities available in UK to 'fully fledged' ex-members of Her Majesty's Armed Forces, the field arm of The Gurkha Welfare Trust operating in Nepal goes some way to bridging the gap.

Its Headquarters collocated in the idyllic settings of British Gurkha recruitment and pension paying camp at the northern end of Pokhara, The Gurkha Welfare Scheme (GWS) works to a central aim which gives rise to two main functional sub-divisions, Individual Aid and Community Aid. Simple, if at first glance appearing a touch elitist, that aim is:

'The alleviation of poverty and distress amongst Gurkha Ex-Servicemen of the British Crown and their dependants by rendering aid to individuals and their communities in Nepal'.

Since its modest beginnings in 1969 when the need was first recognised (or rather the obligation first honoured), GWS has grown and diversified considerably. The result is a unique melting pot of

funding and functions. GWS now works with and on behalf of a number of member charities and organisations besides the original UK based Gurkha Welfare Trust, including The Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association, The Overseas Development Agency, The Gurkha Welfare Trust (Canada), Gurkha Welfare Trust Foundation (USA) and Hong Kong's charitable fund raising endurance event 'Exercise Trail-



*Welfare pensioner Tekbahadur Gurung  
in a jersey presented by the Naval Wives  
of Hong Kong*

walker'. Even the Ministry of Defence acknowledges its commitment to the welfare of Ex-Servicemen and provides GWS with an annual contribution towards staff salaries and administration, as well as two Brigade of Gurkhas serving British Officers. The group currently has a total staff of over 220 and is perhaps the only part of

the British Brigade of Gurkhas which is expanding.

To achieve its aim GWS has a network of 23 Area Welfare Centres spread over the Eastern, Central and Mid Western regions of Nepal in what are considered to mirror the recruiting and retirement areas of Gurkhas. Many are located at what have subsequently become roadhead towns simply by virtue of their role as county towns, while others are more remote - Area Welfare Centre Pirthi, set in the wilds of mid-eastern Nepal where development has yet to take its toll, is a full day's walk from the nearest motorable road and remote in every sense of the word (see front page). The majority of GWS staff are based in these Centres which is indicative of where the bulk of the work load lies. Theirs is the un-achievable task of attempting to meet a never ending stream of welfare requirements - financial, medical, domestic and educational to name but a few.

Each Centre has a mixed staff of Ex-Servicemen and civilians, but with a local hierarchy that has its origins very firmly in the military. The Area Welfare Officer leads his team and is supported by an Assistant or two, a Medic and an Office Runner. Where the Kadoories have sponsored an agricultural programme there may also be an Agricultural Assistant to nurture the orchards and tend the pigs. The Centres are primarily designed as GWS field operating bases but also serve as a display of 'excellence' to the local community in a more general sense. The locals are free to take full advantage of the unusually well-ordered and beautiful surroundings to have their photographs taken or simply relax, and many do just that. The tightly fenced off land surrounding the



*Khamba Gurung looks with dismay at his fields destroyed by flooding*

Centres is a year-round display of brightly coloured flower-beds and highly productive vegetable gardens. With a local pig loose in the back yard, a buffalo or goat tethered on the lawn, a small coop of chickens and the occasional rabbit hutch, many Centres verge on 'home farm' status - the more adventurous have tried anything from fish-farming to coffee plants. Where the Kadoories have set up an agricultural programme, based mainly around a piggery, many Centres have become self-supporting while some even make a net profit from the sale of their fruit or livestock. The pineapples of Area Welfare Centre Tanahun took the honours in a local competition while Area Welfare Centre Beni was on to a winner with a tree bearing over 100 papayas. In all cases practicality and sound practise are the key ingredients, and often beauty goes unwittingly

tingly hand in hand with breakfast - a row of radishes amongst the marigolds is not uncommon! The buildings themselves, of western design and specification, stand-out amongst their surroundings in rural Nepal. In the towns meanwhile the practical luxuries of methane biogas for cooking or solar heated water add a certain status. Above all though, it is perhaps the straightforward approach of the Centre's staff that eventually earns the respect and support of the community. The implementation of the aid package adheres to harsh, but fair guidelines - distinctly un-Nepali but much appreciated anyway. But what of the aid itself?

