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THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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*Journal*

Number 39

2015

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THE  
GURKHAS  
**200**  
YEARS  
OF SERVICE TO  
THE CROWN  
*1815 - 2015*

The logo features two crossed kukris (Gurkha knives) above the text. The text is in a serif font, with '200' being significantly larger than the other words. The dates '1815 - 2015' are in italics at the bottom.



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## Journal

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*Prime Minister Joodha Shumsher with his sons & nephews in Kathmandu with a visiting group of British and Gurkha officers, some time in the 1930s. On Joodha's right is a General Officer. It would appear that this is a group of Commanding Officers with their Subadar Majors (Gurkha Majors). I discovered this photograph initially amongst the late Mayura Brown's archive. I subsequently noted that it was also amongst the many photographs that hung in one of the corridors of the Kaiser Library. The Library suffered major damage in the earthquake. GDB.*

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## DHARAHARA TOWER

By Gerry Birch

The Dharahara Tower or Bhimsen's Tower or even Bhimsen's Folly as it is sometimes known is now no longer a part of the Kathmandu skyline. It was a casualty of the earthquake that shook Kathmandu on 25th April. Over recent years, although it had been restored, it had been masked by the surrounding development. I remember very well my first flight in an aging Dakota into Kathmandu from India in 1962. As we broke through the clouds the city was laid out below. Was this to be a real 'Shangri La'? One could see a fair sprinkling of large white 'palaces' built by the Shahs and Ranas and amongst them a tall white tower, somewhat like a minaret. On my visits in 1962-63 I was able to climb the tower. It was close to the



*The second Bhimsen Tower c 1850. © RGS*

general post office, where if you could find some one, it was possible to buy postage stamps. In later years it was closed to visitors for a long time due to safety concerns presumably. It was reopened in 2005 after restoration had taken place and my wife and I climbed the tower along with both locals and tourists in 2009. This tower was apparently built by order of Bhimsen Thapa, to honour his niece, Queen Lalit Tripura Sundari in around 1832, the second of two towers built by him. (*In Charles Allen's 'Prisoner of Kathmandu' he notes that there were originally two towers. See review elsewhere in the journal. Ed.*) The function of the towers was to act as watchtowers. The towers were no strangers to earthquakes as the painting by Oldfield, the Residency surgeon (1850 to 1864) shows. The damage shown by Oldfield was probably the result of an earlier quake possibly 1834 and is apparently of the second tower. The first tower was severely damaged in 1834. Both towers were apparently restored but the first one was destroyed in 1934. The remaining one was restored on the orders of the then prime minister Jooddha Shumsher.

The photograph taken by the late Mayura Brown, a grand-daughter of Jangbahadur Rana, in 1932 would seem to be of the original tower which was not subsequently re-built. My photograph, taken in 1962 shows the remaining second tower. Sadly the earthquake reduced the tower to a heap of rubble with heavy loss of life.

*(Note: spelling of 'Dharahara' varies! Ed.)*

"Dhara" "



A Monument built in  
honour of Maharaja  
Sir Jung Bahadur  
Destroyed by quake of 15.1.1934.

*This would appear to be the first tower built by Bhimsen Thapa. The photograph was taken by the late Mayura Brown on her visit to Kathmandu in 1932. It was destroyed in 1934 and not re-built.*



*The second restored tower in 1962. This was destroyed by the earthquake in April 2015 with heavy loss of life. GDB.*

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## EDITORIAL

Following the hundredth anniversary of World War I in 2014, 2015 is the two hundredth anniversary of Gurkhas serving the British Crown and is designated as 'Gurkha 200'. Next year, 2016, represents the two hundredth anniversary of the Treaty of Segauli which formally brought the Anglo-Nepal War 1814 – 1816 to a close and will be marked as 'Nepal 200'. Two hundred years of military service with countless campaigns and minor skirmishes around the world in which the Gurkhas have been involved cannot be adequately fitted into this modest journal and has been covered in many books and journals. I would suggest that if you speak to any member of the public and ask what comes to mind when one mentions Nepal, it will be Mount Everest and the Gurkhas. HQ Brigade of Gurkhas planned a series of high profile events which by the time you read this will have taken place. To mark this 200th anniversary I have included as the frontispiece a photograph from the collection of the late Mayura Brown depicting a group of senior British and Gurkha officers with the Prime Minister Joodha Shumsher. On a subsequent visit to the Kaiser Library in Kathmandu I found a copy of this photograph hanging on the wall in one of the main corridors. Unfortunately the only description was in faded Nagri script and Mayura's copy had no caption. By observation and inquiry, it would seem that this photograph was taken in the 1930s, possibly 1932. It shows Prime Minister Joodha Shumsher with, presumably his

sons and nephews, and a British Major-General (?) with COs and Gurkha Majors representing the ten Gurkha regiments of the Indian Army. Mayura travelled to Kathmandu in 1932 (*A description of her journey appeared in the 2000 edition of the journal. Ed.*). Joodha Shumsher was prime minister 1932 to 1945.

By chance I came across some interesting archive material relating to Sir George Falconer, last minister and first ambassador in Kathmandu. He was present in Kathmandu for VE Day celebrations in 1945 and I have included the speech made by the Prime Minister, Joodha Shumsher, with Sir George's reply. This serves to illustrate the long Gurkha connection and Anglo-Nepal relations. Again to mark Gurkha service, without this becoming a regimental history, I have included an unusual piece about the Malayan emergency which occupied the Brigade of Gurkhas post-war from 1948 to 1960 and beyond with action against Indonesia in Borneo. After the withdrawal from the Far East, the Brigade was concentrated in Hong Kong but had already been involved in cross-border incidents during the 'Cultural Revolution' in China. The recent death of Major-General Ronnie McAlister brought this to my attention. He was involved with an incident on the Hong Kong / Chinese border which could have had serious consequences.

Sadly 2015 and the planned celebrations have been overshadowed by the earthquakes in April and May. As the Chairman's report indicates the Society has been involved with fundraising

events throughout the year and has been well supported by members. I am glad to be able to include reports from Col David Hayes, a trustee of the Gurkha Welfare Trust, and Dr Gillian Holdsworth of the Britain-Nepal Medical Trust, both organisations to which the Society contributed funds. Having had to deal with the earthquake in the first half of the year, the long-expected constitution was eventually promulgated and resulted in considerable political unrest. I am grateful to Professor Subedi for his contribution that sets recent events in context.

I have been a subscriber for some time to the now quarterly magazine *Himal Southasian*. This periodical, based in Kathmandu, carries reviews of politics and culture of the South Asian region. In their Volume 27 Issue 4 I noted a piece by Professor David Gellner of Oxford University and the Britain Nepal Academic Council entitled *From Kathmandu to Kent*. This describes the current status of Nepalis now living in UK. I, and I am sure other members of the Society are often asked by people about the numbers of Nepalis in UK so this gives us a good update on the situation as it is today. The editor of *Himal* has kindly given permission for me to reprint the article in this edition of the journal. Things have moved a long

way from the early days of the Society, some fifty-five years ago, when so few Nepalis were evident here.

In recent time there has been increasing interest in Nepal's links with the early years of Buddhism. The Society was pleased to be updated on the continuing excavations and exploration in the area around Lumbini by Professor Robin Coningham at a lecture in May. Included is a piece by him based on that lecture.

Books about Nepal, in all aspects, continue to come out. I am grateful to Dr Andrew Hall for his review concerning two recently published works by Nepali authors on contemporary events surrounding the Maoist uprising. John Cross who has produced a clutch of works, both non-fiction and fiction, has now reached his ninetieth year. His life and career extends over a large proportion of the 200 years of Anglo-Nepal co-operation and his books more than cover that period. I have therefore included a review of his works to mark this anniversary.

I am sure we all wish Nepal well as we look to 'Nepal 200' in the coming year.



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## THE SOCIETY'S NEWS

(This is an edited version of the Chairman's report at the AGM on 3rd December 2015)

The Chairman opened the meeting by thanking Mr Tejbahadur Chhetri, the Chargé d'Affaires, for once again allowing the Society to hold the AGM at the Embassy. He went on to state that the Society continues to look forward to the arrival of a new Ambassador in due time and thanked Mr Chhetri and his team for their continued support to the Society. He also mentioned that he was sorry to say good bye to Mr Surya Bahadur Thapa, Third Secretary, who had returned to Nepal.

Inevitably the first half of the year was dominated by the appalling earthquake disasters that struck Nepal in April and May. It took some time before the full scale of the disaster was known but the Committee immediately sprang into action, making donations of £5000 from Society reserves to both The Gurkha Welfare Trust and The Britain Nepal Medical Trust and £1000 to the Embassy's Emergency Relief Fund. At very short notice a fundraising event was held here at the Embassy in the presence of our President HRH The Duke of Gloucester, who addressed the gathering. Isabella Tree gave a fascinating talk on *The Kumari – The Living Goddess of Kathmandu*. Finally an auction of promises masterminded by Maggie Solon and MJ Streather raised £6000 towards the overall total for the evening of £15000 shared between our two principal recipient charities.

