
THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

Journal

Number 32

2008

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Edward Gardner, the first Resident to the Court of Nepal, 1816 to 1829.



*Hillary & Tenzing enjoy a cup of tea on return from the summit of Everest.
Photo: George Band, courtesy of RGS.*



The original Britain – Nepal Medical Trust team at a farewell reception at 12a Kensington Palace Gardens before their departure to Nepal. Note the fashion and hair-dos of the time! Di Chadwick, Vint Chadwick, Penny Cunningham, Barney Rosedale, John Cunningham, Rosemary Reid, Peter Hawksworth, Gill Kettle, Sheena (to become Sheena Ward), Prue Hunt, John Ward with the royal Nepalese Ambassador, HE Mr Ishwari Raj Mishra and his wife. (This photograph appeared in the book 'Kingdom in the Sky' by John Cunningham. The team joined the Britain – Nepal Society as part of their preparations. Ed.)

 EDITORIAL

This year, 2008, has been a momentous year for Nepal. The much-delayed elections for the Constituent Assembly finally took place in April. The results went against what Nepal-watchers were expecting as Maoist supporters gained more seats than predicted by the 'pundits'. This was a vote for change. After considerable negotiation the country became a republic, signalling the end of the Shah dynasty that had ruled since the late eighteenth century. President Ram Baran Yadav was sworn in. The post of Prime Minister of the interim administration went to Pushpa Kamal Dahal, aka 'Prachanda' ('the fierce one') who had been the Maoist leader during the insurrection. The members of the Constituent Assembly are mandated to propose a new constitution, to be followed by further elections on the basis of such a constitution in some two years time. To date progress on the drafting of the new constitution has been slow; the two year target would seem to be very optimistic based on previous experience.

Although the Society tries to avoid becoming involved with politics, nevertheless the recent events have sadly had an impact. Our Patron, Princess Jotshana, felt that as a result of the change from a monarchy to the establishment of a republic in Nepal, she should retire from her position as Patron since her position and status now no longer permitted her to provide support to the Society as in the past. As I explained in the 2006 edition of the journal, all royal titles had been dropped at that time and this is the extension of that, following the recent changes. We

reluctantly accepted her decision. We did however feel that her six year tenure as our patron should be marked by a suitable presentation. The aim was to find a piece of silver with the London assay mark of 1816, the year of the Treaty of Segauli that marked the end of the Anglo-Nepal War. The Society purchased a pair of excellent quality Georgian silver sauce ladles of the 1816 date. These were presented to Princess Jotshana in December by one of our Vice Presidents, Mrs Pat Mellor and committee member Miss Jane Loveless on their visit to Nepal. This presentation was well received by Princess Jotshana and her husband, Dr Basnyat.

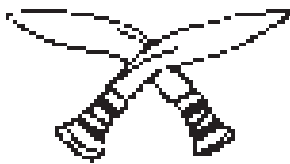
The journal follows the usual format with news of the Society and its events and includes a note on the Nepal Trade & Tourism Fair which was put on in September by the Embassy and the Britain – Nepal Chamber of Commerce. Sadly the world lost one its greatest mountaineers, Sir Edmund Hillary. Sir Edmund was an honorary member and it was through him that in the past the Society held the annual suppers at New Zealand House. George Band has written a tribute to him and I have been able to include a piece written by Mr Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of *Himal SouthAsian*, which looks at Sir Edmund's life and achievements through South Asian eyes. The Society was represented by our President, HRH The Duke of Gloucester, at the memorial service held in St George's Chapel, Windsor on 2nd April and at the memorial charity evening at the Royal Geographical Society arranged by George Band the following day. The Society was strongly represented by

officers and members on both occasions.

The Britain – Nepal Medical Trust celebrates its fortieth year and a review is provided by Dr Gillian Holdsworth. Dr Mark Watson from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh has written about Edward Gardner, an early Resident in Kathmandu and his little known contribution to botany in Nepal. Mark Temple submitted a piece about his meeting and discussions with Lt Col Andrew Mercer in Darjeeling to which the editor added his own experience of some years before – a vignette of ‘staying on’ after the end of the British raj. Rick Beven has written about the far west of Nepal, an area often neglected, and Veronica Watkins of the Zoological Society of London has updated us on the Nepal rhinos at Whipsnade. I must also recommend the book review section.

Over the last two years members have

been busy – I had no idea there was so much literary talent in the Society. Five of the books reviewed were written by members. As always I am grateful to the contributors and reviewers without whom there would be no journal. I take this opportunity to remind members that it is hoped to produce a separate publication to mark the Society’s golden jubilee in 2010. This will take the form of a brief outline history of the Society with a digest of some of the particularly relevant older articles that have appeared over the years with, I hope, some new work. If members have any ideas or interesting pieces for consideration for possible inclusion, please contact the editor. Due to the work and costs involved, the next two issues of the journal may therefore be thinner volumes.



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THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

By Dr Neil Weir

After the 2007 AGM we had the pleasure of welcoming the new Nepalese Ambassador HE Mr Murari Raj Sharma. This is my last report as Honorary Secretary. I have had the privilege of serving on the committee for five years, four of which have been as Honorary Secretary. I would like to thank my wife, Sue Weir, who has ably assisted me since Daphne Field retired in June 2007. Pat Mellor has always been ready to help particularly on membership matters and our Chairman, Lt Col Gerry Birch has been a valuable source of guidance.

PATRON

With the change in status of Nepal in May 2008 from that of a monarchy to a federal republic, Princess Jotshana, felt that she should now stand down as the Society's Patron. The Society is grateful to her for the interest she showed throughout her period as Patron over the last six years. Both we and she will hold fond memories of her time in London and she wishes to keep in touch with us both as a society and as individuals.

LECTURES

The venue of the Medical Society of London has continued to be a success and two of the meetings were followed by a Nepali supper provided by the Munal Restaurant. As will be seen from the accounts there has been a larger loss this year on events. Part of the reason for this is the smaller attendances at some of the talks. Twenty people will not cover the cost of room hire, even at £5.00 per head with at least two glasses of wine! For any event to be successful financially at least 35-40 people need to attend to

cover the fixed charges of room hire.

The attendance increases if the talk is followed by a Nepali supper.

The lectures given were:

30 January 2008: Sue Carpenter: My World, My View: Teaching Photography to Disadvantaged Girls in Nepal.

6 March: Mr Ramesh Dhungal: The British Resident, Brian Hodgson and his Manuscripts from Nepal

21 May: Sarah Lowry, Helen Giles and Naori Priestly: Design and Production of *Allo* (nettle) material and garments by villagers in Eastern Nepal.

Followed by a Nepali Supper.

18 October: Professor David Howard: The Mount Everest Laboratory.

Followed by a Nepali Supper.

We are grateful to all the speakers for their time, enthusiasm and excellent illustrations. As is the custom we shall look forward to receiving them as our guests at the Annual Nepali Supper on 19 February 2009.

ANNUAL NEPALI SUPPER

The supper was attended by 142 members and guests, was held on 21 February at St Columba's Church of Scotland Hall in Pont Street. The Chairman spoke.

SUMMER OUTING

It was decided by the committee not to hold a summer outing this year. A visit to the Gurkha Museum, Winchester is planned for 4 July 2009.

NEPAL TRADE & TOURISM FAIR 21-22 SEPTEMBER 2008

This exciting event was held at the Limkokwing University, 106 Piccadilly, London. The objective was to strengthen economic ties between Nepal and Great Britain by attracting British private investment and British tourists to Nepal. There were stands covering tourism, arts and crafts industries, and beer production. The two day event was punctuated with fashion and cultural shows. The Society shared a stall with the Britain – Nepal Chamber of Commerce and attracted new members to the Society.

FUTURE EVENTS

Talks: The dates for the 2009 talks, all of which will be held at the Medical Society of London, 11 Chandos Street are to be held on:

Wednesday 28 January 2009: Lt Col Gerry Birch: 1948 US Zoological Expedition to Nepal.

The Annual Supper 19 February

Thursday 12 March: John Pemble:

‘Back to the Himalayan Foothills:

Looking again at the British Invasion of Nepal’

John Pemble’s *The Invasion of Nepal* first appeared in 1971. A new, revised edition, with a foreword by John Cross, has just been published under the title *Britain’s Gurkha War: The Invasion of Nepal, 1814-16*

This talk is related to the book. There will be a chance to buy or at least have a look at the book at the meeting.

Additional meeting Thursday 26

March: HE Dr AR Hall: ‘An update on the current situation.’

**Location: Canning House,
2 Belgrave Square.**

Summer Outing: 4 July 2009:

The Gurkha Museum, with lunch

Thursday 15 October: George Band:

UK Himalayan Trust

WEBSITE

www.britain-nepal-society.org.uk

We are grateful to Mr Derek Marsh of Crystal Consultants (UK) for his assistance with the website. The Society ideally needs a keen enthusiastic webmaster to keep Mr Marsh informed of events and linkages with other organizations interested in Nepal.

DEATHS

It is with sadness that we report the death during 2007/08 of the following members:

Mr Hugh Broad.

Sir Edmund Hillary KG ONZ KBE

Bridget Kellas, wife of the late Arthur Kellas, died in Inverockle in August 2008, only some 18 months after Arthur’s death. Arthur Kellas followed Lord Hunt as the Society’s President between 1975 and 1979; his obituary was listed in the 2007 edition of the journal.

Mr TJ O’Brien CMG MC -
Ambassador, Kathmandu 1970 - 74

Lt Col JA Lys OBE MC - Defence
Attaché, Kathmandu 1972 - 75

THE NEPAL TRADE & TOURISM FAIR 21 & 22 SEPTEMBER

By Anthony Wieler

(This is an edited version of an article that was written for 'The Sagarmatha Times'. Ed.)

A large number of people came to 106 Piccadilly in London, where the Limkokwing University had provided a magnificent venue for the first "Trade Fair" to be sponsored by the Embassy of Nepal in London. For the first time the Ambassador from Nepal was putting the emphasis on Trade and Investment..."the development of Trade rather than dependence on Aid"...and several key representatives of the business community in Nepal came over to show that they were keen to work with the new government to develop the great potential such as the hydro-energy and resources of Nepal such as higher value horticulture, tourism, manufacturing, man-power and many other aspects and sectors.

The delegates from Nepal were introduced to representatives of the British Chambers of Commerce, the London Chamber of Commerce, UK Trade & Investment, the Crown Agents, and the Britain-Nepal Chamber of Commerce, and they met the chief of staff of the Hinduja Group, and Lord Paul of the Caparo Group, who promised to consider projects to help Nepal.

Rajendra Khetan, a past president of the Nepal - Britain Chamber of Commerce and member of the Constituent Assembly, with extensive business interests in Nepal, spoke confidently about the opportunities for profitable business and promised to encourage the Federation of Nepali Chambers of Commerce & Industry to follow up the initiatives discussed at the

Fair with the representatives of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the British Chambers of Commerce.

Radhesh Pant, President of the Nepal Bankers' Association was backed by key financiers from Nepal, including Prithivi Pande, chairman of the Nepal Investment Bank, telling their audience about the vast Nepal Infrastructure Fund being put together by International Finance Corporation (World Bank), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and many other leading institutions, to develop an additional 10,000 KW from hydro-energy and other sources, and to build new roads (and rail) to strengthen Nepal's infrastructure.

The Honourable Mrs Hishila Yami, The Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation for Nepal, was the guest of honour, backed by the CEO of the Nepal Tourist Board. Mrs Yami spoke with great optimism about the expansion of the tourist trade, and as she is married to the Finance Minister, the Honourable Baburam Bhattarai, the people whom she met took great notice of her confident endorsement of his expression of interest and the importance he has given to the development of commerce and trade.

The Prime Ministers of both Nepal and Britain sent written messages to the Fair, and Shahid Malik, Minister at DFID, sent a recorded message from the Labour Party Conference, showing a good grasp of the potential opportunities in Nepal.

The Britain-Nepal Chamber of Commerce is following up these promises and proposals, with a series of monthly meetings on a wide variety of subjects. On 1st October, Veeton Fleece sponsored a well-attended gathering at

the Embassy of Nepal, at which leading designers and experts in "Interior Decor" learnt about the high quality bespoke carpets being woven in Kathmandu. Ashoke Rana, CEO of the Himalaya Bank, was one of the BNCC members at this meeting and there were good opportunities for networking amongst all the businessmen there, stimulated and inspired by the champagne and wines provided by Veedon Fleece.

On 12th November, BNCC held a "Showcase" on Tourism to Nepal and invited the travel agents attending the World Travel Market to focus on Nepal. BNCC are planning further meetings and seminars on topics such as hydro-energy and higher value horticulture in the succeeding months. Plans are already being outlined for a second fair for 2009.

SOCIETY TIES SCARVES AND LAPEL BADGES

Mr David Jefford kindly looks after the sale of the Society ties and scarves which cost £10.00 each including postage. They are available from him at: 20 Longmead, Fleet, Hampshire GU52 7TR or at the AGM or one of our major functions.

Miss Jane Loveless has supervised the production of a very attractive lapel badge which is available for sale for £3.00 at the AGM and other major functions.