The main thrust of Individual Aid at present is in the form of Welfare Pensions given mainly to those who fought in the last war (or their widows), but who now at an average age of over 73 may be too old or infirm to support themselves. A Welfare Pension represents a basic life-line of essential support for such veterans and is achieved in Nepal for the equivalent of around £9 per month. Tekbahadur Thapa served with the 2nd Gurkha Rifles from 1940-46. Now aged 74, he and his wife of 64 are entirely self-dependant, their two daughters having married and moved away to look after their in-laws as is traditional. With only half an acre of poor land to farm and a wooden hut to live in, their life was becoming increasingly harder as the years went by. The regular income a Welfare Pension provides has gone some way to reducing this hardship. GWS currently has just over 9,000 such Welfare Pensioners on its books - a substantial but necessary drain on resources.

As an alternative to a Welfare Pension, Land Purchase Grants are made to younger and able-bodied Ex-Servicemen

or their widows who will be capable of working the land and providing their families with a subsistence level of income from it. Successful land purchase grants are cheaper in the long term than pensions, they do not create a welfare dependency and they provide for successive generations.

So much for the straight forward and largely predictable needs of life and growing old. A subsistence agricultural existence in Nepal is highly susceptible to natural disasters such as floods, landslides, earthquakes and fire, any one of which can threaten the delicate balance



*Six year old blind girl Anuradha Gurung is helped by the Blind Schools Matron*

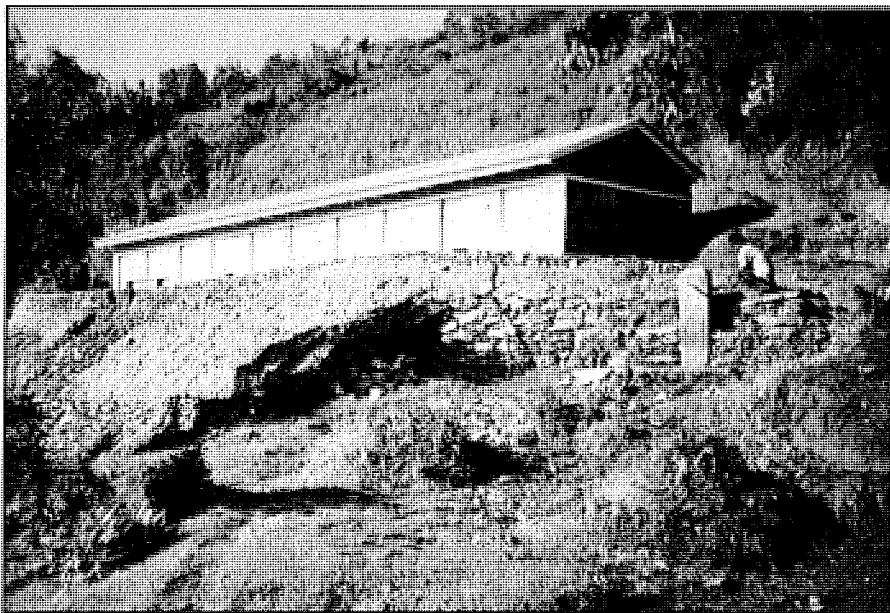
between self-sufficiency and ruin. Khamba Gurung lost almost his entire rice crop, and much of the paddy in which it was growing when the Daraundi River

near Gorkha flooded during the late monsoon 1993. To cope with this type of eventuality GWS makes one-time distress relief payments to redress the imbalance - at the same time being careful not to be perceived as an insurance company, expected to replace in full exactly what has been lost. In cases where there is real hardship, however, timely intervention to help rebuild a house or repair fields will negate the need for more costly help in the future.

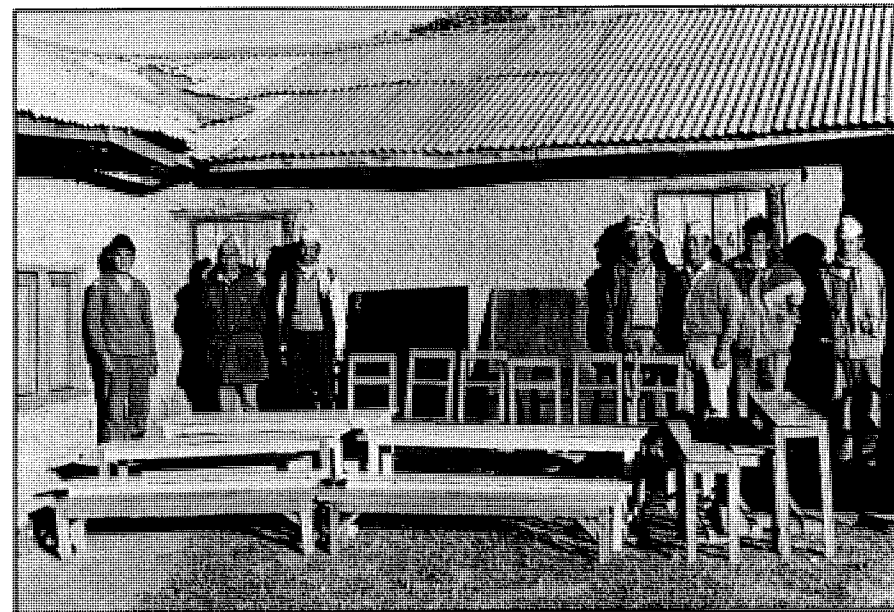
With the lack of readily available state-driven medical facilities in many places, GWS runs a scheme aimed at providing medical support. Area Welfare Centre Medics are well trained and capable of basic diagnosis, treatment and first aid to cope with anything from boils and burns to gastric disorders and scabies. For fur-