I trust that you will not think it too uxorious of me if I mention that a number of unsold auction items were rolled forward to an on-line auction

organised by my wife, raising further substantial sums for our two charities.

Inevitably these events necessitated a great deal of additional work for our Treasurer Rupert Litherland. I would like to thank him for all that he has done throughout the year to keep our finances in order and to maintain our membership lists. You will hear later in the evening how this money is being spent. One thing is certain; the suffering of hundreds of thousands of people will continue and Nepal will clearly need ongoing help in the months and years to come. The Committee will continue to reflect on ways in which we can continue to raise funds.

I think that we were all struck by the spontaneous generosity of so many individuals in response to the crisis. Both within the Society and the wider world people dug deep often not once only but in answer to several appeals. There was an outflowing of sympathy and concern that underlined the very special relationship between our two countries.

The meeting then kept a few moments silence to reflect on Nepal's predicament and also in memory of those Society members whose deaths have been reported during the year: Tony Andrews, Lady Bishop, Lady Bramall, Henry Burrows, P E Green, David Inglefield, Bob Jordan, Ralph Reynolds, Peter Roberts, Richard Thwaites, Brian Thompson, Dr Penny Cunningham and most recently our much loved and admired former Treasurer, Peter Trott. At the time of writing, there is no news of the whereabouts of Robin Garton who

went missing in September whilst walking in Glencoe.

Alongside our fundraising efforts the programme has followed its customary pattern. A successful annual supper was held in February and was enlivened by a display of Nepali dancing and a highly entertaining speech by Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers. Three lectures were held at the Medical Society of London. Topics discussed were *Excavating the Birthplace of the Buddha at Lumbini*, *Water Aid in Nepal* and *The Genealogies of the Shah, Rana and Other Families*, the last by Society member Greg Hickman. It is encouraging to see the gradual growth in numbers at these events. Recent occasions having seen the talks attended by some fifty members and guests, most of whom stayed on for supper. These evenings are very pleasant occasions and the Chairman encouraged members to attend as much as possible.

Most recently, we held a 'Nepal Evening' at Knole Academy in Sevenoaks. The event, superbly organised by Ashley Adams, was a huge success exceeding all our expectations. Some 40-50 students from six or seven schools and a similar number of adults attended and enjoyed a varied programme of presentations. Society members Andy Sparkes and Alison Marston spoke on *An Introduction to Nepal* and *Life and School in Nepal* respectively. We then heard accounts of *Wildlife and Conservation in Nepal* and *The Nepal Earthquake Relief Operation*. There was a piper, dancing (including the kukri dance), singing, flamboyant costumes and displays, all of which created a very vivid image of Nepal. Nepalese snacks, a bicentenary cake baked by a Gurkha regimental chef, and a lusty rendition of

the Nepalese National Anthem all added to the occasion.

All of the schools involved were already doing something for or with Nepal – fundraising (all of them), pen pal letters, schools twinning, trekking, D of E etc and I am sure that all of them and their parents will go away thinking about how they can continue and develop these contacts.

Several people expressed interest in joining the Society and an Everest summiteer offered to give a lecture to the Society. The welcome given by Knole Academy was generous and the school proved an ideal location for such an event. A great amount of work went into arranging all this and Ashley deserves a huge vote of thanks for turning the vision into reality. It was an exciting evening, a marvellous first for the Society and one which I hope that we can build on in time to come.

Looking ahead, the annual supper will take place as usual at St Columba's Church Hall, Pont Street on 18th February. The Chief Guest will be Andy Sparkes, recently our Ambassador in Kathmandu who will be admirably placed to tell us about earthquake relief efforts and perhaps to give us an overview of political developments in Kathmandu following the adoption of the new constitution. Our programme of lectures for next year is taking shape. In May Zara Fleming's title will be *From Zanskar to Bhutan* with some marvellous illustrations. A talk on Everest is in the pipeline and other speakers will be announced in due course. We are also planning a screening of *Mahout*, a film that follows the re-location of four elephants as they are walked from Chitwan to Badia national parks.

During the year the Committee has worked hard to extend the activities of the Society and to improve our communications. We continue to use e-mail to alert members to events of interest which are not necessarily arranged by the Society. If you would like to receive these notifications please ensure that we have your e-mail contact details. Excellent progress is being made with the production of our new website which we hope will go live in the first quarter of 2016. Alison Marston, chairman of the younger members committee, continues to keep a watchful eye on our Facebook site.

The bulk of the Society's archive is now held at the Gurkha Museum in Winchester. If you would like to consult the archive or have any items that would be appropriate for the collection please let Gavin Edgerley-Harris or myself know. Details are shown in the journal.

Later this month we have been invited by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office jointly to host a reception to mark the bicentenary of the Treaty of Segauli signed in 1816 marking the end of the Anglo-Nepal War. Our plans for a Society trip to Nepal in spring 2016, ideally to overlap with a projected Royal visit to Kathmandu are well underway. Various combinations of sight-seeing in Kathmandu and the Valley, six days of luxury tented or luxury lodge-based trekking (or no trekking at all!), wildlife in the Terai and exploration in and around Pokhara have been finalised. We now await confirmation of the details of the Royal visit so that we can finalise our own dates and begin to sign up participants. If you are interested in joining this trip or learning more about it please let me know.

As most of you will know, we have been immensely lucky to appoint Mrs MJ Streather as Honorary Secretary. MJ took over from Jenifer Evans earlier in the year and was immediately plunged into the somewhat nerve-racking task of organising our earthquake fundraising event. That it was such a success was due in good measure to her hard work along with that of members of the committee. It is very good to know that the affairs of the Society are in such good hands. We were able to say thank you formally to Jenifer at last year's meeting but happily it was not farewell as Jenifer has agreed to continue as a committee member.

I would also like to give my personal vote of thanks to the Committee who work so hard to keep the Society up and running. For obvious reasons this has been a demanding year and members could not have a better committee to foster their interest in and enthusiasm for Nepal. And if others of you would like to consider serving on the committee do please let me know.

Finally, I would like on your behalf to thank Mahanta Shrestha and Prashant Kunwar for so generously providing the Khukuri beer for us this evening. I am sure that you will want to take full advantage of their kindness. Many thanks are due to Monty and Prashant.

The Chairman then invited Colonel William Shuttlewood, Director of The Gurkha Welfare Trust, and Dr Gillian Holdsworth, Trustee of The Britain Nepal Medical Trust to tell us how our donations to their earthquake relief efforts are being spent.



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## THE ANNUAL NEPALI SUPPER 2015

By Frances Spackman

Our annual supper last month was hugely enjoyable – but then it always is. It took place as usual in St Columba’s church hall, Pont Street on the 19th February. First of all there was the great pleasure of listening to Lord Philips of Worth Matravers recounting entertaining events from his long and distinguished legal career. He has been a member of the Britain-Nepal Society for many years and judging by the audience response, he would be welcomed by everyone for further reminiscences if he could be persuaded to make a return appearance.

The Chargé d’Affaires, Mr Tej Chhetri, addressed the members and guests and updated everyone with aspects of the current state of affairs between Britain and Nepal. Thanks to the initiative of committee member Ashley Adams, we had the new and most welcome addition of two Nepali dancers to entertain us. They were smiley, charming and most accomplished. The evening continued with all the usual (and unusual) ingredients – the Gurkha piper,

Khukri beer, the flags of Britain and Nepal and the loyal message to Her Majesty the Queen and Her gracious reply. The traditional Nepali food was excellent as always.

It was a sign that the evening was a success that no-one seemed to want to leave. It might have been reluctance to brave the cold and the rain that explained it, but most likely it was the enjoyment being had by all to judge by the chatting. There were several new members present and with luck they will attend future suppers and society events so they will eventually feel as much at home as the old stagers.

As always many thanks are due to Roger Potter our Chairman and the organisers on the committee who can be relied upon to make it all happen. Regarded by many (or is that just the committee?) as the social highlight of the BNS year, this year’s supper was once again a great success so “well done” to all concerned.

### **SOCIETY ARCHIVES & JOURNAL**

The Society has an archive of papers, documents and other ephemera relating to its work since it was founded in 1960. This archive is currently lodged at The Gurkha Museum in Winchester. Anyone who wishes to view the BNS Archive should first make an appointment by contacting the Curator on 01962 842832 or e-mail [curator@thegurkhamuseum.co.uk](mailto:curator@thegurkhamuseum.co.uk)

Duplicate copies of the journal can be obtained from the editor and a limited number of back editions may also be purchased for £3.50 per copy plus p&p.