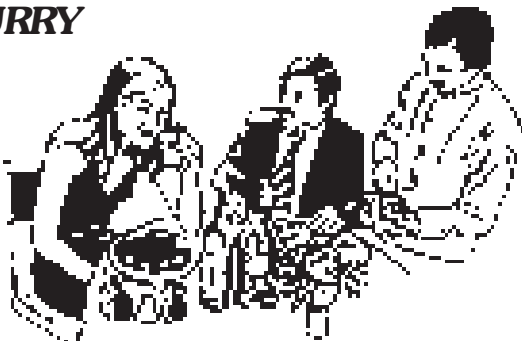


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THE ARCHIVIST

Mrs Celia Brown has agreed to take on the task of collecting archival material and in obtaining where possible, brief memoirs. She would like to hear from anyone who may wish to contribute. However, in the first instance she would appreciate it if members could let her know what they have available. The editor of the journal and the committee are planning to produce a short history of

the Society over the period 1960 to 2010 to commemorate the Society's fiftieth anniversary in 2010. Archival material will play an important part in the production of this publication.

Her address is: 1 Allen Mansions, Allen Street, London W8 6UY and email:celia.collington@btopenworld.com

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TRIBUTES TO THE LATE SIR EDMUND HILLARY KG ONZ KBE

Memories of Ed: A Mountaineer's Farewell

By George Band OBE

I first met Ed Hillary in the garden of the British Embassy in Kathmandu in March 1953 as we assembled for the Everest Expedition. He, and his fellow New Zealand climber George Lowe, were both tall, lean and lanky six-footers, and I could see they were men of determination. Our leader, John Hunt, also meeting them for the first time, later described Ed Hillary: “..as exceptionally strong and abounding in a restless energy, possessed of a thrusting mind which swept aside all unproved obstacles”.

During the delightful 300 km walk to Everest through the Himalayan foothills, Ed would be among the first to enjoy a quick swim before breakfast in one of the icy streams. During those 17 days, we got to know each other, swapping stories about the climbs we had done. How Ed had learnt his craft from the great guide Harry Ayres on New Zealand's magnificent ice climbs, and then teamed up with George Lowe and others to make first ascents on Mount Cook and Elie de Beaumont. Ed had been on three Himalayan Expeditions in the previous two years, so was very fit, and a strong candidate for one of the two planned assaults on the summit.

Hunt chose four of us, Ed, George Lowe, Mike Westmacott and me to find a safe route up the treacherous Khumbu Icefall. It took five days and called for all our ice-climbing skills. Back at the Base Camp we soon learnt to adopt what became known as the ‘Everest Position’: lying flat out on your sleeping bag while waiting for a mug of hot tea! Nowadays, with so many expeditions on the mountain, the task of making the route

through the Icefall is contracted out to the Sherpas. How lucky we were to have the mountain entirely to ourselves!

We were chosen by Hunt as a team of ten climbers, each potentially able to go to the top, plus Tenzing who had already been on five expeditions to Everest, and higher than any of us the previous year with the Swiss. Hillary thought Hunt would not want the two New Zealanders together, so he made good friends with Tenzing and they made a strong pair. Each recognised the other's determination. Hunt wrote that they were “outstanding at the time, climbing faster and more strongly than any of us”. We always hoped one of the best Sherpas might have a chance for the summit, to recognise their huge contribution to the expedition.

In the event, John Hunt chose Charles Evans, his deputy, and Tom Bourdillon, the expert on the closed-circuit oxygen equipment, as the first pair; Hillary and Tenzing as the second, with the rest of us allocated equally essential tasks in the build-up for the assault. Think of George Lowe spending ten days above 7,000m without oxygen, cutting steps and fixing ropes up the icy Lhotse Face. The rest is history. Evans and Bourdillon climbed higher than man had ever been before in reaching the south peak, but it was Hillary and Tenzing who made the successful summit “touch down” on behalf of the team. It was a privilege just to be part of it.

Now Ed has left us, dying of a heart attack on 11th January 2008 in Auckland, at the age of 88. We offer our deep sympathy to Lady June and members of

the extended Hillary family. He was accorded a State Funeral by the New Zealand Government who most generously invited us surviving Everest 1953 climbers as official guests: Gregory, Lowe, Westmacott and myself, plus Jan Morris, who as James Morris, the Times correspondent, made the scoop of his life in time for the Coronation, thereby immortalising the names of Hillary and Tenzing.

We all know how Ed went on climbing, exploring and driving a tractor to the South Pole. But he also created and raised money for his Himalayan Trust to improve the lives of the Sherpas and hill people of Nepal. Over the next 40 years he helped to build 26 schools, 2 hospitals and 13 medical clinics. As Chairman of The Himalayan Trust UK, I have pledged continued support to this humanitarian work which continues to this day. Even more than Everest, he would like it to be a perpetual memorial to his life and achievements.

The Gentle Adventurers -

By Kanak Mani Dixit

To say that someone is a 'Southasian' in *Himal's* lexicon is a compliment of the highest order. And that is not intended to imply any racial or regional chauvinism – it's just an idea that the values of Southasian-ness, beyond nation-statism, imply confidence, competence, commitment, empathy and an evolved ability for self-deprecation.

Edmund Hillary, who died on 11th January 2008, was a Southasian. Of course, he became nominally a Southasian when he was granted honorary Nepali citizenship in 2003. But he was a Southasian well before that due to his seeking to understand the

Himalaya and its people, due to his coming forth to help without fanfare and without seeking applause. Indeed, he later said that his proudest accomplishment had not been climbing Everest ("We knocked the bastard off"), but rather what he did to help the Sherpa community in his decades after the ascent.

Sir Ed was a gentle adventurer, who used humour to cover his sense of unease with having achieved international fame. Once, when challenged about whether Geoge Leigh Mallory and Andrew Irvine might actually have reached the summit before him and Tenzing Norgay, back during a 1924 expedition, Sir Edmund replied in words to the effect that, "Well, you also have to come back down alive."

Sir Ed's personality came through in an interview that I conducted for *Himal's* very first issue in July 1988. (The 'zero' or prototype issue had come out in May 1987.) At that time, and till 1996, *Himal* was a Himalayan magazine and so the issues discussed were all about the mountain people and the mountain environment. Here are some excerpts from Sir Ed's responses to my questions:

- There is immense ecological degradation across the mountains. The Chipko experience is good, and seems to have worked in its specific region; but maybe everywhere area has to develop its own techniques.
- Not by any means are people conservationists by nature. They have to live from day to day and life is hard.
- It is no good saying, "We want this environment unchanged for the next hundred years." The hill

people live very much in the present.

- In the hill areas, I would rather see

slow and steady progress. As my Sherpa friend, Mingma Tsering, says,” Slowly slowly is better.”

- The idea of tourism is good, but one has to consider the pressure on the environment and the local culture. There has to be some discipline and control, but the young and impecunious must not lose their access. So what is required is balance in control. The big mountains of the Himalaya should not be the sole preserve of hotshot alpinists. That is an arrogant view. Mountaineering should be for everyone who is reasonably competent.
- I say let the mountain [Everest] alone for five years. They should close the peak and then start all over again in a controlled manner.

Not surprisingly, the departure of Sir Edmund was also a time to remember Tenzing Norgay, a true mountaineer among the myriad Himalayan ‘tigers’ who helped the *sahibs* attain the Himalayan summits. They were quite a duo, Hillary and Tenzing, each a notable personality in his own right. In his writings, Tenzing comes across as an extraordinary person, sensitive and intellectual.

When the Everest team arrived back in Kathmandu after the successful climb, in June 1953, the reception was all about the glory that Tenzing had brought to Nepal. In sharp contrast to the fame with which Hillary was showered for the rest of his life, in Kathmandu at that time the glory was reserved for Tenzing. With Nepal having just entered the modern era, there was a need to pump up the mountain hero – to anoint him a ‘Sherpa’ and lay exclusive claim to the successful climb. In victory laps around Kathmandu atop a jeep, it was Tenzing rather than Hillary who was lionised. The bard Dharma Raj

Thapa sang of how Tenzing had led Hillary to the summit. But Sir Ed kept the promise of not revealing who had actually first stepped on the summit till long after Tenzing died in 1986. It was he, the lanky New Zealander, who had done so.

Tenzing was a Tibetan by birth, born in the Kharta Valley east of Everest. He grew up in the Khumbu, in Nepal’s Sherpa heartland, before moving to Darjeeling to seek climbing jobs. He made it up the South Col of Everest in 1952 with Charles Lambert, within striking distance of the summit. He returned the next year with Hillary as part of Lord John Hunt’s expedition.

Here is how in July 1988, Hillary described Tenzing, who had moved on two years earlier:

“In 1953, when we climbed Everest, we were friendly and worked together, but you would not have said that we had a warm relationship. In the last ten years, we were really very close. We were able to communicate better and we talked philosophy, for he was quite a philosopher. Buddhism was very important to Tenzing and he had a *gompa* on the top floor of his house. He was very concerned for the education of his children. He had very little to do with the Sherpas of Khumbu. The way of life of the Darjeeling and the Khumbu Sherpas are very different.”

Rest in peace, Hillary and Tenzing – Southasians both.

(This article appeared in the February 2008 edition of Himal Southasian. I am grateful to Mr Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of Himal Southasian, for permission to publish this in the Society’s journal. Ed.)



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EDWARD GARDNER - THE LOST BOTANIST OF NEPAL

By Dr Mark Watson

“That’s really exciting” said Christopher Fraser-Jenkins when I showed him a photograph of Edward Gardner. “If that is Gardner then this is the first likeness that botanists know of and it is really important!”. The Honourable Edward Gardner, was the first permanent British Resident in Nepal in 1816, and I had spotted his portrait in the gallery of past incumbents outside the Ambassador’s office in Kathmandu. Having just read Chris’s book, *The First Botanical Collectors in Nepal*, I remembered his comments about Gardner, and asked the Ambassador if I could have a photograph of the portrait. Dr Andrew Hall kindly agreed and arranged for the picture to be taken from the frame and reproduced (see the frontis piece illustration). Although we cannot be absolutely sure that this is Edward Gardner, the family resemblance is strong and I think it is well worth reproducing it and recounting his story as the ‘Lost Botanist of Nepal’. Chris has recently pieced together the early years of botanical research in Nepal using correspondence he uncovered in the library of the Calcutta Botanic Garden. This article draws heavily from his book (Fraser-Jenkins, 2006).

Botanical exploration began in Nepal when Francis Buchanan made the first scientific plant collections during Captain William H.D. Knox’s mission to Kathmandu, between April 1802 and April 1803. Buchanan (1762-1829) was a Scottish surgeon and keen naturalist who was taught botany at the end of the 18th century by John Hope at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. He spent a rather melancholy year in Kathmandu,

alienated and contained within the Valley by the Nepalese officials. However, he used his time profitably, and amassing 1500-2000 pressed and dried herbarium specimens of plants which he gave to Sir James Edward Smith and Aylmer Bourke Lambert on his return to London in 1805. In later life Buchanan changed his name to Hamilton to inherit his mother’s estates, but in botanical circles he is usually known as Francis Buchanan-Hamilton.

Next in the saga is Nathaniel Wallich (1786-1854), a Danish surgeon-naturalist who worked for the British East India Company as Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden from 1817. Wallich was charged with exploring India’s plant wealth with an eye to potential exploitation. Naming and cataloguing is the necessary first step in botanical understanding and Wallich eagerly set about amassing and collating a huge herbarium collection for the East India Company. As well as the herbarium specimens he and his own collectors gathered, he organised a wide network of people to send him plants from all corners of the empire.

Amongst the first bundles of specimens Wallich sent back to the Britain was material collected in Nepal between 1817 and 1820. At the time David Don was working on the Buchanan-Hamilton collections, and he extended his research to include these new Nepalese specimens sent by Wallich. Soon afterwards Don published his ground-breaking *Prodromus Florae Nepalensis* (1825), literally ‘Forerunner to the Flora of Nepal’, the first systematic account of the plants of

Nepal. As the Nepalese specimens Wallich sent back bore no collector's name, Don and later botanists ascribed them to Wallich himself. However, Wallich only visited Nepal once between December 1820 and November 1821, and the specimens he himself collected were not sent to London until 1828. These early specimens worked on by Don could not have been collected by Wallich, so who did?

Edward Gardner (1784-1861) was the mystery collector, and how he became the 'Lost Botanist of Nepal' is an intriguing story. Gardner was born into a distinguished family, fifth son of the Admiral of the Blue, Sir Alan Gardner, the 1st Baron Gardner of Uttoxeter, England, and Commander of His Majesty's ships in Jamaica. At the age of 18 Edward Gardner went to India to work for the East India Company, first as Writer and later becoming Registrar and Assistant Magistrate at Aligarh. His diplomatic skills were quickly recognised, and in 1808 he was promoted to Assistant Resident at Delhi, and then Acting Judge and Magistrate at Moradabad in 1813. At the outbreak of the Gorkha War in 1814 Gardner was transferred to Kumaon as Commissioner and Political Agent to the Governor-General of Bengal, Francis, Earl of Moira (later 1st Marquess of Hastings). Also in the British forces in Kumaon at that time was his first cousin, Lt Col William Linnaeus Gardner (with whom Edward is sometimes confused), a military tour de force and pivotal player in the Gorkha War. Again Edward Gardner's diplomatic skills came to the fore, and he played a crucial role in bringing Nepal into treaty relations with the British in India. So impressed was the Marquess, that on the signing of the

Treaty of Segauli with the Gorkhas in March 1816, he selected the relatively junior Gardner to represent British interests as Resident (or Honorary Consul) to the court of the Rajah in Kathmandu.