ther consultation many Centres are now able to have regular weekly clinics making use of fully-qualified local Doctors, and allowing the Ex-Servicemen and their families to make multi-purpose visit to the Welfare Centre. The journey may be some 2 or 3 days walk over far from easy country, and to be able to collect a welfare pension, sort out your ailments and meet up with old friends all at the same time is very good for morale! Finally, for more complicated medical cases, hospitalisation or long-term treatment, GWS assists Ex-Servicemen through means-related financial reimbursement.

GWS started a Sponsorship Scheme for individuals early in 1993 with the aim of seeking private or corporate sponsors to take on individual welfare cases. Although more demanding to administer



*A major school project – Mane Danra Primary School in Taplejung Zilla was built from scratch (June 94)*



*A minor school project – Chitrapokari Middle School near Gorkha proudly displays new furniture*

than non-tied aid, direct sponsorship of individuals be it for veterans, orphans or the disabled is assuming an important role in the GWS aid package. To many donors it provides a far more satisfactory service by facilitating personal interest, contact and interaction if required. Six year old Anuradha Gurung is blind and an orphan. Her father who had served with 3rd Gurkha Rifles during the war died in 1990 and his second wife, Anuradha's mother, died in 1992. Alone apart from her 8 year old brother, who was working as kitchen hand in a local hostel to feed them both, her future was bleak. GWS was quickly able to find a sponsor for her and re-locate her to a specialist Blind School in Pokhara where in caring and stable surroundings she has flourished and will be fully edu-

cated. Her brother Amarchan has also been moved to Pokhara where he is at boarding school, also funded by individual sponsorship. Finally, on behalf of a mixed bag of funds and donors, GWS administers aid to individuals in the form of student grants or scholarships. About 550 children benefit annually from a firm commitment that is made to those who are academically suitable to see an education through to its natural conclusion. The scheme thus targets those who would otherwise be unable to receive schooling in a country where the value of education is still highly treasured and appreciated.

Making up a major part of the home grown Community Aid package and funded by The Overseas Development Agency, GWS has designed and built 20

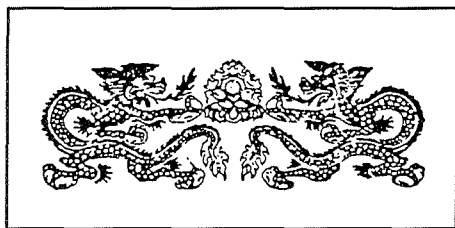
rural potable water schemes per year for the past 6 years. As most contamination of water occurs between collection at the tap stand and consumption, a vital element of the projects is the visit and instruction provided by the Supporting Health and Hygiene Promotion Teams. Two teams of three specifically trained women and a man follow up recently completed projects promoting the hygienic use of water.

GWS has enjoyed a long and close association with the Kadoorie family and their Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association (KAAA). Working to two specific target areas each year, KAAA usually completes six pedestrian bridges and twenty water systems per year. The strength and efficiency of personal commitment by all in the Kadoorie organisation is a fine example to all aid organisations and their affiliation with GWS is highly treasured.

The GWS School Building Programme consists of a balance of minor and major projects. The former involve the complete rebuild of a derelict school to GWS specifications and under the watchful eye of a GWS construction engineer. The average cost of such a major project is around £4,500 and the solidly built results are more than simply value for money. Minor

projects meanwhile make funds for self-help projects such as general building maintenance, the construction of furniture or re-roofing.