Contact the editor at email: [gerry.birch3@btinternet.com](mailto:gerry.birch3@btinternet.com)

Past editions can also be viewed on the Digital Himalaya website:

[www.digitalhimalaya.org](http://www.digitalhimalaya.org)

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## SIR GEORGE FALCONER KBE CIE DL

By Gerry Birch

Sir George Falconer was the last 'minister plenipotentiary & envoy extraordinary' and the first 'ambassador' in Kathmandu, spanning the period 1944 to 1951. (*The succession of British representatives in Kathmandu is listed in the 2010 edition of the journal.*). His niece had, through family circumstances, become the custodian of his medals, memorabilia and papers and felt that these should be properly preserved. To that end she contacted the curator of the Gurkha Museum, Gavin Edgerley-Harris. Since his niece, Mrs Alice Bunbury, lived in Southwold I was asked to go to see Mrs Bunbury collect the medals and deliver safely to the museum. On arrival in Southwold I was royally entertained by Charles & Alice Bunbury to lunch. As we discussed Sir George's career and viewed the medals and some papers it

was clear that this would be a major archive as Sir George and his wife Esther had kept some fascinating original letters from his time in Kathmandu including some from the Rana prime ministers and the king, at that time HM King Tribhubana.

George Falconer was born in 1894 and saw service in World War I in the 4th Hussars as a trooper and was subsequently commissioned into the Indian Cavalry in 1916. He joined the 28th Light Cavalry in Meshed, Persia. In 1921 he was transferred to 2/6th Gukha Rifles in the rank of captain. He saw service on the North West Frontier and joined the Indian Political Service (IPS) in 1923 and was promoted to major in 1935. His IPS appointments took him to Aden, Kashmir and Baroda. He was appointed Consul in Kerman, Persia, serving there from 1937 to 1942. It was whilst in this post that he was instrumental in facilitating the move of Shah Reza from Persia to allow his son to takeover as Shah, following approaches that had been made to Reza by the Germans. Falconer was intimately involved with detailed negotiations surrounding the removal of Reza and to persuade him to abdicate in favour of his son. There was concern that the Persians would allow the Germans to enter the country from the north which would have led to the internment of British nationals for the duration of the war. Forces were sent from India with participation by both French and Russian forces which kept the Germans at bay. Falconer then escorted Reza with his wife to the coast where they were put on ship to South Africa.



*Sir George Falconer.*

He was congratulated by the External Affairs department in Delhi for his part in this episode and was awarded the CIE in the same year.

In 1944 he took up the post of minister in Kathmandu where he was to remain until retirement in 1951. His term of office covered the end of World War II and Indian independence in 1947, an interesting and testing time. It was during this time that Alice Bunbury visited her uncle in Kathmandu in 1950/51. She with Lady Esther Falconer collected some interesting photographs, some of which are now in the museum archives. Falconer was awarded the KBE on 31st December 1947 doubtless reflecting his work in the 1947 negotiations as the Brigade of Gurkhas was split between the British and Indian armies. I have included a picture of Sir George Falconer in his ambassadorial uniform. A copy hangs in the Chancery in Kathmandu. He has a rather severe and possibly sad look about him. This I believe reflects a major sadness in his life as his son died aged 15 in UK whilst on holiday from his boarding school. This would have been hard to bear especially at such a distance. This may account for the fact that the photograph does not show him wearing either the CIE or KBE. When I collected the medals they both appear never to have been worn.

On his retirement to Suffolk he was active in local affairs. He was a member of the West Suffolk County Council, appointed a Deputy Lieutenant and held the appointment as High Sheriff in 1964. He died aged 87 in September 1981. His wife Lady Esther Falconer died two years later in 1983.

Amongst the archives I discovered two important speeches following the end of

the war in Europe made by the Prime Minister of Nepal and Sir George's reply. I believe these speeches, slightly shortened, are appropriate in this year of 'Gurkha 200' and help to sum up Anglo-Nepal relations.

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*SPEECH MADE BY HIS HIGHNESS  
SIR JOODHA SHUMSHER JANG  
BAHDUR RANA, PRIME MINISTER OF  
NEPAL – MAY 1945 AT THE VE DAY  
PARADE IN KATHMANDU*

“Your Majesty,

With your Majesty's permission I would like to address a few words to the Bharadars and other gentlemen who have gathered here today.

Colonel Falconer, Commander-in-Chief, Commanding Generals, Generals, Bharadars, Officers and men of the Army and Gentlemen,

The welcome news of unconditional surrender of Germany having terminated the gigantic war which had been raging in Europe for close on five and three quarter years has filled Nepal as one among the allies with very great joy.

A tiny spark which set the whole world ablaze first appeared in middle Europe and went on assuming such serious proportions as to envelope the world in the conflagration caused by it. Strange events were seen and curious occurrences began to take place in international politics; reason could get no patient hearing; righteousness, justice, and good faith seemed to get no place in it. Aggression became the order of the day, while pacts and plighted words ceased to have any meaning whatsoever.

Britain foresaw what such a disastrous course events would lead the world to,

and her government tried its best to avert such a danger. All efforts however proved of no avail with one filled with the ambitions of dominating the whole world. Thus forced by circumstances Britain had to come forward and take the field with a view to protect the weak and helpless and uphold the cause of truth and justice. Having had to deal with swollen head enemy and unprepared as she was she had, at the outset, to pass through some dark days. But then by the grace of the Great Dispenser of Justice, Britain found herself at such a critical time favoured with good fortune of having got at the helm of her state a wise sagacious and very proficient person like the Right Honourable Mr Winston Churchill. The admirable way this illustrious and eminent soldier-statesman went on tackling successfully all the problems as they cropped up in the wake of the swift moving events of the day was simply marvellous. The foresight,

sagacity and firm determination shown by him in dealing with state affairs has rightly won him the glorious epithet of being called the "Father of Britain."

A friend is by duty bound to help a friend in need. A firm friendship of about 130 years binds Britain and Nepal together. Since that time Nepal has ever shown herself ready to come forward to help Britain to the best of her ability in times of emergency. At the time of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 in India when Britain was passing through a critical time the armed might of Nepal was fully engaged in cementing the bonds of friendship between the two governments with the life's best blood which was then freely shed in support of the British cause. The help thus rendered by Nepal was then gratefully acknowledged and gracefully marked with a tangible token of appreciation by the British Government, which the Nepal Government had the pleasure to accept.

Again in 1914 the outbreak of the last Great War saw Nepal ready to help Britain as the best she could with her army and any other such resources as she possessed. And when God was pleased to favour her friend with final victory she had the pleasure of accepting what was given her by her grateful friend as a tangible token of appreciation of the valuable rendered by her.

In this war also Nepal has strained every nerve from the very beginning to be of what use she could, and we were not slow to gird up our loins to go through all the vicissitudes of the war and sail in the same boat with our great friend and ally in crossing the frightful ocean of this gigantic struggle. Nepal has done her best. Indeed she could not have done better. We have provided freely and





unconditionally whatever help was asked for from us without waiting for a moment to consider the inconveniences and difficulties that might arise there from. The fateful days of the evacuation of Dunkirk, the treacherous leap of Italy into the war, the abject surrender of France to the enemy, the terrible blitz over London and England at the time when Britain was in an unprepared state, the sudden and unjustified opening of hostilities by Japan, all these could not make us flinch in the least in our firm belief of the achievement of final victory by our great friend. The ultimate realisation of that firm belief now has filled the hearts of us all here and the people of this country in general with supreme pleasure and gratification.

Ours is a small hilly kingdom. Our resources are also similarly small. Whatever help we have been able to render can but mean quite insignificant before the prowess and vast resources of the mighty British government. All the same Nepal has left nothing undone for the sake of her friend. The number of her sons sent out by her to serve with heart and soul the righteous cause of Britain has already come to over 148,000. Of them 132,000 are those sent for enlistment in the British Gurkha regiments of the Indian Army; 4000 formed part of those enlisted in the military Labour Corps while 12,500 are represented by the eight infantry battalions of our own army plus one pioneer battalion attached to it and the drafts sent to them from time to time. Surely such a supply of manpower from a small country like ours is no small thing. The Gurkhas as a martial race is well known everywhere. What Nepali can there be who does not feel elated

when he hears of the gallantry shown by his compatriots, who have gone out to be enlisted in the British Gurkha Regiments and be of help to the British Government. Fighting with great valour in all battlefields wherever they happen to be and shedding their lives' best blood in the service of the British cause are cementing still more firmly the happy friendly relations and adding fresh lustre to the traditional friendship subsisting between Nepal and Britain.

All the units of our contingent in India have also been doing well, each in its own sphere of action. I am indeed much gratified to learn from reports received that of these the Kalibahadur, the Shere and the Mahendra Dal have acquitted themselves very well, the former two of resisting the Japanese invasion of India and the latter as much in fighting as in driving the Japs across Burma. It is indeed very pleasing to hear that Lieut-Col Chhatra Bikram Rana a mere



youngster of 31 and Major Padam Bahadur Shah the OC and second-in-command respectively as well as the other officers of that battalion have acquitted themselves creditably. It is such a great pleasure to think that their return home cannot be long delayed now, and we are much looking forward to the day when we shall have the satisfaction of welcoming them back home.