Before Gardner arrived in Kathmandu, his position was held by Acting Resident, Lt John Peter Boileau, also in action in Kumaon in 1814-15. Boileau reached Kathmandu in April 1816, as Commandant of the Resident's Escort and Postmaster to the Residency. Gardner arrived in Kathmandu three months later and remained as Resident for 14 years until 1829 (apart from a few months away on postings in India). His main task was to change the hostile relations with the Nepalese into one of friendship, or at least gain stability with mutual respect. This was very difficult in the post war era of hostility and mistrust, but Gardner was a highly skilled and even tempered diplomat. With his deep understanding and strong liking of the people of Nepal, he was the perfect person for the job and against the odds he largely succeeded. During the Gorkha War the British had been impressed by the fighting skills of their opponents and Edward Gardner and his cousin W.L. Gardner pioneered the first recruitment of defecting Gorkhalis and Kumaonis into the British East India Company's army as Gorkha Battalions. This Gorkha recruitment was formalised after 1825 and later strengthened by B.H. Hodgson during his Residency; a tradition that continues to this day.

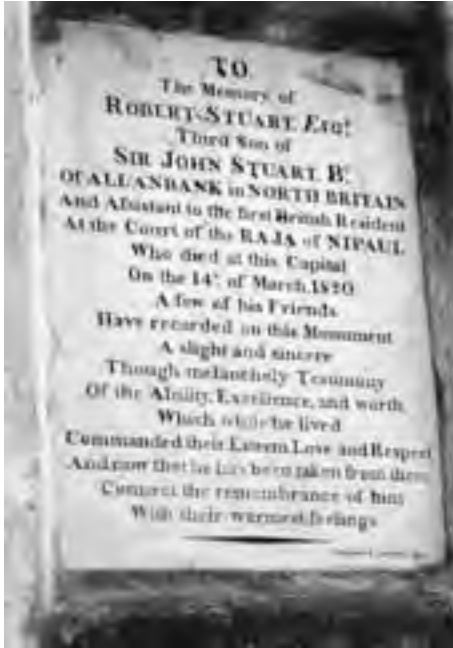
Edward Gardner was evidently quite a character and enthusiastically immersed himself in local customs and culture. Lady Maria Nugent met him during her visit to Delhi in the early 1810s, and wrote that the Resident, Sir David

Ochterlony and particularly his two Assistants Edward Gardener and William Fraser, had 'gone native', "...wearing immense whiskers, neither will eat beef and pork, being as much Hindoos as Christians, if not more; they are both of them clever and intelligent, but eccentric; and having come to this country early, they have formed opinions and prejudices that make them almost natives." (Dalrymple 2002: 53). Gardner would have been in his late twenties or early thirties when he met Lady Nugent, and as he looks much younger in his portrait, this was probably made before he adopted these Indian habits, perhaps whilst on home leave in the Britain.

As for Knox's mission 14 years earlier, the Residency was deliberately kept isolated by the Nepalese, both in diplomatic relations and by physical distance. The Residency was sited on the edge of Kathmandu and Nepalese soldiers were stationed between the Residency and the city to intercept all messages and arrest their bearers. All unofficial contact between the Nepalese and the Residency was strictly prohibited, as was any contact between the Residency and British traders to Kathmandu. Life for the Residency staff was slow and tedious, and communications via the diplomatic bag must have been a welcome escape. Wallich took up his position in Calcutta less than a year after Gardner's arrival in Kathmandu, and they soon struck up a prolific correspondence. Fortunately at least some of Gardner's letters to Wallich survive in the Calcutta Herbarium, and they tell of the hardships and constraints endured by Gardner and his men, and the long unproductive periods of waiting. It was during this copious spare time that,

encouraged by Wallich, Gardner developed his new interest in botany and he started to collect plants. In 1817 Gardner sent Wallich his first batch of specimens, and larger batches followed in 1818 and 1819. Gardner detailed his most interesting finds in his numerous letters to Wallich. He wrote at least once a week for the six year period from 1817 to 1823, and at one stage was writing up to five or six letters per week. Gardner continued occasional correspondence with Wallich long after his retirement until his death in 1861.

With the help of his Assistant Resident, Robert Stuart, Gardner directed a small team of assistants collecting plant material and preparing herbarium specimens to send back to Wallich. At the start Gardner must have felt daunted by the sheer numbers of plants available and the inexperience of his team, and so he requested help from his mentor in Calcutta. Wallich agreed and generously sent two of his own collectors to Nepal in 1817. Thus Francis de Silva and Bharat Singh joined the Residency team for a year to help with the collections. Movements of the British staff were tightly restricted to within the Kathmandu Valley, but de Silva and Singh were able to make at least one visit outside the Valley. In 1818 they journeyed north through Helambu towards Langtang, visiting Dhunche and the ranges of Gossainthan ('Gossain Than'). At the time this was botanically virgin territory, and Wallich wrote enthusiastically to his contemporaries, saying that Gardner had sent him nearly 1000 specimens collected from the snowy mountains of the Himalaya. Gardner continued collecting and sending Wallich many enticing plants, and in 1820 Wallich



Memorial to Robert Stuart, Assistant Resident

accepted Gardner's invitation and joined the Residency team in Kathmandu between December 1820 and November 1821. Apart from a few glimpses through correspondence already uncovered, much of Gardner's botanical excursions remain a mystery. Library indices to correspondence held in Calcutta record that many more letters exist between Gardner and Wallich than have so far been found, and this is an area ripe for research.

Robert Stuart also corresponded with Wallich, but unfortunately died prematurely in Kathmandu in March 1820. He caught a fever whilst travelling through the malaria infested Terai in order to accompany Wallich on his visit to Kathmandu. Stuart is commemorated by a tall funeral monument which still stands in the British Embassy graveyard

at Samakoshi. Stuart was succeeded as Assistant Resident by a man of exceptional talent, Brian Houghton Hodgson (1799-1894). An astute diplomat and keen naturalist, Hodgson pioneered the study of animals and birds in Nepal and is today recognised as the founder of Himalayan zoology. Hodgson honed his diplomatic skills under Gardner's expert guidance, held the fort as Acting Resident in 1829 after Gardner's departure, and returned for a distinguished career as Resident from 1833 until 1843.

Although not a trained botanist, Gardner became a passionate plant collector and knowledgeable amateur. He sent Wallich numerous packages of herbarium specimens as well as many living plants. Gardner also created a garden in the Residency grounds, where he planted garden-worthy native trees and shrubs, and from which some of the material sent to Wallich was obtained (labelled as '*in hort.*'). The garden appears to have survived to this day, although the old Residency grounds are now divided between the British and Indian Embassies. Gardner's enthusiasm for botany, and the many plant collections that he made, have been commemorated by botanists who later described plants in his honour. Wallich dedicated a new genus *Gardneria* to "the Hon. Edward Gardner, late Resident at the Court of the Rajah of Nepala, by whose indefatigable exertions & liberality the Botanic Garden at Calcutta has been enriched by the most splendid additions of flowering plants, trees, and specimens of the interesting & hitherto mostly unknown vegetable productions of that country." Other plants that are named in his honour include: *Coelogyne gardneriana* (now *Neogyne*

gardneriana), an epiphytic orchid, *Daphne gardneri* (now *Edgeworthia gardneri*), a source for Nepalese handmade paper, and *Hedychium gardnerianum*, a tall flowering ginger. Gardner also collected mosses which he sent to Sir William J. Hooker, and a few of these bear his name. *Stereodon gardneri* was unfortunately incorrectly published by W. Mitten, and should instead be called *Entodon myurus*, but the tropical epiphytic moss *Calymperes gardneri* (now *Syrrhodon gardneri*) still bears his name.

However, apart from Wallich and a few contemporaries, Gardner's prolific collections and his pioneering contribution to Himalayan botany are largely unknown to modern botanists. This is largely due to Wallich's practice of seldom writing the names of the collectors on the specimens he was collating in his huge East India

Company herbarium. Instead many modern workers refer only to Wallich himself as if he were the collector, and so miss the great contribution to Nepalese and Himalayan botany of Edward Gardner and his team in Kathmandu: the second botanist there after Francis (Buchanan-)Hamilton.

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2001-2011

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GIVING NEPALESE CHILDREN A CHILDHOOD

The Esther Benjamins Trust is a registered children's charity working for some of the most marginalised children in Nepal. It was set up in 1999 by Lt Col Philip Holmes in memory of his wife who took her life in January of that year because of childlessness.

The Trust works through its own partner organisation, the Nepal Child Welfare Foundation, which is unique in being run by former British Army Gurkha officers. Since its inception, the Trust has given freedom and a loving home to innocent children imprisoned in adult jails alongside parents (the two youngest are pictured), and street children escaping domestic abuse. We fund education for deaf children and we are rescuing and rehabilitating some of the hundreds of Nepalese girls who have been trafficked into India to work as circus performers. Held on long contracts in grim conditions, these girls are subject to frequent physical and sexual abuse. We bring them back to Nepal, to their families and communities. We offer education to younger ones to prepare them for mainstream school, and training and employment to older ones at a range of farming and business initiatives that we are developing.

By supporting our work with a donation or legacy you will enable us to continue our vital work with disadvantaged and discriminated against children. Help us to turn their lives around, from lives of misery with no hope to lives full of the joys of a happy healthy childhood and a positive future. Thank you for your support.

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THE BRITAIN NEPAL MEDICAL TRUST – 40 YEARS

By Dr Gillian Holdsworth

Many of you will have connections with the Britain Nepal Medical Trust from its early days – and in 2008 BNMT will have been serving the people of Nepal for forty years. This article provides an update on some of BNMT's major achievements over the years and its future plans – as well as touching briefly on Gillian Holdsworth's Trans-Himalaya trek from Simikot, Humla to Olangchung Gola in Taplejung in the autumn of 2007 as part of the forty year celebrations.

The Britain Nepal Medical Trust aims to assist the people of Nepal to improve their health through realisation of their health rights. It does this by working in partnership with the Ministry of Health, international and local non-governmental organisations, local committees and communities to:

- Strengthen the capacity of local institutions to respond to the health needs of the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society – with effective preventative and curative health services.
- Work with communities enabling them to express their needs better and advocate for and obtain improved and equitable access to essential health services and resources.
- Validate models that provide affordable and accessible quality health care services that can be replicated and adapted by others.
- Develop methods which will ensure the sustainability of outcomes after completing handover of successful programmes to local institutions.

Traditionally known best for its ground

breaking work in tuberculosis, particularly in the treatment and ensuring patient compliance with the often very long treatment regime, BNMT had one of the highest tuberculosis cure rates in a developing country. The Trust was also instrumental in undertaking much of the operational research which led the Nepal National Tuberculosis Programme to adopt directly observed therapy (a much shorter drug regime for the treatment of tuberculosis at six months) as the national strategy in its fight against TB. BNMT no longer provides direct care as it used to, but works very closely with the National TB Programme, supporting the government health services to provide quality and equitable services through support for staff training, monitoring and evaluation of the programme to ensure that high levels of care are maintained and quality assurance of microscopy in the laboratories.

Similarly, BNMT has, with continued support and guidance, managed to handover many of its community drug schemes to a local organisation named SARHDON. The BNMT drug schemes, which were designed to plug a gap in government health programme medical



Some mothers planting rice.

supplies, continue to ensure a ‘year round supply of medicines at an affordable price’ at rural health posts and district hospitals throughout the eastern region. This is an excellent example of how BNMT has developed a service in response to a need, established a groundbreaking programme, and trained local Nepali staff and members of the community to manage it themselves before handing it over to a local organisation. This is real development!

Over the last few years the focus on health rights is a significant development in BNMT’s approach to support the government of Nepal in achieving the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs encompass a covenant agreed and committed to by every country of the United Nations and set the global standard for social and economic justice and human rights. The rights-based approach reinforces the linkage between supply and demand of essential health services, ie by ensuring that users understand their entitlements in terms of access and equity, they are better placed to drive an appropriate response by services.

BNMT, as part of its comprehensive Health Improvement Programme, has for many years worked toward increasing health service utilisation and improving the health status of disadvantaged communities in a number of important and challenging health areas which include:

- Treatment and prevention of infectious diseases – Kala Azar, Japanese B encephalitis, etc.
- Reproductive health and safe motherhood.
- Supply of essential drugs.
- Quality care and prevention of important global health threats eg TB, HIV/AIDS.



Happy mothers.

Safe Motherhood

For poor women in Nepal, giving birth is a risk proposition that can lead to illness, disability and death. Nepal’s maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world. It is reported as 740 deaths per 100,000 live births – or one in 24 women will die in child birth. The majority of these deaths are preventable and are caused by obstructed labour, eclampsia (high blood pressure in pregnancy), infection and haemorrhage and unsafe abortions. Ninety per cent of these deaths occur in rural areas. Safe motherhood and reducing the number of maternal deaths by 50 per cent by 2015 has been identified as a national priority and BNMT’s work helps to reduce the risk for many women.