GWS fulfils a somewhat unique charitable role in providing an enormously wide-ranging welfare package to a relatively select group of people - we of GWS however are in little doubt that they deserve it! Ever mindful of the need to adapt the aid package to what is actually required, GWS has recently computerised its Headquarters to permit accurate budgeting as well as take a lead in predicting future dependency through a demography study. What the long term future holds for GWS is more difficult to predict although careful planning now will be essential to see the Second World War veterans through their time of need. It will also be necessary to keep a look-out, and anticipate both where and when the next main cry for help will come. With the majority of Gurkhas now retiring on a Service Pension it is arguable that a time will come when GWS can reduce its operations considerably. That said, we aim to be operating in Nepal well into the next century, and certainly as long as Gurkha Ex-Servicemen or their dependants are in genuine need of our help.



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## HIMALAYAN VOICES

An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature, by M.J. Hutt,  
University of California Press, Berkeley 1991.

(Reviewed by Mark Temple)

This introduction to the Literature of the Nepali Language was written by the lecturer in Nepali at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University. It will to some extent replace Abhi Subedi's Nepali Literature: Background and History published in Kathmandu in 1978. An article by Michael Hutt appeared in this journal in 1991.

Nepali, or Gurkhali as it is known in regiments of the British Army for historical reasons, is not just the language of Nepal, but is widely spoken in Darjeeling District of West Bengal, Sikkhim, Bhutan, Assam and parts of upper Burma. It is also spoken wherever Nepali communities live in numerous cities of the sub-continent such as Dehra Dun and Calcutta.

The book is in two parts, poetry and short stories. In each section the foremost authors are introduced with a brief profile and essay on their work followed by translated poems or short stories.

The short stories work better in translation than the poetry. In a paper to a linguistics symposium in Kathmandu in 1989 Michael Hutt quoted a famous Italian saying 'translation is treachery'. The poem is the most important medium in modern Nepali Literature but the translation of poetry is notoriously difficult. Nevertheless, the rich tradition of Nepali poetry comes through in some of the excerpts:-

### A Glimpse


(by Kedar man Vyathit)  
*Fickle as a mountain stream,  
affectionate as the earth,  
lovely like ripened crops  
shy like bending straw  
a girl with a basket  
climbs up the hill ....*

Poetry was also an important vehicle for political thought during the repression of the Ranas and the Panchayat Raj.


Since Britons in Nepal have a good tradition of mastering the language, some readers of the Journal may feel inclined to read the poems in Nepali which is the only way to fully appreciate them. I recommend the poet Bhupi Sherchan as a good starting point because of the simplicity of the language and the quality of his poetry.

The short stories bring Nepal alive in a brilliant manner. Ramesh Bikal's 'A Splendid Buffalo' describes how an official in a hill village cheats a poor farmer of his fine new buffalo. B.P. Koirala's story from the 1940's 'To The Lowlands' tells of an encounter on a hill path between a widow and four coolies/beggars on their way to search for their fortunes in the plains. She gets robbed. In these and other stories you can hear the authentic voices of the ordinary people of Nepal.

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## NEPALESE TEXTILES

by Susi Dunsmore - £16.95 British Museum Press

(Reviewed by Mayura Brown)

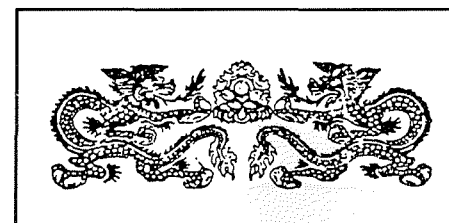
A great deal of careful research was obviously required to produce such a fascinating book. We are introduced to Nepal's early history and legends with comments on the apparel worn in the distant past. This is followed by the observations of the privileged few who were able to visit the country later.

Mrs Dunsmore's expert knowledge of textiles and her sympathetic appreciation of the traditional rural crafts of Nepal enables the reader to evaluate the techniques that have existed in the country for centuries. The Allo (Nettle) cloth still made today was mentioned in the Hindu epic, the Ramayana, where its beauty was praised. She explains with clarity the methods used to employ the indigenous plants for spinning and weaving, giving their names and the areas in which they grow. There is a short chapter dealing with the vegetable dyes and the manner of their production. In the past natural dyes were always used, but are being superseded by chemical dyes from India. Mrs Dunsmore says (p81): 'Although the fastness of these dyes surpasses that of the natural dyes, the

beauty and subtlety of the latter can rarely be imitated'.

Examples of the weaver's art, the gentle colours, and the intricate patterns are charmingly illustrated in many colour plates. The villagers, who are the guardians of these crafts, must be persuaded to pursue their ancient traditions and jealously preserve them. It is sad that the attractive Dumber Kumari Chappa which was so popular when I was young, is difficult to obtain nowadays. The influx of tourists and 'modern' ideas mean that some Nepalese prefer to buy imported material rather than their own more durable and distinctive woven cloth.