Colonel Falconer,  
We thank you from the bottom of our heart for your having kindly come to join us in this victory celebration. It is not very long since Your Excellency has been here as Representative of our great friend Britain. Yet I feel sure you have seen enough to realise how our country stands and the long firm friendship we have with Britain. You have seen how during all these last 130 years Nepal has never flinched to freely apply her manpower and money in support of the British cause and how in this terrific world-wide war also she has come forward to help Britain. We feel sure that like a good friend you are, Your Excellency will not fail in your co-operation towards ensuring from your government due recognition of the help rendered by her, by tokens calculated to foster her happiness and prosperity. I am loath to say this and that should be given to us. Whatever our great and magnanimous friend be pleased to give will be welcome to us.

Gentlemen,  
I cannot pass this day of rejoicing without mentioning the glorious example set by Their Imperial Majesties the King and Queen of Great Britain to their people to calmly go through the ravages of war and the visits made by His Majesty to his army at various fronts to cheer them up in

the deadly struggle in which they were engaged. I find no words to adequately express my admiration and so content myself by simply saying I salute them.”

---

*THE REPLY BY LT COL GA FALCONER  
HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S  
MINISTER IN KATHMANDU*

“Your Majesty,  
Your Highness, Your Excellency,  
Commanding Generals, Ladies and  
Gentlemen.

I am very grateful to Your Highness for the glowing tribute you have paid to His Majesty my Sovereign and Queen Elizabeth who during the last 5 ½ years shared with their peoples all the perils and dangers which beset Great Britain. Their calm courage and high sense of duty has been a shining light to the peoples of the British Commonwealth of Nations, and indeed to many others, throughout the dark days of that chapter of European history which happily has now been closed.

I also thank Your Highness for the generous words you have spoken about the Prime Minister of Great Britain, The Right Honourable Winston Spencer Churchill, who, by his infinite courage and leadership sustained the peoples of the British Commonwealth and other nations when their fortunes in war were at their lowest ebb and through ‘blood, tears, toil and sweat’ guided them to victory over their enemies in Europe and Africa and to the preservation of their freedom.

Today Nepal celebrates this great victory in Europe and I am honoured by the privilege of being present to witness this ceremony. From the outset of

hostilities, Your Highness has maintained a firm belief in the righteousness and ultimate triumph of the British and Allied cause. Today we know that belief was well founded.

The traditional friendship between our two countries, which has now stood the test of 130 years, was further emphasised when in March, 1940 a strong Contingent from the Nepalese Army (under the command of Commanding General Sir Bahadur Shumshere) crossed the frontier into India for the third time in our joint history to range itself alongside the British forces in the great struggle which was to follow. In addition to this, large numbers of your brave countrymen have gone forth to swell the ranks of the Gurkha Regiments in the Indian Army. The gallant deeds of the soldiers from Nepal on the fields of battle are well-known to all the world. The many decorations for bravery bestowed upon them, are proof, if any proof is needed, of their conduct in battle.

On behalf of my Government and the Government of India I take this opportunity to express their thanks and warm appreciation of the great contribution made by Nepal towards the complete defeat of Germany and her satellites in Europe and Africa. This contribution is not forgotten, and assuredly will not be forgotten by my Government.

It is very fitting after 5½ years of great stress and strain, we should awhile celebrate the

overthrow of the aggressor and the restoration of freedom in Europe. But the victory over Germany, great and important though it is, is but a stage in the total defeat of the Axis Powers. There remains yet one other to be dealt with, Japan. I am confident that with the additional power which will soon be brought to bear upon that country and with the continued assistance of Your Highness's Government and the Nepalese soldiers, the overthrow of the remaining enemy of freedom-loving Nations both great and small, cannot be long delayed."

"We salute Nepal and 'Johnny Gurkha'

Long live His Majesty the  
Maharajadhiraja of Nepal

Long live His Majesty the Maharaja of  
Nepal"

---

*The photographs, taken by Lady Falconer, show Sir George Falconer with Field Marshal Sir Mohun Shumsher Jang Bahadur Rana, GCB, GBE, GCIE. It seems from the archive that this is a ceremony to invest the Field Marshal with the GCB.*



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# THE 2015 NEPAL EARTHQUAKE THE GURKHA WELFARE TRUST'S RESPONSE

By Colonel David Hayes CBE  
(GWT trustee strategy)

## **The Context**

Normally, when landing at Kathmandu airport, I anticipate the exhilaration of meeting old friends amongst our Gurkha community, the prospect of hard but rewarding trekking in the foothills and, once there, the opportunity to observe the good work of the Gurkha Welfare Trust, through its field arm The Gurkha Welfare Scheme (GWS), in its task of caring for our Gurkha veterans, their families and their wider communities.

My visit last July, within 3 months of the earthquake, would be very different. Much of the historical sites of Kathmandu would be lying in ruins, its people would be anxious, normal city life would be on hold, and in the hills there would be the tragedy of death and destruction heralding the end of the old ways, perhaps for ever.

I was traveling with William Shuttlewood our Trust's Director, and we were arriving in Nepal to start to plan the Trust's long-term strategic response to the recent earthquake. The GWS had committed itself magnificently to the immediate crisis within its means. Nonetheless, this was such a seismic national disaster event for Nepal and its people, that a rapid 'change of gear' to meet a broader longer-term recovery was needed.

Within days of the earthquake, our Trustees had committed funds and indicated their intent to support Nepal for the hard years ahead. We had arrived to assess the strategic priorities, the level of

our future ambition and to identify the resources to meet that commitment.

Our initial expectations held true, bar one. In time of national crisis, we had underestimated the resilience of the Nepalese, and our Gurkha hill communities in particular. Devastation, the loss of loved ones, the eradication of communities and livelihoods, were not allowed to interfere with the gentle grace and courtesy of traditional welcomes. In those simple, genuine ceremonies one felt the tangible robustness and dignity of a nation and its people, unbowed.

It was very clear that as a nation Nepal was getting ready to fix that which needed to be. After an understandably hesitant start the Government had already announced the structures and immediate conditions under which it intended to restart and to rebuild its nation. We foresaw our immediate task as to link into that structure and its processes, and to apply our expertise and funds to support it. Our retired Gurkhas and those serving elements of the Brigade already deployed in country were fired up to deliver their part and more.

What follows is a progress report on how far they, with our Trust in support, have travelled along the road to recovery, and what still needs to be done.

## **The Facts**

The April 2015 Nepal Earthquake, also known as the Gorkha Earthquake in recognition of the location of the epicentre in Gorkha District in mid-

western Nepal, killed nearly 9,000 people and injured more than 23,000 in Nepal and its neighbours. It occurred at 11.56 NST on 25 April, with a magnitude of 7.8. Its epicentre was 80kms to the northwest of Kathmandu and it lasted approximately 50 seconds. It was the worst natural disaster to strike Nepal since the 1934 Nepal-Bihar Earthquake.

The earthquake triggered an avalanche on Mount Everest, killing 22 climbers and Sherpas, making April 25 2015 the deadliest day on the mountain in history.



The earthquake triggered another huge avalanche in the Langtang Valley.

Hundreds of thousands of people were made homeless with entire villages flattened across many districts of the country. Centuries-old buildings were destroyed at UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Kathmandu Valley, including in Kathmandu's Durbar Square, the Patan Durbar Square, the Bhaktapur Durbar Square, the Changu Narayan Temple and the Swayambhunath Stupa. Geophysicists had warned for decades that Nepal was vulnerable to a deadly earthquake, particularly due to its geology, recent urbanisation and architecture.

Continued aftershocks occurred throughout Nepal within 15-20 minute intervals, with one shock reaching a magnitude of 6.7 on 26 April at

12.54 NST. Landslides across the country were triggered, hampering relief efforts. The largest aftershock occurred on 12 May 2015 at 12.51 NST with a magnitude of 7.3 – many consider this a second earthquake. The epicentre was near the Chinese border between the capital of Kathmandu and Mount Everest. More than 200 people were killed and more than 2,500 were injured by this huge aftershock.

To date, there have been more than 440 aftershocks with a magnitude of 4+, although these have lessened in number and intensity in recent weeks.

### **The Scale of the Challenge**

The earthquake and its aftershocks killed more than 8,800 people in Nepal and injured over 23,000. The majority of deaths occurred in the larger towns as the result of collapsing buildings; in the rural areas the death toll was comparatively low as people were outdoors working in the fields. Although over 32,000 classrooms



were destroyed, relatively few children died because the earthquake occurred on a Saturday when schools were closed. In total, 13 British Gurkha veterans, or their widows, lost their lives in the earthquake. It was estimated that over 3 million people have been displaced.

Thousands of houses were destroyed across the affected districts. To date, the Trust knows of over 2,200 ex-Servicemen's or widows' homes that have been damaged, of which many are totally destroyed.

The majority of health posts in the affected districts no longer exist. Add to this the damage to water systems, sanitation programmes and electrical distribution networks and the scale of destruction becomes clearer. The lack of a communications infrastructure, together with poor weather conditions and damaged transport systems, has hindered relief efforts. There are severe shortages of labour and all raw building materials, while families have lost both their crops and livestock.