Our Safe Motherhood Innovation Programme aims to reduce maternal mortality by increasing the proportion of births which are attended by skilled and equipped health staff. It does this in a number of ways including training of health care staff in the safe management of pregnancy and delivery; supplying of medicines and equipment to district hospitals and health posts; improving access to financial resources and developing means for pregnant women to reach hospitals and health posts when they need them. BNMT has supported



Antenatal clinic at the health centre in Ling Ling, Sankuwa Sabbha.

comprehensive training of maternal and child health workers (MCHWs) both in emergency obstetric care, the management of normal deliveries and spotting the indications for referral. Each of the trainees receives an emergency kit with essential medication and equipment and almost all of the communities in the programme area now have MCHWs trained to provide antenatal, delivery and post natal care for local mothers.

For more complicated deliveries BNMT has run midwifery refresher trainings and provides ongoing support and supervision for assistant nurse midwives (ANMs). The ANMs learn about recent developments in delivery, how to manage difficult deliveries and when to refer to the district hospital. While at the hospital BNMT has trained health care staff to manage life threatening complications including retained placenta, haemorrhage and how to undertake a vacuum delivery or proceed to caesarean section in addition to basic anaesthesia training for health assistants.

But none of this will be effective without raising awareness of the risks associated with childbirth, ways to minimise these risks and the services which they can expect to be provided for

them among local women and with local community leaders. So the Trust has provided extensive community-based education programmes by training female community health volunteers (FCHVs) and traditional birth attendants to use a set of specially developed educational materials for the pre-literate on pregnancy and childbirth for families and communities. The FCHVs now conduct community education sessions and visit pregnant women's homes to talk to women, their husbands and their 'in laws' about planning for a safe birth.

So did it make a difference? After three years the programme has made a measurable impact. The use of clean home delivery kits went up by almost 30%. The proportion of women who sought medical treatment following a pregnancy related complication had increased by a third, more women were attending for regular antenatal care – up by 40% in some areas, and mothers attending for post natal checks were up too. There was also an increase in the proportion of families making preparations for the birth of their new baby – up by 65% and the proportion of births attended by a trained birth assistant had increased by a factor of five. This programme highlights the wide impacts that simple interventions can have as well as the difficulties that community based projects have in proving definitive outcomes like 'reduction in the number of mother's dying as a result of childbirth'. However, intuitively, it seems likely that deaths from childbirth will decrease when women access quality antenatal care, high risk pregnancies are referred to an appropriate care level for delivery and normal delivery is attended by trained birth attendants; after all that's what worked in England!

Despite the challenges of political instability over the last ten years, the programme has continued to operate as well as expanding its programme into the Terai districts of Sunsari and Morang. Also the big population shifts in response to the war – as people endeavoured to move to areas where they could ensure their own personal safety and that of their family – has put additional challenges on services, particularly in the district centres in the hills and in the Terai. So as the government focus shifts to providing services for areas of greater population (very pragmatic when you are dealing with limited resources) those in the under-populated rural areas become increasingly disadvantaged and vulnerable. It is precisely these people who BNMT will continue to target to ensure that childbirth is safe and that children will grow up with a mother.

As an ex BNMT doctor, a trustee of BNMT and a complete ‘Nepalophile’ – to kick start the 40 year anniversary celebrations I led a ‘Trans-Himalayan Trek’ in the Autumn of 2007 as a fundraiser for BNMT. I was joined for parts of the route by many others who either had links with Nepal and/or BNMT or just like walking in the mountains and who I endeavoured to turn into Nepalophiles too! As I emerged

from behind the Annapurnas (having ‘done’ the northern half of the circuit ‘the wrong way round’ according to most of the guides who we met en route!!) I stopped for a day in Besisahar, Lamjung district and the gateway to the Annapurnas. The following morning I watched a funeral cortege take the body of a young mother down to the banks of the Marsyangdi River for cremation. She had died in childbirth the preceding night – she was only 24 years old – her baby son survived. This exemplified for me the very real risk of childbirth in Nepal – and of course the survival for the baby son without his Mother to feed and nurture him will be compromised too. It is exactly this which BNMT’s safe motherhood programme is designed to prevent.

Over the last 40 years, BNMT believes it has done a satisfactory job in improving health in Nepal, but there is a lot more to be done to consolidate the legacy of that small group of doctors and nurses who had the vision and established the Trust all those years ago.

If you wish to read more of Gillian Holdsworth’s ‘Trans-Himalayan trek’ – the blog plus photos can be found on the BNMT website at www.britainnepalmedicaltrust.org.uk.



Balloons - reward for washing faces!

LETTER FROM FAR WESTERN REGION

By Rick Beven

National Park Baba

In his lifetime perhaps only Sri Satchidanandendra Saraswati, more commonly known as Khaptad Baba, held the distinction of being a simple hermit with a helicopter at his disposal. For fifty years the Baba lived as a recluse in a wooden hut built for him by local villagers. Beside the hut the villagers dug a deep hole where the Baba used to meditate undistracted by the external world.

The view from Baba's house is one of Thoreauesque simplicity. To the north are the white translucent peaks of the Api and Saipal Himal. On every other side are dense forests of oak, larch and fir interspersed with open areas of grassland called *patans*. The forests are home to wild boar, leopard and black bears.

The 3,000-metre Khaptad plateau is mentioned in the Hindu Vedas as a source of medicinal herbs. Over two hundred different kinds of medicinal plants are found in the area and local people say that in the summer the scent of the mountain flowers is so strong that it is intoxicating.

During his life the otherwise genial Baba disliked people asking where he was from. However, he spoke Hindi, English and Nepali fluently and told people he had studied to be a doctor in England. In his sixties he gave up his medical practice in India and became a sadhu or holy man. Like many sadhus he moved closer to the abode of the Gods in the Himalaya.

For many years the Baba relied on the charity of the poor villagers who lived

around the plateau and who supplied him with food and firewood. However, word of the wise holy man eventually filtered back to the royal palace in Kathmandu. In 1983 the late King Birendra Bikram Shah paid the Baba a visit by helicopter and changed his life completely.

During his visit the King asked the Baba if he could do anything for him. "Something to protect the natural beauty of the area", answered the Baba. The following year, at royal behest, the Khaptad plateau was gazetted as a national park.

The King was so taken with the simple sanctity of the Baba that he ordered that he should be given a government stipend. The Nepalese Army constructed a helipad next to the Baba's hut. During the cold winters, or when he was ill, an army helicopter would fly the Baba to a warmer retreat in Kathmandu.

According to local folklore Khaptad Baba died in 1996 aged 130. Unlikely as this is, he was certainly a very old man, loved and venerated in the Far West of Nepal. In spring this year I trekked for two days to Khaptad National Park to visit the Baba's home. Once there, it is a half-hour walk from Park Headquarters through the woods to the hermitage. At the top of the hill I push open an iron gate and wander around the Baba's garden. Even though the Baba died ten years ago the garden is well maintained and his hut has been freshly whitewashed. A small wooden veranda runs along the south side of the house. A wooden statue of the Baba

meditating in saffron robes is sitting on a table on the veranda guarded by a white stone lion. The bearded Baba smiles serenely out at a world he helped preserve. A prayer flag rasps gently in the wind against the wall.

On my last day in the national park I walk up to the hermitage to make an offering of a single crimson rhododendron flower. In the forest I meet the Hindu priest from the nearby Nepalese Army camp returning from conducting puja at Khaptad Baba's house. He looks at the flower in my hand and places a tika mark on my forehead. Incense sticks are still burning beside Baba's statue when I arrive at the

house. I place my offering by Baba's statue. I walk outside and sit on Baba's wooden bed in the sun. It is very peaceful amongst the silence of the surrounding mountains. I listen.

Beneath the occasional call of birds, the drum of a far-away woodpecker, the murmur of an early spring bee, is another sound. It is like the noise made by electric power lines on a wet day; for a few seconds I hear the vibrant, ephemeral hum of the eternal cosmos. Then I lose it amidst the cooing of pigeons in the woods.



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AN AFTERNOON WITH MERCER SAHIB

By Mark Temple and Gerry Birch

Mark Temple writes:

As I travelled towards Darjeeling in November 1973, several people said to me that while I was there, I should call on Andrew Mercer. Retired British Gurkha officers in Kathmandu offered me this advice, and Nepali ex-servicemen in Dharan, too, said I should visit 'Mercer Sahib'. I resolved so to do. Andrew Mercer, it was explained, was a former Colonel in the 7th Gurkhas whose men were mainly recruited from east Nepal and who had retired to Darjeeling. He was said not to speak just Gurkhali, but also some of the languages of their several different tribal groups such as the Limbus.

I cannot now remember how I acquired his contact details but early on one late autumn afternoon I knocked at the front door of a well matured block of flats in Darjeeling, Ajit Mansions, near Chowrastha. The door was opened and I was shown in by an elderly Nepali man who was, presumably, Mercer Sahib's orderly. Andrew Mercer, a sprightly English gentleman of 77, rose to greet me. However, many years later I can only remember snatches of the conversation. He told me that he was the fourteenth member of his family to serve in Gurkha regiments and had retired in the early nineteen-fifties.

The flat was furnished comfortably, but in the old fashioned way of the dwellings of the aged where, so often, the furniture and fittings have grown ancient without the occupants noticing. It reminded me of my great aunts' house in Felixstowe.

Some parts of the conversation made me realise I was in touch with history. He explained how, following the Ted Heath's election pledge in 1970, his army pension, which had been frozen since leaving the

army, had suddenly been indexed linked and had more than doubled. (The previous freezing seems to have been some devious UK governmental wheeze to avoid paying pension increases to those residents in the Sub-continent. (*And elsewhere. Ed.*)) "Before I got my pension increase" said Andrew Mercer, "a *sepo*y of my regiment serving in the UK was being paid more than me, a retired colonel of the regiment!" It was that use of that word *sepo*y which shook me. I had read about the '*Seпо*y Revolt'. I had learnt that the Nepali word for soldier was related to it and the Hindi equivalent, but I had never before or since heard a British person use the word naturally to refer to living soldiers.

He also told me how he had been sent by air to Kathmandu in 1946 as a member of a small military mission. Whilst there, the British Resident (*At that time: Lt Col Sir George Falconer KCB, CIE, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. Ed.*) had remarked that, including the mission of which Mercer was a member, and the Residency staff, there were eight Europeans in Kathmandu - and as far as anyone could remember - that was the largest number there had ever been there at the same time. That was about five years before Nepal began to open to the world outside.

He was keenly interested in what I was doing in Nepal, where I had been and what I thought of it all. At some point in the conversation, we discovered a common interest in Weston-Super-Mare. I hail from there and it turned out Andrew Mercer was born just along the street from where I had gone to school. (Through the miracle of the internet I later found the following:

Baptism Record at Emmanuel
Parish Church, Weston-Super-Mare:

“1896 Apr 22 Andrew Vierair Aldie to Charles Archibald and Helen Eliza Mercer. Lieut Col 4th Gurkha Rifles.”)

At the time, his recollections of the geography of Weston seemed sharper than mine. This was alarming since I had only left there fifteen months before! Perhaps my efforts to learn Nepali and adjust to Nepal had, if only for a while, overprinted my recent youthful memory.

Andrew Mercer explained that there was one other long-term British resident still living in Darjeeling, a lady of similar age to himself. He said that they had their respective plots reserved in the church graveyard and they would be the last British people to be interred there. He said this without any pathos, but just to explain in a matter of fact way, his situation as one of the last of those who had ‘stayed on’. He was enjoying a relaxed and gentlemanly retirement. He explained to me how he regularly had groups of secondary school children come to his flat to talk with him to improve their English conversation, and he enjoyed their company.

By the time I left Darjeeling four or five days later, I knew that in meeting Andrew Mercer I had been talking to a real expert. On the 19th November 1973, in the Oxford Book and Stationery shop that opened onto Chowrastra (*Still there & better than its namesake in Calcutta. Ed.*) I had purchased Her Majesty’s Stationery Office (HMSO) for the Ministry of Defence in 1965. It contains dated black and white pictures of Nepal by such famous (among Gurkhas) old British Sahibs as Lt Col Alistair Langlands and the late Lt Col Jimmy Roberts. In its preface it mentions among the acknowledgements that the author “has been assisted in the paragraphs on the Eastern tribes by the notes of Lieutenant Colonel AVA Mercer, 7th Gurkhas”.

In the early nineteen-nineties I was up in

London, and in an idle moment, went into a favourite oriental bookshop. I purchased a 1956 copy of ‘*The Kukri*’, the journal of the Brigade of Gurkhas. It contains an article by Lt Col AVA Mercer, late 7th Gurkha Rifles, entitled ‘Shadows of the Past History of Gurkhas’ which features photographs of Gurkha families in Indian Army depots in the nineteenth century, when travel to Nepal was difficult. The article makes it clear that marriage of Gurkhas with local hill women from around the old Indian Army depots of Almora, Dehra Dun, Dharmsala and Bakloh was not uncommon.

Try this quote for some atmosphere of living history:

“When my father first joined the Goorkhas (1871) the railway system in India was still very much in its infancy. Before 1854 there were no railways at all, and for many years thereafter only the main lines existed. In 1871, for instance, the railhead for Dharmsala and Bakloh was Amritsar, whilst Lucknow was the railhead for most of Nepal. Going on furlough involved long and tedious journeys on foot or in *ekkas* and bullock carts, and it is not surprising, therefore, that from the old Goorkha Cantonments, Dharmsala (1 GR), Dehra Dun (2 GR) Almora (3GR), Bakloh (4 GR) and Abbotabad (5GR), furloughs were few and far between”

Further “Googling“ later produced: “Mukherjee, Dr BK and Lt Col AVA Mercer.