Our gratitude is due to Mrs Dunsmore for presenting to us an important Nepalese craft which must be encouraged to flourish, and never allowed to decline. This book is not only for those interested in textiles. Readers will find in its pages a momentary escape to hidden valleys, where village life, despite a demanding environment, continues in timeless tranquillity.





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## WARS BRING SCARS

by E.D Smith

£6.95 R.J. Leach & Co

(Reviewed by Lt.Col. T.M. Lowe)

'I remember Pat shouting and then we plunged like a stone on to the pad: there was a loud splintering crash: one minute we were gazing at the sky, then trees raced at us as the Wessex somersaulted down the steep slope. A momentary glimpse of whirling sky and jungle and then, a terrible pulverising blow on my right arm. So this is an accident and I am being killed ...'

But the author, Birdie Smith, did survive, albeit after some jungle surgery, to write this sequel to his much-acclaimed 'Even The Brave Father'. In 'Wars Bring Scars', Birdie Smith covers some of his experiences in counter-insurgency operations with the 7th Gurkha Rifles in Greece (1945), Malaya during the Emergency, and in Borneo where the Wessex helicopter, in which he was travelling, crashed in April 1964. His rehabilitation at RAF Headley Court enabled him to return, once more, to Borneo, this time as Commandant 1/2 KEO Gurkha Rifles. His story ends when he handed over command in 1968.

With so much of his service spent with the Gurkhas of Nepal, this book gives an insight into what it was like serving with

those happy warriors in 'the savage wars of peace' that have troubled the world ever since 1945. Moreover, the current plans to cut the Brigade of Gurkhas to a mere shadow of its former strength can only add to fears for their long-term future in the British Army.

A limited number of signed copies can be obtained direct from the author - but please add 75p to your cheque to cover postage. (The author gives £1 on each copy sold from his house to the Gurkha Welfare Trust).

E.D. Smith  
2 Balfour Mews  
Station Road, Sidmouth  
Devon EX10 8XL

Copies can be obtained from the Publisher - whose address is as shown - or order at any book shop.

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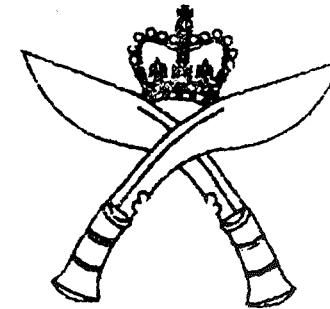
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OBITUARY

We were greatly grieved last November to hear of the death of Joyce, widow of John Boyd Denson, (British Ambassador to Nepal 1977-1983). Mr Peter Roberts represented the Society at her funeral. It is sad to lose old friends, especially those devoted to Nepal. Among our earliest members, the Densons always kept in touch with me wherever they happened to be to have news of the Society. I am sure the many years they spent in Nepal were among the happiest of their lives. We value the memory of these good friends who are sadly missed.

*Mayura Brown*



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Our aim is to promote and foster good relations between the people of the United Kingdom and Nepal. The Society was founded in 1960, under the patronage of His late Majesty King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Deva of Nepal during his State Visit to London: Lord Hunt became the first President.

British and Nepalese subjects, and business firms or corporate bodies are eligible for membership.

Members include serving and retired Gurkhas, mountaineers, members of the Diplomatic Service, schoolmasters, doctors, nurses, businessmen and scholars.

Ordinary members pay a subscription of £10 per annum. Life members - a single payment of £150 and Corporate Members £25. The Journal is sent free to all members.

Members of the "YETI" Association for Nepal's resident or staying in Britain are welcome at all functions. They are eligible to join as full members in the usual way. They have a flourishing organisation of their own and publish their own attractive journal.

The Society's programme includes:

- monthly lectures or events from October to May in London;

- a Spring or Summer outing to a place of interest;
- receptions and hospitality for visitors from Nepal;
- the AGM in November and an annual supper party in February or March.

We keep in touch with the Nepal-Britain Society in Kathmandu which the late H.H. Field Marshal Sir Kaiser, a Life Member of the Society, founded shortly before his death.

The Britain-Nepal Society has a growing membership and there is tremendous enthusiasm for Nepal. Our meetings, which are usually well attended, provide an excellent opportunity for members and their guests to get together. Our membership, not counting Honorary Members and Corporate Members, is now well over five hundred.

The President of our Society is His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester, GCVO.

The Committee welcome new members amongst people with a genuine interest in Nepal. The address of the Honorary Secretary is:

Mrs E.P. Mellor  
3c Gunnersbury Avenue,  
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## THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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