### **The Trust's immediate Response**

The Trust is uniquely placed to support the national relief effort. We have:

- An extensive network of 34 operational bases across the Himalayan foothills
- An extremely mobile workforce totalling around 350 members, almost all Nepali and many of them ex-Gurkhas
- An intimate local knowledge and established understanding with the Nepali Government
- Strong operational links with the serving Brigade of Gurkhas, whose skilled troops are working alongside our own specialist teams
- Well-established local implementing partners

- A long-term commitment to Nepal, which is and always will be our home
- The Trust made its 21 Area Welfare Centres (AWCs) immediately available to other aid organisations, the Nepalese Government and the local communities. AWC Bagmati in Kathmandu provided emergency accommodation for around 50 people made homeless or fearful of aftershocks. The Trust deployed its welfare and medical staff to those areas of greatest destruction.



Patrol teams of one medical staff member, a welfare officer and at least two support staff were deployed to remote villages to assess damage and report this information to the central coordinating relief body, to check on the wellbeing of our direct beneficiaries and projects and to provide emergency medical aid, relief supplies and shelter to earthquake victims.

Each relief pack consisted of a tarpaulin, blankets, floor mats, food, water and cooking utensils. In the initial months, the Trust distributed over 1,400 such packs and helped construct over 2,000 temporary shelters.

In addition to the large-scale destruction to homes, 84 of our drinking water projects and 145 of our supported schools are damaged. Our Area Welfare Centre in Jiri that had only opened in January 2015 sustained such extensive

damage that it was unsafe to use; our Welfare Centres in Lamjung and Gorkha were also damaged, although to a lesser degree. A replacement Centre in Jiri has recently been built.

### **Looking Forward**

The monsoon has arrived. Its rains make moving goods and any rebuilding in the hills extremely difficult. We are currently focused on providing temporary homes to protect ex-Servicemen and their families from the torrential downpours. Shelter packs consisting of corrugated iron sheets, wood, nails and tools are being given to all those made homeless. We are also planning the long-term response to the disaster, once the rains subside. This will include:

- Rebuilding homes
- Repairing damaged schools and water projects
- Financial support for affected veterans
- Enhancing our Medical Programme to provide greater outreach healthcare and improved diagnosis

On top of our earthquake related operations, we must also maintain all our routine welfare activities – the payment of a monthly Welfare Pension and caring for the medical needs of our 6,323 veterans and widows; the running of our two 26-bed Residential Homes (which fortunately were not damaged); and supporting Mobile Medical Camps that provide free medical care in remote rural districts of Nepal.

The Trust's Earthquake Response Fund, launched in the aftermath of the first large quake, has already raised over £3 million. The Trustees also made an immediate commitment of £2 million of Trust funds, of which £500,000 has already been spent.

With an average cost of £2,000 - £3,000 to rebuild a permanent home to earthquake resistant standards, £2.5m - £3.7m will be needed to fund the Veterans' Homes Rebuilding Programme, with a further £1m to repair those homes less damaged. With funds needed to repair schools, water schemes, medical posts and wider infrastructure projects, we estimate that the Trust will require £10m over the next two years to rebuild the homes and communities of our Gurkha veterans.



The Gurkha Welfare Trust is a Service charity with strong governance, a deep knowledge of Nepal and an experienced presence on the ground. Those who give us support can have confidence that all their money will go directly to where it is most needed, with all expenditure carefully assessed and audited by the Trust's field team.

### **The Trust's Commitment**

Disastrous events in very poor and politically developing nations such as Nepal often become a long drawn-out chain of events in that one disaster feeds into another for years or even decades to come.

The after-effects of an earthquake affects a myriad of apparently unrelated aspects: human trafficking, labour costs and availability, rental and property cost

burdens, urbanisation, private and public debt burdens, mental health, politics, tourism, as well as disease and healthcare system damages, and further local disasters that come with the monsoon season.

The first monsoon related effects were a landslide on 11 June has claimed 53 lives, meanwhile a glacial lake has burst in the particularly hard hit Solukhumbu district. Whether or not the quake contributed to such events is unknown and as yet un-researched, but it remains a possibility.

This year is the 200th Anniversary of Gurkha service to The Crown. Our Brigade of Gurkhas boasts 26 holders of the Victoria Cross (13 to British Officers, 13 to Gurkhas). These awards epitomise the distinguished service which that has cemented the Gurkhas' place in the British public's heart, and indeed those of many others around the world.

Nepal as a nation, and our Gurkhas, have supported the United Kingdom over 200 years in countless conflicts across the globe. We have a moral obligation to support them now, and in the many years to come, as they confront this disaster with its harrowing and enduring

implications for the nation and its entire people.

### **A Personal View**

I opened with the thought that the old Nepal could be lost forever. Post our visit that statement deserves a degree of perspective. Lives have been lost and the personal memories and love that have gone with them cannot be replaced. For now the traditional landscape of the foothills of Nepal will remain an unsightly tapestry of glaring yellow tarpaulins under each of which would have been a home but for now, as the monsoon passes, those families who have survived the earthquake now seek shelter from the further eroding elements.

As for the rest, I should have known better and had greater faith in those whom I have had the privilege to lead and command. I should have expected that their loyalty to one another, their families and their way of life, would have galvanised them to face this disaster as they have faced other calamities that their nation's landscape and daily life trials so often bestow upon them.

As the welcome ceremonies took their course, so did those of farewell, and one in particular by one of our Area Welfare Officers. He stood beside what had been his Area Welfare Centre, which was now rubble. There was nothing standing around him above waist height, while his once carefully managed files were lying in neat rows on a grassy bank drying out in the sunshine. He stood dressed somehow immaculately in his regimental mufti. By tradition, he wished to present us with a departing gift. He passed to each of us a jar of the remaining honey sourced from his Centre's beehive. To have refused such a gift would have but





added to his well-disguised anxiety.

As the AWOs steadfast figure slowly dwarfed as we departed, one was left with a huge sense of pride that our ex-Servicemen their families and indeed their local communities, are in the noble hands of many such AWOs across Nepal. If we give them the guidance and the resources to mend their lives and their nation, then all that we knew and remember of Nepal will not have been lost, and the nation and its people will recover their rightful pride and dignity.

As William and I prepare to return to Nepal next week to continue our work, my jar of the AWO's honey remains much enjoyed. It sits in a pride of place on our kitchen windowsill at home. There it serves as a daily reminder of the generosity and courage, endurance, patience and light hearted resolve of our Gurkha ex-Servicemen and their families,

and, importantly, the work still to be done by our Trust to support them and their wider communities in the hard years, which lie ahead.

*(This article was written by Col Hayes for 'Pennant' the journal of the Forces Pension Society. I am grateful to the editor of 'Pennant' for permission to reproduce this piece. The Forces Pension Society was very supportive and printed an earthquake picture on the front cover of their journal which greatly helped to publicise the event. Ed.)*

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## THE BRITAIN – NEPAL MEDICAL TRUST RESPONSE TO THE EARTHQUAKE

By Dr Gillian Holdsworth, Co-Chair BNMT

When we heard the terrible news on April 25th about the earthquake (magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale) our immediate thoughts were for the safety and wellbeing of those who we know in Nepal and in particular in Kathmandu. Our director was in the UK with her daughter – due to return to Kathmandu on the day of the earthquake and unable to do so until Tuesday the following week. The anxiety they both experienced separated from friends and loved ones was palpable as news started coming through about the death and destruction.

As our director passed through Tribhuvan airport on the night of April 28th, she messaged me sending pictures of the baggage collection area in the airport which was chaotic – with medical teams from six countries including Mexico, Poland, Japan, Philippines – all processing through customs with no idea where their intended destination was. It all felt a bit out of control.

Nepal straddles a geological fault line where the Indian plate meets the Eurasian plate resulting in the formation of the spectacular Himalayan range – so we always knew they were likely to experience a devastating earthquake at

some point – but hoped that it wouldn't be just yet.

The earthquake affected 39 districts; the fourteen worst hit included Kathmandu, Rasuwa, Ramechhap, Lalitpur, Sindhupalchowk, Dhading, Gorkha, Bhaktapur, Nuwakot, Dolakha, Sindhuli, Makwanpur and Kavreplanchowk. The disaster claimed the lives of almost 9000 people and injured over 22,000. Of all the people who lost their lives, 56% were female, the majority being children under ten years of age. The loss of life would have been much greater if the earthquake had struck during night time. In addition to the deaths, physical destruction and loss of livelihoods, many people were left with post traumatic stress disorder – made worse by the fact that earthquake tremors kept coming and continue to do so even now.

Given the scale of the disaster, BNMT realized it had a responsibility to assist affected communities and use its wide network of partner organisations to help bring in the most appropriate services. Our main plan was to do what we do best: work with local communities, supporting them with shelter, food, water and first aid and referral to acute services when required.



*Damaged temple.*



*Damage near the Durbar Square.*

Once the Ministry of Health and Population with support from World Health Organisation established the Health Emergency Operating Centre, BNMT actively participated in the national response. This mechanism ensured a coordinated response with government agencies, international and national organisations, local stakeholders and community based agencies – to avoid duplication of effort and ensure that help reached those who needed it most.