A SHORT HISTORY OF
DARJEELING DISRICT. AND ITS
HILL PEOPLES

12mo, wraps, 21pp, plus an ad section at rear, folding map. Foreword by Srimati Padmaja Naidu, Governor of West Bengal. INSCRIBED ON TITLE PAGE BY THE AUTHOR,

A.V.A. MERCER. Mounted to last page is a retraction slip stating that the author withdraws his remarks relating to *Singsapas*, which appeared in Chapter II of this book. He states that it was not his intention to hurt the feelings of any community. All profits from this book go to the SB Dey TB Sanatorium to assist poor non-paying tuberculosis patients from the Darjeeling District, first edition soft cover. Price \$44.”(This was published in 1962 at the cost of One Rupee & 50np. Ed.)

Gerry Birch writes:

My interest was immediately aroused when I received Mark Temple’s draft article for the journal since I too had had the good fortune to meet Lt Col Andrew Mercer some ten years earlier in 1963. At that time I was the Signals Officer at the British camp in Dharan. By coincidence the senior staff officer in HQ British Gurkha Lines of Communication in Dharan was Lt Col AEE (Eric) Mercer, OBE, MC, RA, nephew of Andrew Mercer. The camp in Dharan, which had been opened in 1960, replaced the old HQ British Gurkhas India that had been established in Calcutta and from where all recruiting, movement, administration and pension paying for British Gurkhas had been coordinated. Eric Mercer had been commissioned into the 4th Gurkha Rifles prior to World War II. During the war he had served in Burma, winning an MC. In 1947, at the time of the partition of India, when the future of the ten Gurkha Regiments was under consideration, Eric Mercer was then back in UK. With the post war reductions and the fact that the 4th Gurkha Rifles had been designated to become part of the post-independence Indian Army, Eric Mercer found himself, as a regular officer, transferred to the Royal Artillery. He was a meticulous staff officer and his subsequent

posting to Dharan towards the end of his career was both fitting and appropriate. (*On his retirement he became a Retired Officer (RO) grade civil servant and worked in MOD. He also became honorary secretary to the Society.*)

Throughout the nineteenth century and up to 1960, all Gurkha recruiting and other administrative functions had been carried out in India. The Nepalese Government, whilst generally supporting such activities, had always insisted that no depots should be established on Nepalese soil. This remained the situation post Indian independence and was allowed for in the 1947 Tripartite Agreement between Great Britain, India and Nepal. As Nepal began to open up after 1951 and Gurkha air-trooping to and from the Far East was beginning to replace movement by sea and, I suspect, pressure from an emerging Indian government sensitive to a remaining British presence, efforts were made to move the depots into Nepal. Agreement was finally given by the Nepalese Government in the late nineteen-fifties for the establishment of an HQ in Dharan with a co-located recruiting depot, the British Gurkha Recruiting Depot (BGRD) for eastern Gurkhas, replacing the depot at Jalapahar in the Darjeeling District of West Bengal. A depot for the western Gurkhas, the British Gurkha Recruiting Centre (BGRC) just a few hundred yards over the border at Paklihawa, replaced the old depot at Lehra. A pension paying post was temporarily established each year at Pokhara in the pension paying season to minimise the length of time needed by the westerners to walk down from the hills to collect their pensions. (*Note that the late Major Dudley Spain was much involved in the negotiations with the Nepalese authorities at the time of the building of Dharan. See obituary in Journal No. 30. Ed.*) In the nineteen-sixties the recruiting ‘season’ was always in the autumn, after the monsoon

when movement in the hills was easier. The 'hill' recruits were brought down by the *gallah wallahs*, retired Gurkha NCOs employed for this purpose.

Recruit clerks at that time were recruited from the schools in the Darjeeling District as a good knowledge of the English language was a prerequisite for such employment and was not to be found from within Nepal. The state of education in the schools in those days, particularly in English, was insufficient. Andrew Mercer, having retired and settled in Darjeeling, was the informal contact between the Darjeeling schools and BGRD. Eric Mercer arrived in Dharan in early 1963 and it became apparent to him that the continued use of his uncle as our 'recruiting agent' in Darjeeling was becoming untenable and could lead to his expulsion due to the doubtful legality of recruiting Indian citizens into the British Army.

All this was set against the background of the debacle of the Indo-Chinese war of the previous autumn. The Chinese had invaded India and in the western sector had even managed to construct a road across Indian territory in the Aksai Chin. In the east, nearer to home, the Chinese had penetrated into the remote Himalayan mountains and valleys of the North East Frontier Agency and were threatening Assam. There was considerable disquiet in the Indian Government and great concern over security in the border areas. Such was the paranoia that all foreigners were suspected of being potential spies. Kalimpong was famously described by Nehru as "a nest of spies" as far back as 1953. The Chinese government had long suspected Kalimpong, (the end of the traditional trade route from Tibet through the Chumbi Valley to India) of being used as a base from which to ferment resistance in Tibet. There were accusations that American and Kuomintang agents were operating out of Kalimpong. Certainly on

my visit all the Chinese traders' shops were sealed up. (*See 'India's China War' by Neville Maxwell, p.104. Ed.*)

Eric Mercer summoned me to his office and briefed me on the situation. I was to go to Darjeeling and visit his uncle at Ajit Mansions under cover of darkness. Andrew Mercer would then in turn brief me on where to go to meet his contacts from the selected schools at their homes after school hours. Cover for me was not thought to be a problem as Darjeeling was a tourist location, there were Gurkha ex-servicemen there and in any case the dentist who paid regular visits to the camp came from Darjeeling and I was to travel back with him on his next visit. It would take time to arrange the necessary pass to enter the Darjeeling District. I would have to report in person to the District Intelligence Board on arrival and play being the 'tourist.' And so it turned out that I too went to Ajit Mansions; at that time the furniture was not so worn. I too had an interesting evening being briefed on Darjeeling and the situation in the area. Sadly, under instruction, I never returned to say good-bye to Andrew Mercer before leaving for Dharan at the end of the mission. I was granted only a 24 hour pass to visit Kalimpong as a result of the security paranoia noted above. I developed a fondness for the Darjeeling area with its views and mix of Himalayan people. There were many Tibetans in the refugee camp having recently fled from their country following the Chinese invasion. I was given a copy of Andrew's then recently published book, *A Short History of Darjeeling District and its Hill Peoples*.

Looking through this book now brings back memories of this my first visit to that area and of other visits over the years. Many of the businesses advertised in the book are still there. I well remember the famous 'Das Studios' where one could purchase film (always in short supply in

Dharan), postcards and Douglas prints. George Douglas, I was told, was an Anglo-Nepali who had served in the RAF. He had made a study of the many different tribes and produced an extensive series of sketches which had been made into prints. These prints became very popular with British officers of the Brigade of Gurkhas.

As I bought my first selection of prints the assistant pointed out that Douglas had just left the shop and was going down the street. I always regretted that I never went after him to speak to him. I was distracted by the arrival in the shop of two beautiful girls dressed in the traditional silk costumes of Bhutanese design. We exchanged coy smiles and chatted in halting Nepali! After they had left, the assistant told me that they were part of the Bhutanese royal family. Missed opportunities!

Over the years I have been back to Darjeeling and looked to buy more prints but the supply finally dried up. On a visit in 1989 the Curio Shop, on Chowrastha, produced an unfinished chalk sketch of a Tibetan lama. In December 1991, having gone to the Curio Shop, as Das Studios had long ago sold out, we were directed back to Ajit Mansions where Douglas had lived as a 'son' was there who would show us what he had left of Douglas's work, sadly he was not there and the house was closed up. This was the end of an era.

.....

Having written the first piece about Lt Col Andrew Mercer, Mark visited the Gurkha Museum and continued his research to find out more about him and also looked on the internet. His extract below is from this research.

Andrew Vivian Aldie Mercer was born in the 14th March 1896 in Ellenborough Crescent, Weston Super Mare and he was baptized at Emmanuel Parish Church in Weston on 22nd April 1896. Although born in England, his real roots were in India. His

father, Charles Archibald Mercer was Colonel of the 4th Gurkhas and lived in Bakloh for many years and Andrew Mercer was brought up there as a child. Charles had joined the 4th Gurkhas in 1871.

Andrew Mercers's mother, Helen Eliza Mercer (maiden name Rawlins), was a 'Mutiny' baby, born in Mussoorie in September 1857. For some months his grandmother did not know if her husband, then Captain J S Rawlins, was dead or alive. Rawlins was shut up in the Fort at Agra. His regiment, the 44th Bengal Native Infantry, having mutinied, was disbanded. Later he was posted to the 1st Gurkha Light Infantry at Dharmasala. He commanded the Regiment for many years and ended up as a Major-General.

Andrew Mercer's mother remembered going home in 1864 in a sailing ship. It took five and a half months voyage round the Cape. Her mother, Andrew's grandmother, took home on this voyage six children of her own and five from other families. There was no nurse or ayah. If it was rough, no oil lamp or candles were allowed because of the danger of fire.

Andrew Mercer's great-great uncle was Lieut-General J Nash, CB. As an ensign, he had fought in the action at Malaun in 1814 against Gurkhas, the army of Nepal, in the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-1816. Nash's grave is in the Dehra Dun cemetery.

Andrew Mercer was commissioned on 22 December 1915 and arrived in India in 1916 when he was sent to the 1st/7th Gurkha Rifles. He spent great deal of time with 1/7 GR on the North West Frontier. In about 1918 he was with them on the line of communication which stretched from Kishingi (on the Quetta - Karachi railway line) to Saindak near Robat. Service on the line of communication entitled men to wear the war service medal, and Mercer said they deserved it. "I have never known men worked so hard; yet throughout they remained their ever-

willing ever-cheerful selves”.

In 1921 he was Officer Commanding the Depot of the 1st Battalion at Bakloh. In Darjeeling in 1965 he was accosted by an old Lady who said surely he was Captain Marsal Sahib, OC Depot 1st Battalion at Bakloh in May 1921 and did he not remember her? He confessed he did not. She said “Don’t you remember in Bakloh in May 1921, and when the roof of the “Kuchha Married Lines” was blown away in a storm, you carried my children in the night to the empty Bachelor Lines and helped save all the stranded families who’s Married Lines had been destroyed in the storm.” Mercer observed that he remembered the incident but NOT the individuals. Such was fame! Andrew Mercer was back on the NW frontier in 1929. The officer commanding Chaman was ex-officio Station Commander, regarded as a man of some standing. When therefore in May 1929, Lt Col Brett, commanding the 1st Battalion at Chaman, was nearly run down on his bicycle by a large touring car that tore past him and smothered him in dust, he had cause to feel angry. Vowing vengeance he rode on and overtook the car which had pulled up within the cantonment. To his astonishment he discovered the culprit to be Amanullah, King of Afghanistan, who had fled his realm. Amanullah, was the self-appointed monarch for whose state visit to India the 2nd Battalion had been specially sent to Chaman only two years before.

Brett did what he could for the fugitive king and for his household who arrived after him during the course of the day. Mercer who went to the party’s help laid hold of a suitcase thinking to lift it out of the car. It resisted him; he could not move it. Obviously it contained gold, and it was but one of seven similar cases; the ex-king clearly put no trust in folding money.

In 1935 Mercer was in Quetta at the time of the earthquake. “Both Battalions were

absent from Quetta at the time, the 1st Battalion being in Zob and the 2nd at Chaman. Both felt the tremors, yet so narrow was the fatal passage of the earthquake that our barracks at Quetta, on the very brink of it, escaped destruction though they were severely shaken. Mercer, in charge of the first Battalion Training Company and the families in Quetta, was awakened out of sleep into terrified consciousness - but already all was still again. Mercer had experienced the earthquake of 1931 and he tells us that what impressed him in 1935 was the silence after it had passed. He missed the eerie, anguished cry of 1931 and did not guess the reason for “the absence of all sound”. Nearly all the population were dead. The earthquake caused about 30,000 deaths.

In 1938 Andrew Mercer was in charge of a detachment of 250 of 1/7 GR including the pipes and drums, who at the request of the Viceroy of India, the Marquis of Linlithglow, were the guards at the Viceregal Lodge and at the Commander-in-Chief’s house, Snowdon in Simla, from April to October - a great honour.

Andrew Mercer was a great expert on Gurkhas - far beyond the knowledge of most British officers. He passed the Civil Service Interpretership examination in Gurkhali (Nepali), being one of only three British officers known to the author to have achieved this very high level in the language. He spent a lot of time as Assistant Recruiting Officer in Ghoom. He was there in 1934, again in 1941 and in 1948 he came back to Darjeeling to help establish a Recruiting Office for Britain’s Brigade of Gurkhas. He was promoted to major in 1933 and to Lieut-Colonel in December 1941. He settled in Darjeeling in his retirement in his flat in Ajit Mansions. The British Army had facilities in Jalpahar just above Darjeeling until Dharan camp opened so he had frequent contact with serving Gurkhas and British officers.

Dorothy Wallace who arrived in Darjeeling in October 1953 and retired in 1993 having spent almost all that time in charge of Nepali Girls High School recounted her meetings with Andrew Mercer.

“My predecessor obviously knew Col. Mercer as he was always known, very well. So quite soon I was taken to Col. Mercer’s home in Ajit Mansions. He was what we always think of as a Colonel, a real upright rather stiff English Gentleman of the Victorian Age. His servant was obviously his old “batman”.