BNMT has contributed to the earthquake response work of the Ministry of Health and Population with provision of medical supplies for distribution in some of the remote mountain districts, conducting health camps for earthquake victims in some of the fourteen most affected districts, construction of community toilets for tented camps around the Kathmandu valley and provision of psychosocial counseling for survivors traumatised by their experience.

Immediately after the earthquake, a BNMT team went to Bhaktapur, one of the worst affected areas in Kathmandu valley. Aside from the destruction of many of the monuments in the main Durbar square – a UNESCO world heritage site and important tourist attraction – there were 15,000 families rendered homeless who are now housed in 42 tented camps in and



*Equipment at the airport.*

around the city. BNMT found that people were scared and confused, women and children complained of many physical symptoms: rapid heartbeat, dizziness, an inability to eat and sleep and frequent tearfulness. Men were angry and felt powerless to protect and care for their families. Neighbours and family members had lost their lives. Hopes and dreams as well as home comforts were buried in the rubble. It was clear that survivors were in tremendous need of mental and emotional support but were not getting it.

After consultation with the Nepalese government – BNMT set out to provide psychosocial support to people in three districts: Makwanpur, Kathmandu and Bhaktapur. BNMT has since supported many communities with counseling support, trained Female Community Health Volunteers giving them the skills to maintain ongoing counseling support in the areas we have worked in. In addition BNMT has provided training for other organisations so that provision of post disaster psychosocial counseling can be available more widely amongst communities across all affected districts that need it.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake relief agencies set up temporary toilets for many of the tented camps in and around the Kathmandu valley. This was



*Tented camp in Kathmandu.*

really important as both the population pressures within the valley and the impending monsoon meant it was important to ensure at least basic sanitation facilities were available for the displaced and homeless. Lack of sanitation poses a big threat of diarrhoeal and other infectious diseases spreading. BNMT knows from previous work that there is a real need to address gender in toilet and sanitary provision – ensuring security, privacy and dignity for women, girls and children. This has become an even bigger challenge in the stressed environments that many people currently live in. BNMT has been working through local government over site selection and engineering design for the construction of community toilet blocks for the tented camps in and around the Kathmandu valley. A users committee is formed at each camp and charged with the responsibility for the building work and oversight for the maintenance of the construction subsequently and our collaboration with local government ensured that the toilet blocks all have a water supply. By working with local communities in this way we assure local



*Patient with twins.*

ownership of the building now and into the future.

BNMT's earthquake relief initiative assisted communities in seven of the worst affected districts with the distribution of food and other relief goods including tents, tarpaulins and blankets. BNMT prepared a relief bucket containing supplies to last the average household at least one week. Our relief buckets included salt, rice, biscuits, beaten rice, instant noodles, lentils, soya beans, tea, sugar, cooking oil, oral rehydration solution and sanitary pads.

As one of the country's longest standing healthcare organisations, BNMT also sought to provide medical assistance to victims and survivors in earthquake affected areas. The Trust organized health camps in hard to reach communities, bringing in doctors and nurses to treat fractures, sprains, cuts, wounds and waterborne infection. We have worked in collaboration with a range of organisations implementing our health camps including, amongst others, German Rotary Voluntary Doctors, Nepalese Nursing Association UK

As Co-Chair of BNMT I worked tirelessly on fundraising and keeping all of our supporters informed of what we were doing for the first few months after the earthquake. In August I had the opportunity to visit Kathmandu and see at firsthand the impact of our work. Overall, Kathmandu appeared to have survived relatively unscathed. Many of the much visited and loved monuments of the valley are obviously badly damaged – most notably the Durbar squares, Swayambunath temple and the Bhimsen tower. There were still a few people camping on the Tundikhel and as I travelled around the valley I saw some tented camps. But nothing like the scale of displacement that was evident in Bhaktapur. One camp, established on the

brick floor in what is the site of Bisket Jatra (where Nepalis celebrate their New Year), where all the tent floors flooded in every monsoon downpour as there was no soakaway for the water. There was one pit latrine shared by 245 families and the Nepal Red Cross tankered water in every day for washing and cooking. It was here that I met a young mother with 17-day old twins who was living under tarpaulin with five other families. Speaking to her she wept as she recounted her experience during the earthquake and being pulled from the rubble of her home. She worried for her future and the future of her twin boys as she has nowhere to live and not enough milk to feed them. She requested help in the form of bottled milk, but in this environment giving bottled milk to babies creates a significant risk of life threatening diarrhoeal disease. BNMT were able to provide her with a 12 man tent for her family, provide her with nutritional support so she would be able to continue to breast feed her twins and have constructed a community toilet block with a water supply for residents of the camp.

I was also able to participate in a BNMT health-camp at Sipaghat in Sindhupalchowk, about five hours drive



*Male patient with medicine.*

from Kathmandu. I had worked as a field doctor for BNMT from 1986-89 and in 1988 there was a big earthquake which hit eastern Nepal. What struck me then, and again this year is the nature of the destruction, how one valley can be unscathed and the neighbouring valley experience total destruction. As we travelled along the road towards Sipaghat we saw the occasional cracked house or wall being supported, but when we crossed the pass into the Indravati river valley the devastation was overwhelming. Over 85% of properties had been destroyed and families were living under corrugated iron or in tents. Here we worked in partnership with staff from the local healthpost to provide medical supplies and clinical services including general medical, orthopaedic, paediatric and obstetrics consultations. More than 450 local people attended the clinics that day and we saw respiratory problems, skin diseases, fractures, sprains and diarrhoeal disease. But talking to people there, they described an overwhelming sense of loss and it was very clear that these are people who have been deeply traumatised by their experience.

Nepal has made remarkable progress in health over the years with substantial achievements towards the health related Millennium Development Goals. However 2015 has created significant challenges not just with the earthquake and multiple aftershocks, but the continued political unrest following the passing of the new constitution and the ongoing economic blockade by India. The reconstruction of homes and services and rebuilding of lives will take many years; however, BNMT will continue to support the people of Nepal in their quest to ensure health and wellbeing amongst all the communities with whom we work.



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## NEPAL'S JOURNEY TO A NEW REPUBLICAN AND FEDERAL CONSTITUTION AND THE MAJOR EARTHQUAKE OF APRIL 2015

*(Professor Surya P. Subedi, OBE, MA, LL.M., D.Phil., Barrister-at-Law; Professor of International Law, University of Leeds; Founder Chairman of the Britain-Nepal Academic Council and Co-Chair of the Britain-Nepal Medical Trust)*

For a small Himalayan state, Nepal has gone through more than its share of tragedies in recent years, both natural and man-made. Owing to the political mismanagement, the country has seen the political system crumble and democratic institutions in tatters for some years. Adding to these man-made tragedies, the country was hit by a major earthquake in April 2015 resulting in a massive disaster for the country. Nepal as a state has existed in various forms for more than 2,500 years and has been a tourist magnet because of the mountains and picturesque ancient temples dotted around the Kathmandu Valley.

It was heart rending to see the scale of devastation in my birthplace. I have regarded my native country as the land of holy mountains. When I was growing up I could see the majestic views from my bedroom window every morning. They were so uplifting. My father was a scholar of Sanskrit and was a universalist in his approach to life. These values were highly influential in my formative years. Seeing the images of destruction after the earthquake made me very sad and nostalgic. The temples that had stood the test of time have fallen, and the whole Kathmandu Valley looked like a war-torn city.

There have been reports that the Kathmandu Valley and the mountains have moved by about one metre north-west due to the movement of the tectonic plates beneath the hills of Nepal and

since not all energy was released during the earthquake western Nepal and/or India may experience an earthquake of a greater magnitude in the near future.

The task ahead of relief operations and the reconstruction of the severely damaged infrastructure was daunting. The country, which had been ruined by political mismanagement, had been hit hard by a natural calamity. These were testing times for Nepal and Nepalese political leaders. Since the Nepalese are an immensely resilient people, there was no doubt that they would start to recover from this tragedy and they have. The international community has come to the rescue of Nepal with a big heart. Tremendous goodwill towards Nepal was demonstrated by the international community and especially both of its large neighbours, China and India, and traditional allies such as the UK, the USA and Japan. The UK had been the largest bilateral donor to Nepal and the generosity displayed by the British people in the aftermath of the disaster was heartening. The British people responded generously to the call for assistance by the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) consisting of major British charities such as the Oxfam, British Red Cross and Save the Children UK. They also responded enthusiastically and generously to the call for appeal by the Britain-Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT) and the Britain-Nepal Society and the resources generated were mobilised to



provide immediate rescue and relief operation in Nepal. One of the memorable events that the BNMT organised to raise funds was an epic 100km walk along the picturesque south coast of England in July 2015 which was joined by the present author, his fellow Co-chair of the BNMT Dr Gillian Holdsworth, the former British Ambassador to Nepal, Andy Sparks, and other committed British friends of Nepal, including Nicky and Paula Willmore, Rosemary Blandy and Shona Duncan. The following is a photograph of the crew taken near the Seven Sisters white cliffs in a fine sunny morning along the walk.

But the country needs more than the resilience of its population and the help of the international community. It needs good governance and a responsible, transparent and non-corrupt government, led by people with a vision, foresight and wisdom. But this is what has been missing in Nepal for some time. It was because of this that the country was ill-prepared to deal with such a massive earthquake.

Of course, no one can predict natural disasters such as an earthquake, and no preparations can ever be adequate to deal

with the aftermath of a disaster of such magnitude. But there were warnings that due to the fault lines running across the Nepal Himalayas, powerful earthquakes were likely to hit the country. There were calls for some degree of preparedness for such an eventuality. But the chaos and lack of adequate preparedness that we have witnessed in the streets of Kathmandu and the rural areas in the aftermath of the earthquake was a testimony to the failure of the political elite in the country. However, the longer-term challenge of reconstruction is a more daunting one, and the quality of the political elite that runs the country does not offer much hope. Therefore, the international community should do its utmost to ensure that the financial assistance extended to Nepal is put to good use in a transparent manner and the process of reconstruction of the country is underpinned by good governance.

Nepal had been a monarchy until a decade ago. The foundation of the 240-year-old Shah dynasty was shaken to the core by the royal massacre in 2001, in which King Birendra and nine other members of the royal family were gunned down. The only surviving brother of the late king was Gyanendra, who ascended to the throne in the aftermath of the tragedy. But he made a series of blunders that resulted in the abolition of the monarchy itself in 2007.

Another force that was wrecking the country was the Maoists, who had been creating terror in the rural areas since 1996 and intensified their campaign in the aftermath of the royal massacre. The Maoist insurgency led to the death of 17,000 people



and the disappearance of scores of others. When the Maoists were eventually brought into mainstream politics through a comprehensive peace agreement, there was a ray of hope that this politically mismanaged and economically impoverished country would start to benefit from the peace dividend and witness economic growth and prosperity. But the politicians lacking in vision, foresight and wisdom filled the power vacuum created by the abolition of the monarchy. The old values had crumbled due to the political upheavals, and new democratic values had not yet taken root in the society. The country elected a constituent assembly to write a new republican constitution for the country; but due to constant bickering among the politicians, driven mainly by petty interests, the assembly was dissolved without writing a new constitution. After a period of meaningless political squabbles, the country finally elected a new constituent assembly, for the second time, to write a new constitution. The challenges to the new Constituent Assembly was to enshrine in the Constitution the transformation from a monarchy to a republic, from a unitary system to a federal system and from the first-past-the post system to a mixed system of proportional representation and first-past-the-post system to elect members of parliament. Each of them would be a daunting task in any country and Nepal was attempting to deal with all three at the same time. The massive earthquake and the daunting task of rebuilding the infrastructure seem to have jolted the squabbling political elite and galvanising them into action to finalise a new constitution for the country. Consequently, the Assembly finally

adopted a new Constitution in September 2015 enshrining all these three elements and in doing so enshrined other principles designed to make the governance of the country more inclusive, participatory and democratic.

There is now a ray of hope that the country will experience political stability so badly needed to usher the country towards economic development and prosperity for all. Of course, the new constitution is not a perfect document by any standards and there have already been some teething problems with its implementation. Many Madeshi leaders from the south who boycotted the Constituent Assembly demanding, inter alia, a stronger and larger federal state along the Madhesh belt, began agitation against this new Constitution. But it was hoped that their demands will be addressed through political dialogue and the new constitution approved overwhelmingly by the Constituent Assembly will be amended and the country will be ushered into an era of political stability and economic development. Thank God, after getting a series of bad news from Nepal for some time, including the killings and harrowing accounts of atrocities during the Maoist insurgency, the royal massacre and the earthquake, there is now some positive news starting to come out of Nepal. May this long continue!

*(This article draws on some of the material in an article entitled 'What is Missing in Nepal' that the author published as an op-ed piece for the CNN on 28 April 2015:*  
<http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/28/opinions/subedi-nepal-earthquake/index.html>)

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## THE BALING PEACE TALKS

By Dennis Wombell

*(The author left school and went directly into the army as a private soldier at the Light Infantry Depot. Selected for officer training, he was considered to be too young to start this training immediately so elected to spend six months with his regiment, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, (KOYLI) then in Malaya on operations as a result of the Malayan Emergency. After a period of 'jungle bashing' with his battalion he was interviewed as a possible candidate to join the expanding Malayan Police Field Force as a Police Lieutenant. The KOYLI were to be transferred to Cyprus so Wombell volunteered to join the King's Shropshire Light Infantry) (KSLI) then in Korea. Before he could leave for Korea he contracted malaria and was hospitalized. Whilst in hospital his transfer to the Malayan Police was confirmed with the result that he found himself as a commander of a platoon of Malays in what was known as a Federal Jungle Company. He served for a number of years in the Police Field Force including time as company 2ic of an FMP Gurkha Company. He was involved with cross-border operations into Thailand and as the emergency came to an end he retired from the Police and became a rubber planter for a further seventeen years. As he pointed out one mosquito bite had changed the course of his life. His son, Col Wombell, is a retired Brigade officer.)*

In 1955, the MCP realised that their military campaign had failed and Chin Peng made approaches to the government proposing peace talks.

Following an initial exchange of letters between the government and The Central Committee of The Malayan Communist Party, and two preliminary meetings between the representatives of both, the first at Klian Intan, a village close to the Thai border and the next in a tent on Kroh airfield, it was agreed that talks would be held between leaders on both sides in an attempt to negotiate a peace settlement and bring to an end the Communist insurrection throughout the country. As a result of these meetings it was agreed that the peace talks would commence on the 28th of December and would be held at a local school in the nearby small town of Baling. The Communists announced their intention of emerging from the jungle on the morning of the 28th at a hilltop tin mine, Gunong Paku, near Klian Intan, approximately 20 miles from Baling.

This being our area of operations, it fell to 2nd Field Force to put in hand the necessary security procedures for the duration of the talks. These were, essentially, to secure the Gunong Paku site where the Communists were to emerge from the jungle, and, secondly to conduct Chin Peng and his party safely to Baling and to return them to the jungle upon the termination of the talks. This latter task was given me with my platoon.

In the preliminary negotiations at Kroh, it was agreed that Chin Peng and his party would be accompanied to the jungle edge by a large force of about a hundred terrorists who would establish a

camp in the jungle edge close to place where Chin Peng was to emerge, and remain there for the duration of the talks. The government agreed to give this force an amnesty for this period and for a ten day period following the cessation of the talks should they fail. A guarantee was given that the terrorists would not be pursued until this period had elapsed, and the government also agreed to supply the entire terrorist contingent with army rations plus an additional daily ration of rice for the period of the talks and for the ten days during which they were to be allowed to clear the area.

There was a great deal of eager anticipation amongst the officers who were to secure the Gunong Paku area. It was envisaged that a line of communication would be opened up between the two camps - the communist camp in the jungle and the Field Force camp on the tin mine hilltop, with a field telephone line between the two and a good deal of coming and going with rations and supplies. This was a fascinating prospect for those of us who had spent the last several years in the jungle, hunting down this elusive enemy, of whom we had caught only momentary glimpses in the short sharp fire fights which were typical of the type of warfare in which we were engaged. Alas, this was not to be. When Chin Peng emerged from the jungle, he insisted that the promised food and supplies for the entire period of the talks and the following amnesty period be carried a short way into the jungle and stacked there for his force to collect unseen.

On the 28th of December, the day before the talks were to commence, I moved with my my Company from our

detachment in Kroh to Gunong Paku, a high hill which had been mined for tin and was cut into wide step-like terraces. It was a hot, dry and inhospitable moon-like landscape consisting of stony red volcanic laterite, rock and shale, without as much as a blade of grass growing on it and it was bordered at the foot on one side by the primary jungle from which Chin Peng was to emerge.

The main body of the Company established a position of all-round defence on the uppermost terrace circling the summit of the hill, erected their jungle 'bashas' and prepared themselves to remain there until the end of the talks. I stood by with my platoon in preparation for Chin Peng's arrival. Although there ostensibly for escort duty, for which we wore jungle green and carried only side arms and bren guns, we had, tucked away in our armoured vehicles and out of sight, our full scale of equipment - weapons, extra ammunition, grenades, maps of the surrounding area and the Thai border and four days rations, in readiness for an immediate and prolonged jungle operation, should we be attacked at any point during or after the talks. I assembled my platoon, with our vehicles, on a flat area on the summit of the hill and joined the group of officers awaiting Chin Peng's arrival - Assistant Commissioner T.B.Voice, the Ops Officer with overall administrative responsibility for the talks; Geoffrey Turner, the Officer in charge of the local Police District; John Penley, the Field Force Company Commander; and a Police Lieutenant Ollerearnshaw, responsible for the platoon on the hill. Lastly, but the most important man there, was John Davis, specifically asked for by Chin Peng and

known as the Conducting Officer. At this time John Davis was the District Officer, Butterworth, but during the war he had served with Force 136 and had been parachuted into the jungle to assist the Malayan Peoples Anti Japanese Army, in their guerrilla war against the occupying Japanese army. He was much respected and totally trusted by Chin Peng, who asked that John Davis accompany him at all times, from his emergence from the jungle and until his return, to guarantee his safety.