Col Mercer’s house as you describe it, was just like my quarters at the school, furniture probably brought up from Calcutta (Kolkata) or even UK and always just seemed all right - no money to replace it and you didn’t notice anyway as you had got used to it. I used to take the school boarder girls in crocodile for a walk to the Chowrastha every Sunday afternoon and we often met Col Mercer. He would say “Good Afternoon” to me and the girls would chorus “Good Afternoon Colonel Sahib”. This ritual had been taught them by my predecessor, not by me.

The reference to improving the English of secondary school children was probably the local RC schools where pupils came from better class homes, able to afford the higher fees, or from St. Paul’s School with very high fees.

Sometimes I would get an invitation to afternoon tea with Col Mercer - he was Col Mercer to everyone. His invitation was almost a summons. I am afraid the conversation was a bit stilted, he being of the pre-independence school of thought and I being the post-independence generation who mixed as much as

possible with the local people and made their friends with them.

But Col Mercer was an outstanding person in Darjeeling, though I doubt if anyone knew him very well.”

Mr. Young, a tea planter now resident near Sukna (*Still alive in 2006 and the occasional visitor at the Darjeeling Planters’ Club. Ed.*) describes him thus:

“Col. Andrew Mercer was a very disciplined army man. I knew him as a very, very well known person in Darjeeling. The people of Darjeeling liked him a lot and almost everyone did so. He was an expert on the history of Darjeeling. He was also, at one time, the Recruiting Officer for British Gurkhas at Jalapahar. I knew him as a person who played the piano very well and he had a piano in his flat at Ajit Mansion, Chowrastha. He was a bachelor and spoke Nepali better than many Nepalis. He died about 20 years back.”

Andrew Mercer died in 1975 and in his obituary of him Brigadier E D Smith wrote:

“I remained in regular contact with Andrew and when he settled in Ajit Mansions, a visit to my old friend was always ‘a must’ on any Darjeeling programme. In his younger days a walk round Chowk Bazaar, with Andrew, was a memorable experience. Everyone knew him; all greeted him with a smile irrespective of their age, sex or walk of life: Padre, pensioners, pony-boys, prostitutes and pimps, all knew him as “Marsal Sahib”. As the years passed this was to become “Marsal Buhro”. Andrew was a devout Roman Catholic, truly a gentle man who was not only upright in figure, erect and trim, but one who practised his Christianity at all times. Until his pension was increased a few years ago, Andrew had to live frugally but

never did he refuse to help those in dire need, even if it meant that he himself had to forgo an occasional luxury in his somewhat monastic mode of living. A few of Andrew's contemporaries used to say: "Poor old chap. Fancy living as an exile in Darjeeling". Absolute nonsense, my friends. Andrew would have been a lonely pathetic figure if he had lived in a flat here in England. And, let us be honest, he would have been an insufferable bore if he has chosen to eke out his days in a Club. No, he died a lively old soldier, surrounded by friends, few of them British it is true, but none the less friends, steadfast, loyal and loving. And he never cut himself off from the Regiment. Andrew loved meeting young serving officers and men and having regaled them

with stories from the past, then he would seek news about the present. When I bade farewell to him about eighteen months ago, we both had to fight back our tears. It was to be our last farewell and we knew it."

To report only the British views of Col Mercer would be to miss a crucial point. Almost every long term resident of Darjeeling over the age of 50 and born there, remembers him with affection. An enquiry to Minoos Avari, whose father Eric Avari, was a good friend of Andrew Mercer, elicited the following response.

"I remember Col Mercer so well, even after all these years, and can still see him walking erect in his khaki greatcoat during the winter months".



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Images from 2005 BRINOS ear surgery camp - Roorkee, March 2005

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RHINOS OF NEPAL AT ZSL WHIPSNADE ZOO

By Veronica Watkins
Deputy Team Leader, Asia Region
Zoological Society of London



Behan and Asha.

ZSL Whipsnade Zoo has been home to Greater one-horned rhinos since the 1930s and over the years has had a successful breeding programme. However, with an ageing pair of rhinos which last bred in 1989, the breeding programme was waning. So the Zoo welcomed the arrival of two young female rhinos from Chitwan National Park, Nepal in 1998. The two young rhinos, both under two years old, quickly settled into their new surroundings. They were named Beluki and Behan and soon became favourites with both staff and visitors.

As the 'girls' matured, so began the search for a suitable mate. A breeding

male, 'Jaffna' from Basle Zoo in Switzerland (born in San Diego in March 1994) was offered on loan and he arrived in July 2004. Jaffna was a very relaxed male rhino and when mixed with a female to breed, he was happy to let her do all the chasing! Eventually a successful mating took place in September 2005 and sixteen months later keepers were preparing for the big event.

Behan was under constant surveillance with CCTV cameras in her well-bedded and warm stable so the team of keepers were able to witness the normal and safe birth of a female calf at 14:00 on New Year's Eve 2006. A good bond between mother and calf was quickly established



Asha.

and Behan proved to be a natural mother protecting and nurturing her calf as if she was an experienced cow rhino.

The calf aroused a lot of interest in the local press, being the first Greater one-horned rhino calf born at Whipsnade Zoo for over 17 years. A competition to name her was run by a local television company and the name 'Asha' meaning 'hope' was selected.

Asha has gone from strength to strength. Now, nearly 2 years old, she weighs 868kgs. She is very friendly and relaxed and is inseparable from her mother and is still suckling.

In the meantime Jaffna, the male rhino



Jaffna and Behan.

had been busy and had mated Beluki in July 2006. Her calf was due in November 2007 and again preparations were made. On 5 November, fireworks day, Beluki was showing signs of early labour but staff didn't expect the calf to be born like a rocket in under 2½ hours at 12:40! The delivery was good and although it took a while the calf was up and suckling by 17:30. This was a male calf and he weighed 60kgs at birth.

Although Behan was also a good mother the calf started to become slightly lethargic a few days later. The veterinary team were called in and after several days on antibiotics, vitamins and top-up feeds the calf was back on track and putting on 1.5kgs every day. By day 5 he seemed fit and Beluki was left in soul charge. The calf was named Rap, meaning 'heat of the fire', in a competition run by a children's newspaper. He has recently had his first birthday, celebrated as it always will be in Britain, with fireworks! Rap now weighs 534kgs and is an independent young rhino who loves to get attention from his keepers and any lucky visitors.

Jaffna has now returned to Basle and Whipsnade has acquired a new male, Hugo, from Warsaw in Poland who was born in Amsterdam in December 2002. Although he is still young there are plans for him to breed with the Whipsnade females in the near future and increase the captive population of Greater one-horned rhinos. A new modern exhibit named 'Rhinos of Nepal' with indoor pools and open stabling areas has been opened this year to accommodate this growing herd. November 2008

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FROM THE EDITOR'S IN-TRAY

Honours and Awards

Major David Thomas, formerly of 2nd KEO Goorkhas was made an MBE for services to Nepal in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in June 2008. He formed the Cairn Trust to assist children in hill villages in west Nepal. This assistance has included school reconstruction and further work is planned to create orphanages, more schools and general support for education in Nepal. In the 2009 New Year's Honours List, Mr George Band, a member of the successful 1953 Everest Expedition, has been made an OBE for services to mountaineering and charity work, notably the Himalayan Trust UK, started by the late Sir Edmund Hillary. We hope to hear about his work with the Trust when he speaks to the Society in the autumn of 2009. Members will be pleased to note that five MCs and an OBE were awarded to members of 1st Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles following their tour of operations in Afghanistan in 2008.

Physical fund raisers

Those members who attended the Supper in February may remember that Steve Askham, the FCO Nepal desk officer and his team entered the Trailwalker event held on the South Downs Way in the summer. This event is jointly organised by Queen's Gurkha Signals and Oxfam. Proceeds are divided between the GWT and Oxfam. Steve and his team completed the 100km course in under 24 hours and raised over £2500.

Lt Col (Retd) Richard McAllister at last obtained place to take part in the London Marathon. He decided to make this a sponsored run for the Gurkha Welfare Trust. Richard first announced his intentions at the Gurkha Brigade Association AGM, where he started to

collect his initial donations. At the Society's Supper, we were able to advertise his run, along with Steve's Trailwalker announcement. Richard writes: "Before I left for home that evening, I was hugely encouraged by the generosity of some of those present. This encouragement was enhanced by a veritable deluge of mail over the next days and weeks with donations from many members of the Society. The most difficult part of the whole exercise was the training, particularly as winter really set in and the distances got longer. The second most difficult bit was the fund raising, but perseverance paid off handsomely. The actual day dawned bright and beautiful and I was lulled into thinking that it was going to be a warm one. It was for the first hour but it turned colder with rain and hail. By half way (Tower Bridge) I was still feeling pretty good and was making good time but soon after, cramps started in my left calf and life became a tad more difficult. On the edge of Docklands, when spirits were not particularly high and I found myself in an empty patch of road, a shout of 'McAllister Saheb!' came from the side of the road and there was Deputy Director GWT giving much needed encouragement. All the way from Tower Bridge to the finish there were friends and family giving support until, finally the end was nigh. What time? Well, for those interested it was 5 hours and 17 minutes. And the really important part, the final total in round terms was just over £5,000. So, many thanks to all those of you who gave me that much-needed encouragement."

Both Steve and Richard are very grateful to all the Society members who supported their efforts and wish to indicate their thanks through the journal.

Wildlife and Conservation Action

Koshi Tappu. In the last edition I noted that the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust had a project in the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve working with the local communities to achieve a sustainable livelihood compatible with wildlife conservation. Members will be aware that very severe flooding in the 2008 monsoon season had seriously affected south-east Nepal and Bihar. Several kilometres of the eastern bund was washed away flooding a large area. I contacted Dr Hem Sagar Baral of Bird Conservation Nepal. In response Mr Seb Buckton, a member of the WWT project staff wrote: "I've recently been at Koshi for project work and had a look at the impact of the recent flooding caused by the Koshi embankment breach. The river is still flowing along its new course through previously populated areas, and tens of thousands of people have been displaced. There are many camps established for the displaced. Conditions are basic. From second hand reports, it seems that the Indian authorities (who are responsible for managing the barrage and the embankments) are carrying out work to divert the river back to its previous course. This is problematic because of the huge volumes of sediment deposited by the river as it changed course. These have to be moved to allow the river to flow back along its previous course. Once this is achieved the embankment will be re-built, and eventually people will be able to return to where they previously lived. However, the river has completely obliterated vast swathes of countryside and villages, leaving a sandy wasteland, so immediate prospects for those returning to these areas don't look good." Naturetrek tell me that their tours to Koshi Tappu are going ahead and that the camp is still intact. The authorities, both Indian and Nepali have a dilemma on their hands.

Reports indicate that the work currently in progress should have the breach repaired by March 2009. When the river is returned to its pre-breach course there is no guarantee that it will remain there. It may be 'better' to let the river set its own course, but this too raises fears and many political problems of how to deal with and / or compensate the population so affected.

The Vulture Crisis. Below is an extract from a recent report by Dr Hem Sagar Baral:

"The 'vulture restaurant' is an innovative scheme for providing safe food to vultures in strategic locations. This work has recently been selected as one of the most successful projects by UNDP....Nepal's work on setting up a conservation breeding centre has recently been completed at Kasara, Chitwan. Bird Conservation Nepal and the National Trust for Nature Conservation are supporting this initiative through technical and financial resources. Currently fourteen young vultures are housed in the aviary at Kasara and more catching is planned for next season. The breeding programme is a long term commitment and ensures survival of healthy stock for conservation breeding." Dr Baral does go on to warn that although the cause of the problem, the drug diclofenac, has been banned there are still stocks of it about as well as illegally imported and manufactured and human diclofenac which can continue to cause further loss of vulture populations. Sir John Chapple on a recent trip to Nepal was briefed on the 'vulture restaurant' project. Old cattle and possibly goats are bought in, checked to ensure that they are diclofenac-free, allowed to live out their lives drug-free and then the carcasses are put out for the vultures to feed on. This provides a clean and continuous source of food. As he states: "It is a very praiseworthy and effective local project."

 BOOK REVIEWS

My World, My View. *By Sue Carpenter. Photographs by the girls of SOS Bahini, Pokhara, Nepal. Asha Publications, Emberton, MK46 5JB UK, in association with the British Council. 2007. Pp. 113. 150 Colour & B&W photos. Pb. £15. ISBN 99946-2-433-1.*

Sue Carpenter is a freelance writer and photographer who has worked for numerous national newspapers and magazines. Her article on the trafficking of women into prostitution in Nepal inspired the establishment of the Asha-Nepal charity of which she is a founding trustee. This charity is primarily concerned with the rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked women and girls and their reintegration into society. SOS Bahini (SOS stands for “Save Our Sisters”, and *bahini* means “little sisters”) is a Nepali-run NGO. Sue led the *My World, My View* photographic project in Pokhara from September 2006 to June 2007. The book, a paperback in A4 portrait format, has been distilled from amongst the many photos taken by the girls (aged between 6 and 16) themselves over the period of the project. Each picture has been labelled, often including the comments of the photographer, giving her reasons for taking it. The pictures give graphic images of their life in and around Pokhara. This is certainly a different set of photographs from that which is normally found. Dr Andrew Hall, ambassador in Kathmandu has stated, “The girls, who until recently had never handled a camera before, show a natural feeling for colour, form and composition. Their sheer enjoyment in recording the world around them shines through these pictures.” Sue gave a talk

to the Society in January 2008 in which she showed many of the photographs that appear in the book. Profits from the sale of this book go to SOS Bahini. It can be purchased from Asha –Nepal, 13 High St, Emberton, MK46 5JB. The website is: www.asha-nepal.org. GDB

The Nettle in Nepal. *By Susi Dunsmore. The John Dunsmore Nepalese Textile Trust. 2006. Pp. 57. Colour & B&W photos and drawings. Bibliog. Pb. £6.50 ISBN 0- 9552900- 0- 7.*

Susi has updated this paperback A5 format pamphlet which is richly illustrated with photographs and drawings. It describes the production the raw nettles known as *allo* and subsequent conversion by spinning and weaving into a unique material. It goes on to describe the design and production of this material into goods that can be sold on the open market. This work is carried out in the relatively remote villages of eastern Nepal, particularly by the women and has great value in income generation for the villages. Susi has addressed the Society on this topic and this is recorded in the 2004 edition of the journal. Following the death of her late husband, John Dunsmore, a travel scholarship was founded and awards are made annually to students from the Royal College of Art to visit eastern Nepal to help with the design and marketing of *allo* goods. Six such students went to Nepal in 2007 and spoke to the Society in May 2007 about their experiences. The pamphlet which makes very interesting reading can be purchased from: The John Dunsmore Nepalese Textile Trust, 13 Eliot Place,

Blackheath, London SE3 0QL. Sales of this pamphlet go to support the *allo* project in Nepal.

GDB

A Man of the Frontier S. W. Laden La (1876-1936): His Life and Times in Darjeeling and Tibet. By *Nicholas and Deki Rhodes. Mira Bose, Kolkata, 2006. Pp. 89 + 39 plates. Appendices. Bibliog. Hb. £14 incl postage from distributors Pagoda Tree Press, Bath, UK ISBN 8-1901-867S-2.*

Sonam Wangfel Laden La is a name that crops up frequently in studies of Anglo-Tibetan relations in the 1920s and 1930s, but he remains a somewhat shadowy figure who has avoided the academic spotlight. But for the authors of this book he is not an obscure ghost from the past but a venerated member of the family, for Deki Rhodes is Laden La's granddaughter and she and her husband have written a fascinating tribute to a distinguished servant of the Raj. The book is based on extensive family archives including Laden La's diaries and photographs, as well as interviews with elderly relatives.

Laden La was born into a Sikkimese Bhutia family in Darjeeling in 1876, his father a landlord and chief lama of the Ging monastery while his mother came from western Sikkim. His parents died when he was very young and he was first sent to a monastery as a novice monk. But he was adopted by his aunt a few years later, the first boy from Darjeeling to be given a "European education". He was taught by Jesuits while also receiving instruction in Tibetan from a learned Gelugpa (a school of Buddhism) monk, and was later sent to school in Calcutta. The book notes that "Laden La was unique in Darjeeling, in that his education allowed him to feel 'at home' in both

European and local cultures, and his ability to empathise, made him someone that all communities could relate to." After working in the Government Press in Darjeeling he was transferred to the Imperial Police Service and eventually became involved in frontier intelligence work. In 1903 he joined the Younghusband Mission to Tibet, and subsequently accompanied the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama to India on separate visits. Laden La visited England in 1913, accompanying four Tibetan boys who were to be educated at Rugby and his own youngest son who was sent to Giggleswick. In 1920 he visited Lhasa as a member of the Bell mission. This led to the most controversial episode in Laden La's career, when in 1923 he was asked to form a police force in the Tibetan capital. Things came to grief the following year when a group, including Laden La was accused of hatching a plot to undermine the political authority of the Dalai Lama. Much has been written about this alleged coup attempt and Laden La's role in it but the authors are convinced of his innocence. They believed Laden La was the victim of a power struggle and that "he had a few detractors in Darjeeling who sought to capitalise on the situation by writing against him to their British superiors". Reverberations of this linger on and the authors accuse a leading expert on Anglo-Tibetan relations, Alex Mckay, who has taken a more sceptical view, of having been misled by "malicious gossip". This was a low point in Laden La's career, but he was still trusted by the British and was sent on another mission to Lhasa in 1930 when he helped to avert a war with Nepal.

His final visit to Lhasa later that year was marred by friction with his boss, Colonel Weir, who remained convinced that that Laden La had been involved in

the 1924 coup plot and who instructed him to leave Lhasa before the rest of the mission. Laden La took early retirement at the age of 55, and in his final years he campaigned tirelessly on behalf of the Darjeeling hill people, helped to promote Buddhism and was local the local Chief Scout of the Boy Scout movement and an active freemason. Laden La was clearly a pillar of the local establishment, but this book makes little attempt to get inside his mind or to give us an idea of how he felt about being ultimately the servant of his British colonial masters. It is a labour of love and the authors have little time for anyone who suggests that Laden La could ever have acted improperly; although they do admit that he was “more successful in his professional career than as a family man” (he was married twice and had a dozen children). This short biography is based on a unique archive which I hope the authors will make available to scholars who wish to carry out further research on Laden La and his times.

Michael Rank

(This review appeared in the July 2007 edition of 'Asian Affairs', journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs and is reproduced here by the kind permission of the editor. 'Asian Affairs' is published through Taylor & Francis. Details of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs are to be found elsewhere in the journal. Nicholas and Deki Rhodes are both members of the Britain – Nepal Society. Nicholas Rhodes' mother, Mrs Ruth Rhodes, was the Society's first Secretary in the 1960s. Ed.)

The Scalpel & the Kukri – A Surgeon & his family's adventures among the Gurkhas.

By Peter Pitt. The Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd. London. 2005. Pp xxiv + 248. Map. B&W photos. Line

*drawings. Gloss.Hb. £15.
ISBN 0-9552059-0-5.*

This is the second book that Pitt, a member of the Society, has written about his experiences as a surgeon in Nepal; the first, *Surgeon in Nepal*, was published by Murray in 1970. This latest work describes his life and that of his new family in the British Military Hospital (BMH) Dharan in east Nepal. Pitt, a fully qualified surgeon from a medical family, served for nine years in the Royal Army Medical Corps, during which he spent two years in Dharan, 1966 to 1968. After Indian independence in 1947 British military facilities remained in Calcutta, Darjeeling and close to Gorakhpur to service the requirements of Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas then serving mainly in Malaya. These facilities included leave transit through India, recruitment and pension paying. Over the succeeding years there was pressure to close these facilities and with political changes in Nepal opportunities to establish a presence there arose. The Headquarters moved from Barrackpore, Calcutta to Dharan in south east Nepal. Eastern Gurkhas could be serviced from Dharan and a separate depot was built at Paklihuwa just over the border from India, close to a railhead. Dharan was sited 30 miles away from the railhead at Jogbani which necessitated the building of a road to the Indian border. As Pitt explains the requirement for water was the big factor in the location of the Dharan camp with its larger establishment which included the HQ as well as the recruiting depot. A small transit camp was retained in Barrackpore. This organisation needed medical support for the Gurkhas in transit, for recruitment and for the British and Gurkha staff posted to this somewhat remote cantonment. The British and Gurkha staff were young and fit so there was a good deal of spare capacity at the BMH. This capacity quickly became

available for the population of the surrounding area as there were no such medical facilities available almost anywhere else in Nepal. A posting to BMH provided surgeons with a unique opportunity to experience medical problems that no other establishment could provide. The medical officers consisted of one surgeon, one anaesthetist and one physician. The duty roster was 'tight'. Supplies were often delayed or disrupted and staff stretched. Pitt describes in considerable detail the injuries he had to face – quite outside a normal hospital or A & E experience. These included burns, gunshot wounds from hunting accidents, bear and snake bites, the results of being gored by buffalo, complicated births and many others. The subsequent treatment is described in some detail, possibly too much for the general reader and this squeamish reviewer! He also recounts life in and around the cantonment, Dharan Bazaar, visits to Kathmandu, leave to Kashmir and Darjeeling. All are told with great sensitivity and give an accurate picture of that life which this reviewer can confirm since this was only some three years after he served as the HQ signals officer. Pitt's feeling for his patients and his great desire to improve their life come across very strongly. The forward for this book has been written by Brigadier AB Taggart, a vice president of the Society. He states, "Peter and his staff always did what they could, within the limits imposed by higher authority on their activities, to help anyone of these unfortunates; their assistance made an invaluable contribution to maintaining the goodwill of all the hill people in the surrounding areas – whether military or not – and the Brigade of Gurkhas was certainly very grateful for that." BMH Dharan developed a very wide spread reputation within the community and its strength was really as an aid project. Its closure in 1989

was a great disappointment to the locals although it was the later to become the nucleus of the new eastern regional hospital in Dharan. This book will appeal to those who experienced Nepal in the 1960s and 1970s and any medicos aspiring to work in Nepal or any developing country. It is also worth noting that the line drawings are the work of the late George Douglas. Douglas, an Anglo-Nepali lived and worked in Darjeeling (for a time at least in Ajit Mansions – see 'An afternoon with Mercer Sahib' elsewhere in the journal). In the early 1960s 'Douglas' prints were on sale in Darjeeling and they became very popular with the expatriate community; there was little else of that nature to buy in those days. The prints of Nepalis and Tibetans in their various forms of dress are finely done and very pleasing. *GDB*

Postcards from Kathmandu - Life among Gods, Kings and Diplomats. *By Frederick Selby. Vajra Publications, Kathmandu. 2008. Pp ix + 216. Colour & B&W plates. Pb. ISBN 978- 9937-506-06-9. (The book is obtainable through the publisher's website or Pilgrims Bookstore and /or website.)*

This work is a personal memoir written by Selby (now a member of the Society) some forty years after he had served in Nepal as an industrial/economic advisor attached to the US Embassy. He arrived in Nepal in 1960 relatively freshly out of university and a short period with his firm of management consultants. He was accompanied by his wife whom he had recently married. Their son was born in Nepal during this time. The period of his service, 1960 to 1963, is one that I describe as the post the 'Han Su Yin – The Mountain is Young' period. As one who was present in Nepal then, I find his

descriptions of the people and places very evocative of the life as it then was. The full cast of characters is included: Boris and Inger of the Royal Hotel, Toni Hagen, anthropologist and geologist, Father Marshall Moran SJ of St Xavier's School, Colonel Jimmy Roberts, Colonel Charles Wylie (not to my knowledge ever known as 'Chuck'), Prince Basundhara, Barbara Adams, the various diplomats and many others. He devotes a whole chapter to Sir Edmund Hillary. Other chapters are devoted to the visit in 1961 of HM The Queen, the Tibetan refugee problem and his work as an industrial advisor. He describes an early trek to Chhomrong and goes on to write about the development of trekking in Nepal. Other more bizarre incidents written about include the import from America via Calcutta of his white Mercedes convertible car and water skiing with Prince Basundhara on Phewatal Lake. Selby has returned to Nepal some nine times and he looks at Nepal and more recent events and briefly notes what happened subsequently to some of those people whom he met and knew in the early days. There is a good selection of photos, in colour and black & white of both people and local scenes of those early days. These include King Mahendra, King Birendra, King Gyanendra, the Dalai Lama, Boris Lissanevitch, Father Moran, Toni Hagen, Heinrich Harrer, and Sir Edmund Hillary, and even Prachanda, aka Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the current prime minister.

There are shots of old Kathmandu, Tibetan refugees, trekking, camping and mountains. These make an eclectic set of pictures to set off the book. Members who knew Nepal at that time will, particularly, I am sure, enjoy the many vignettes of the life there that are portrayed including the comments on recent events. This is an interesting read

for anyone with more than a passing interest in Nepal.

GDB

I will need to break your other leg - Tales of medical adventures and misadventures.

By Dr Prasanna Gautam. Hammersmith Press Ltd, London. 2008. Pp 180. Pb. ISBN 978-1 905140-21-3.

[A CIP record of this book is available from the British Library.]

When I first saw the title of this book, I asked myself why on earth would a doctor need to break a patient's other leg? After reading the book I found out; it was not the author but an orthopaedic surgeon who had said this when replying to a patient who complained about the short leg and wanted the surgeon to make it equal to the good one! The book begins with the author's early years undergoing training as an intern in India. This is followed by stories relating to his subsequent assignments in Kathmandu, the far western hills and south eastern Terai of Nepal. The author then writes a series of stories about his professional life after coming to the UK in 1977.

The book gives an excellent account of the situation in which a doctor is subjected to practise medicine both in Nepal and in Britain. Telling his stories, the author takes us to experience the social, cultural and political practices prevalent in Nepal during the seventies. Having worked as a medical doctor myself in similar circumstances during the same period, I felt quite familiar with incidents and events described in the book. To a reader from the west, the book can give a very useful insight into the state of health service in Nepal and the challenges faced by a relatively new medic where he is expected to make clinical, ethical and moral decisions at

times beyond the scope of his knowledge, skill and experience.

To a reader from Asia, it gives a good insight into the standard of medical practice in a developed country and also the quality of life, particularly of those from less privileged class, old and infirm living in British inner cities. The author highlights the social and public health impact of the imported Sexually Transmitted Diseases by the Nepalese workers when they return home infected from India. Similarly, he also drops a hint on the Indian spies working on a different pretext on the northern side of the border adjoining Tibet which was a sensitive issue between the Government of Nepal and the Indian establishment at that time. He also writes about the restrictive policy of the Nepalese Government during sixties and seventies in attempts to prevent doctors and other professionals to leaving the country by denying them passports.

In his stories, he writes about buying council properties in Britain during eighties and nineties. The consequences people had to face of the double edged policy of the then British Government. In one of his stories, he does not hide his feelings of being a victim of discrimination, when he was denied progress in his career to become a consultant cardiologist.

The story of Mr Reebock, a South African tourist who refused to be examined and treated by Dr Gautam because of the colour of his skin and eventually died of massive heart attack was a very sad story in deed! He also describes an event which concerned his family which was very touching. One day his wife, who was also a medical officer in the hospital, had suddenly taken ill. Her condition became quite serious. In that situation, as he was the only medical

doctor in the vicinity, he becomes her physician, husband and guardian. I must say, he was both brave and lucky to have been able to save his wife under the circumstances. Prasanna has made us all proud and shown his hidden talent by writing this book. Each and every story is thoroughly enjoyable. His writing has a smooth flow and a style which makes it a most interesting and enjoyable read. In conclusion, looking back at his successful career as a consultant physician, and now as a budding writer, I feel, perhaps the title of the book would have been more appropriately titled 'Looking Back and Moving Forward'. I wish Dr Gautam a very bright future in the field of writing.

Raghav P

Dhital

Kathmandu Bird Report 2004 – 2006.

By Mark Mallalieu. Bird Conservation Nepal. Kathmandu. 2008. Pp 56. Pb. ISBN 978-99379006-0-7.

Mark Mallalieu was formerly the country Director DFID in Kathmandu. During his tour of duty there he was able to continue his interest in ornithology. He has produced a review of the species seen in the Kathmandu Valley over the period 2004 to 2006. The main part of this A5 softback book is a systematic list of the species with the time of year and location where the visiting birdwatcher is likely to encounter such species. It also acts as a benchmark in respect of the status of the birds at this time. The Valley is subject to a great deal of development which has had and continues to have an adverse effect on wildlife, not least birds. The state of the Bagmati River and the quarrying around Phulchowki are cases in point. Dr Hem Sagar Baral, the chief executive of Bird Conservation Nepal, has contributed a forward to this work.

He writes: "Well over 500 species of birds have been reported in Kathmandu Valley within the last 200 years of which some have not been seen for many years. The loss of forests, wetlands and open farmland, combined with hunting and persecution, are major threats to bird life in Kathmandu Valley." The usefulness of this list is not only the overview of the current status of species which is of value to ornithologists, but the visiting birder will find this list invaluable in conjunction with the relevant field guides, either the original *Birds of Nepal* by the Flemings or the most recent work by the Inskipp, *A Guide to the Birds of Nepal* It will enable birders to plan and better identify the birds they may encounter.

GDB

(This report can be purchased from Mr Mark Mallalieu by sending a personal cheque for £4.50 (incl p&p) to him at: 29 Cobbetts Mead, Haywards Heath, West

Sussex, RH16 3TQ.

All proceeds will be passed to Bird Conservation Nepal.)

Britain's Gurkha War – The Invasion of Nepal, 1814-16. *By John Pemble.*

Frontline Books, an imprint of Pen and Sword Books, Barnsley, S. Yorks. 2008.

Pp xv + 389. Hb. Maps. B&W plates.

Appx. Bibliog. Index.

£19.99 ISBN 978-84832-520-3.

This is a comprehensive account of the war between the expanding East India Company and Nepal over the period 1814-16, and is an updated version of his earlier work, *The Invasion of Nepal*, published in 1971, with new information and a forward by Lt Col JP Cross. The author addressed the Society on 12th March 2009. A full review article will be published in the 2009 edition of the journal.

GDB

HIMAL SOUTHASIAN

Himal Southasian is a monthly news and current affairs magazine which is published in Kathmandu. Originally it dealt only with Nepal but due to its increasing success it now covers the SAARC / South Asian region. The editors consider this to be a 'review magazine' that contains longer and more analytical articles, two of which are reproduced in this edition of the Britain – Nepal Society Journal by kind permission of the editor.

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 OBITUARIES


Mr TJ O'Brien CMG MC

Terence O'Brien died in December 2007. He was Ambassador in Kathmandu over the period 1970 to 1974. He was born in India on 13th October 1921, one of a long line of Irish civil servants who had served the British Raj. He was educated at Gresham's School, Holt and having won a scholarship went up to Merton College, Oxford in 1939. His studies were interrupted by the war. He served with the Ayrshire Yeomanry, landing in Normandy shortly after D-day. As a captain he was awarded the Military Cross for his actions in driving between Allied and enemy lines to carry out vital survey work. He once joked, "I was decorated because I survived." In 1947 he joined the Dominion's Office which later became the Commonwealth Relations Office. He was posted initially to Ceylon and was famous for entertaining guests to his bungalow wearing a silk dressing gown – possibly a habit acquired during his days as a Thespian at Oxford. His first brief marriage to Phyllis Mitchell ended sadly

with her death as a result of polio. He married Rita Reynolds in 1953. Apart from a posting to Australia 1956-58, his career centred on South and Southeast Asia. He served in Malaya 1960-62 following the end of the 'Malayan Emergency', a time of uncertainty in that part of Southeast Asia. He then became involved with the initial negotiations concerning the formation of Malaysia when the question of how to deal with the remaining colonies of Sarawak and British North Borneo arose. He was the Secretary of the Inter-Governmental Committee at Jesselton charged with resolving the future status of North Borneo. That North Borneo became part of Malaysia he always considered to be one of his most enduring legacies. He was next appointed Head of Chancery in Delhi 1963-66. This was a difficult time with the continuing border disputes with China both in the Aksai Chin in the northwest and on the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) following the short war between India and China in 1962. He attended the Imperial Defence College in 1967 and after a period in London was appointed ambassador to Nepal in 1970. This was probably his most energetic and fulfilling posting. He, with his wife, made many treks into the hills to assess the possibilities for aid projects. On one occasion he went on trek with the then Crown Prince Birendra with whom he formed a degree of real friendship. It was during this period that, with HQ Brigade of Gurkhas, he helped to initiate direct air-trooping between Hong Kong and Kathmandu. Direct air-trooping obviated the difficulties for families who had previously had to travel via Calcutta. However his personal proudest achievement was the relief operation that he initiated in 1973 to bring food aid

which helped to avert a serious famine. This was known as 'Operation Khana Cascade', carried out by the RAF. This involved delicate negotiations with the Indian Government in respect of over-flying. The operation required a base to be established by the airport at Bhairawa from where the RAF with the army Air Dispatch Unit dropped some 2000 metric tons of food into remote areas of western Nepal. However, it was not all work in Kathmandu which, at that time, was a delightfully colourful and relaxed place to be. Perhaps it was here that O'Brien's wry sense of fun emerged, notably his method of duck racing which he devised in the residency garden. His next posting was as ambassador to Burma which he considered to be the most heartrending of his career. He was obliged to meet General Ne Win officially on many occasions. He did establish bonds with many Burmese people and these included Daw Khin Kyi, widow of the independence leader Aung San, the mother of Aung San Suu Kyi, cementing a close relationship between the two families begun during a previous posting. For his last posting O'Brien was sent to Indonesia which he considered to be the most trying of his career due to the trade war which then existed between UK and Indonesia. O'Brien retired in 1981 to Dorset after a long, eventful and distinguished diplomatic career.

Mr Theon Wilkinson MBE

Mr Theon Wilkinson, founder of the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia (BACSA) died on 26th November 2007. He was born in Cawnpore (Kanpur) in 1924 where his father was Director of the Elgin Mills. Following the accepted procedure, Theon was sent to England to school. In the summer of 1939, while he was back home

in India on the school holidays, war broke out; he was unable to return to Radley College, completing his schooling at St Paul's in Darjeeling. He was called up on his 18th birthday and went to Bangalore escorted by his bearer, Babu Lal, a family retainer since 1921 who had been told to deliver him to the barracks and then report back to his father. After officer training he was commissioned into 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles. He moved to the Regimental Centre at Ghangora accompanied by another family servant, Bahadur Ali. According to Wilkinson, Bahadur Ali waited on him at breakfast in the mess and always insisted on helping him off with his boots at the end of the day's training. (He met Bahadur Ali later in the 1950s in Bradford where he was apparently successfully selling 'fudge' made to Wilkinson's mother's recipe!). After a period as training adjutant at the Centre, he joined 2/3GR in Italy in March 1945. He was involved in the final stages of the Italian campaign and the operations to secure Trieste against aggressive incursions by Tito's Yugoslavian troops intent upon territorial acquisition. By Christmas 1945 he was back in India and was appointed ADC to Colonel Sir Clutha-MacKenzie, a New Zealander, on a mission to Nepal. His last appointment before demobilisation was as OC Boys Company at the Centre. On return to England he went up to Worcester College, Oxford and read modern history. Whilst at Oxford he won a half Blue for squash and represented the University at tennis. He joined the Colonial Service and in due course became a District Commissioner in Kenya (1953-54). On leaving the Colonial Service he worked for Charrington's Brewery and later De La Rue (1959-68). He then went into personnel management and became Secretary to the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the UK

Universities until he retired in 1990. Wilkinson's abiding legacy is his foundation of BACSA in 1976, the inspiration for which was the result of taking his son on a tour of his old haunts around India some years before. He noted the condition of the old British cemeteries which had been abandoned following Independence in 1947. Monuments were crumbling and the graveyards were regularly plundered by local builders seeking materials. He began to collect information on cemeteries through records held in the British High Commission in Delhi. This, in turn, led to further avenues and contacts with others also interested in such information. He realized that his researches should be collated into a book. The result was the publication in 1976 of *Two Monsoons*. The book was described by Jan Morris in *The Times* as not so much of "rulers, nabobs or reformers, but essentially of fallible humans and loyal families, struggling to make life tolerable in a ghastly climate far from home." From this BACSA was founded. At the time of his death there were about one thousand members and some one hundred cemeteries have been restored and more recorded. From within this membership he established area representatives – people with specialised knowledge of places in

South Asia. Through these representatives BACSA carries out its work of restoration and recording. It was Wilkinson's own huge capacity for work and his great detailed knowledge and enthusiasm, based on his early life in India, which enabled him to assemble and process such records. The BACSA records have been deposited in the British Library and constitute a major resource for travellers and researchers of family history. This was Wilkinson's most important achievement for which he was awarded the MBE. He set up a small publishing company – BACSA Books – that produced over forty books written by members which, through his company, were made available to the general public. Theon Wilkison, a member of the Society, described to the Society, in 2001, his walk in 1946, into Kathmandu with the blind Sir Clutha MacKenzie from St Dunstan's. *GDB*

(I am grateful to Mr Rodney Turk, editor of 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles Association journal and Mr Peter Leggatt, President of BACSA and the editor of 'The Chowkidar', journal of BACSA, for providing information for this piece. Ed.)

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NOTES ON THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

President: HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO

The Britain-Nepal Society was founded in 1960 to promote good relations between the peoples of the UK and Nepal. We especially wish to foster friendship between UK citizens with a particular interest in Nepal and Nepalese citizens resident – whether permanently or temporarily – in this country. A much valued feature of the Society is the ease and conviviality with which members of every background and all ages mingle together.

Members are drawn from all walks of life including mountaineers, travellers, teachers, returned volunteers, aid workers, doctors, business people, members of the Diplomatic Service and serving and retired officers of the Brigade of Gurkhas. The bond they all share is an abiding interest in and affection for Nepal and the Nepalese people. Membership is open to those of all ages over 18 and a particular welcome goes to applications from those under 35.

Ordinary members pay a subscription of £15 (husband and wife members £25) per annum. Life membership is a single payment of £300, joint life membership, a payment of £500, and corporate business members £50 and charities £25 per annum. Concessionary rates are available at both ends of the age range.

The annual journal includes a wide range of articles about Nepal and is sent free to all members.

We keep in close touch with the Nepal-Britain Society in Kathmandu, and their members are welcome to attend all the Britain-Nepal Society's functions. However we do not have reciprocal membership.

Members of the Yeti Association which provides equally for Nepalese residents or those staying in this country are also welcome to attend the Britain-Nepal Society's functions, and can become full members of the Britain-Nepal Society in the usual way. The Yeti is a flourishing organization and they publish their own attractive journal.

Throughout the year, the Society holds a programme of evening lectures, which are currently held at the Medical Society of London, Chandos Street, off Cavendish Square, where members are encouraged to meet each other over a drink beforehand.

The Society holds an Annual Nepali Supper, usually in February and in the autumn we hold our AGM. The Society also holds receptions and hospitality for visiting senior Nepalese.

The Committee is actively seeking suggestions from members for ways of expanding and developing the programme.

Those interested in joining the Society should write to the Honorary Membership Secretary:

Mrs Pat Mellor
3 (c) Gunnersbury Avenue
Ealing Common
London W5 3NH
Tel: 020 8992 0173

THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

President: His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester KG, GCVO

Vice-Presidents

Brigadier AB Taggart MC
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Committee (2008/09)

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Miss Rosalind Corrigan, FCO (*ex officio*)

Mr Simon L Lord ED, HQ Brigade of Gurkhas (*ex officio*)

Editor of the Journal: Lieutenant Colonel GD Birch*

Archivist: Mrs Celia Brown #