At the appointed time we all stood in relative silence and with considerable apprehension, wondering whether Chin Peng really would turn up when, suddenly, two lone figures appeared at the jungle edge and picked their way up the steep side of the hill, watched in silence by the armed multitude looking down on them from the summit. It must have been a daunting experience for them and required a great deal of courage. Leading the two was a very slight young Chinese male, dressed, not as we expected in MCP khaki drill uniform with green cloth pointed cap, knee-length puttees and rubber-soled canvas boots, but in clean, plain white long-sleeved shirt and long khaki trousers. He spoke good English, introduced himself as Chen Tien, Chin Peng's second-in-command, and informed us that Chin Peng and the rest of the party were following and would arrive within the next ten minutes or so. The Chinese male with him was similarly dressed and was guide, companion and orderly. Shortly afterwards a line of figures emerged from the jungle and slowly climbed the hill towards us. We all knew Chin Peng by sight and recognised him immediately as

he greeted his old friend, John Davis, with great warmth. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, although, in retrospect, it must have been a tense moment for Chin Peng, knowing as he would have done, the price on his head! He then introduced his group - Chen Tien; Rashid Mydin, the Malay representative; Tan Kwee Cheng, Lee Chin Hee and Sanip. The last three being guides, aides and orderlies.

Due to the difficulty of the terrain, our transport from the top of the hill consisted of two Ferret Scout cars with armoured turrets and two GMC's. These latter vehicles, which were universally used as personnel carriers by the Malayan Police during the Emergency years, were completely armoured, except for the back which was open and where the armour was only waist high. Being open, they were extremely hot, and, having no seating, they were very uncomfortable; they were, however, with their powerful engines and large wheels, capable of negotiating the roughest tracks and these were the vehicles used to transport the Communist group the one and a half miles to the main Baling road. There, we were met by two open-sided Bedford vans with bench seats, into which we transferred John Davis, Chin Peng and the remainder of his entourage, for the rather more comfortable twenty-mile journey along the tortuous jungle road to Baling. The two Bedford vans travelled between the two GMC's carrying the escort party and I travelled in the turret on the leading scout car, the other scout car, armed with a Bren gun, following at the tail of the convoy.

I shall never forget the sight which met us as we approached the gates of the

school in Baling in which the talks were to be held. There was a crowd of two or three hundred people, Malays, Chinese and Indians, with, in front of them, an army of reporters and photographers. In those days, in a country fighting a war and in which such assemblies were, strictly speaking, highly illegal, I had never seen anything like it. Nor in those days did we have any truck with journalists or photographers. I had actually threatened to shoot a pushy reporter who had attempted to invade the airfield during the talks at Kroh!. The authorities, however, turned a blind eye to this illegal assembly on this occasion and the people in the crowd were quiet, well behaved and in a festive mood, as they waited, almost in awe, to catch a glimpse of their national leaders and the legendary Chin Peng. After stopping my escort party at the gates of the school and waiving the two Bedford vans in, my part in the proceedings was over for the time being and I took my platoon to another local school where we made ourselves comfortable to await the termination of the talks.

The talks, in which the government was represented by Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Chief Minister of the new Federation of Malaya; Dato Marshall, the Chief Minister of Singapore; Dato Sir Cheng Lock Tan, the President of the Malayan Chinese Association and Too Joon Hing, the Assistant Minister of Education, ended in failure at noon on the following day and the cessation was announced in a statement, hand written on behalf of the Communist delegation by David Marshall. After being amended by Chin Tien (his amendments are in brackets) it read: As soon as the (elected

government of the) Federation obtains complete control of internal security and local armed forces, we will end hostilities, lay down our arms and disband our forces. (It does not amount to accept the present amnesty terms).

I received orders to return immediately to the school in which the talks had been held and to escort the Communist delegation back to Gunong Paku. The return journey was completed without incident, except that Chin Peng, who already looked somewhat despondent at the outcome of the talks, was somewhat irritated when I took photographs of him and his party on the return journey and when we changed vehicles upon arrival at the track leading to the hilltop at Gunong Paku. He complained that he had not agreed to photographs being taken other than the official photographs taken by the press at Baling. Knowing what the immediate future held for him however, I was not too concerned and it was interesting, years later, to see that he had used one of my photographs in his autobiography!

We arrived back at Gunong Paku in the late afternoon and to our surprise, Chin Peng, after holding a discussion with the other members of his party, announced that it was too late to return to his jungle base before nightfall. He asked if we would allow Chen Tien and the remainder of the group to return to the jungle that night and for him to return the following morning. He also asked for Chen Tien to be given a torchlight to help him find his way back in the dark. By this time, we had established a fairly friendly rapport with the Communist leader and saw no reason to deny his request; a basha was quickly erected for

him, a blanket provided and a Land Rover despatched to the local village where the driver was able to purchase a torch. Chen Tien and the others then departed and Chin Peng remained, in the company of John Davis, to spend the night in what must have been, for him, the lion's den. After my evening meal and whilst wandering about on the summit of the hill watching the sun go down he joined me for a little while and we engaged in small talk. We studiously avoided discussing our mutual professions, the only thing I remember of our conversation is that he asked me how long I had been in Malaya and whether I found it hot! I never knew whether to take this literally or whether it was an allusion to my activities in the preceding years!

The following day, waking just before dawn and after stand-to, my men and I had an early breakfast and quickly packed our kit in preparation for our return to our camp in Kroh. I was due to go to Hong Kong for a week's leave and I wanted to get away as quickly as possible, consequently we wandered about the hilltop waiting impatiently for Chin Peng to depart and for our transport to arrive. By this time of course, each of my men had, beside him, his full complement of weapons and kit which we had carried covertly in the event of having to mount an immediate offensive jungle operation. In passing the time, I stood with Ollerearnshaw on the edge of the hill, open map case in hand, pointing towards the distant jungle hills and discussing with him the operations I had carried out or been involved over the previous couple of years. The sight of me in jungle kit, holding my carbine and

carrying, on various parts of my anatomy, a 9mm pistol, a compass, a belt of ammunition, 2 hand grenades and a parang (a Malay machete), and pointing to the jungle in the direction in which he was about to depart, produced an instantaneous effect on Chin Peng who showed distinct signs of agitation. He was very obviously convinced that we were preparing to follow him immediately and that we would have little difficulty in killing him once we were out of sight and in the jungle. It took some time for John Davis to convince him that our intentions were honourable, and, as proof of this, offered to accompany him alone into the jungle and to stay with him for some considerable distance. Eventually, Chin Peng was satisfied of our good intentions and he and Davis disappeared down the track from which Chin Peng and his party had emerged on the previous day. We waited for about an hour until Davis reappeared and then went our separate ways. The peace talks were over and I was able to leave for Hong Kong on my week's leave, but upon my return I still had a job to do!

Two days after my return from leave, the amnesty period for Chin Peng and his Communist guerrillas was over and I received orders to search the Gunong Paku area in an attempt to follow their tracks from the point at which they had originally emerged from the jungle. I was also to investigate the area in which his large armed group had camped and the dump of food which had been supplied by our own forces and stacked thirty or forty yards beyond the jungle edge.

It came as no surprise to me that there was no communist camp and that no

large armed group had existed. Chin Peng was no fool and knew as well as we did that a large body of men is as easy to track in the jungle as a double-decker bus, and it was obvious that Chin Peng and his party had been alone.

Consequently, the large food dump was almost untouched. A few boxes of rations had been opened and some of the contents removed and a quantity of rice had also been taken. I concluded that this had been the reason for Chen Tien leaving separately on the day before Chin Peng, since it gave them the opportunity to examine the dump at their leisure and to help themselves to as much as they could carry. They would not have returned after that in the expectation that we would ambush them.

We then followed the track along which the Communists had travelled after leaving Gunong Paku. Like all jungle paths in the vicinity of a village it was well worn by the local people for the first three or four hundred yards and easy to follow. It then petered out to become more typical of an animal track or the usual track made by terrorists in primary jungle - ill defined and marked only by the very occasional sapling cut by a parang. Nevertheless, it was relatively easy to follow until it climbed steeply up to the high ridge marking the Thai/Malaya border, where, at just over a thousand feet the jungle is sparse and the ground stony and bare. Tracking in these conditions is impossible without dogs, and, given that our task was completed we returned to Gunong Paku to be picked up and returned to our camp in Kroh.

This marked the end of what had been an interesting and fascinating experience, especially in meeting the man who had

become a legend in Malaya, albeit a misguided one. Knowing full well from my own experience the hardships he must have endured during twelve years of life in the jungle as a hunted man, without our advantages of regular airdrops of an unlimited supply of food, medicines, arms and ammunition, and our ready access, even in the deepest and remotest jungle, to rapid medical assistance and, if necessary, evacuation to hospital, I had to admire his tenacity in pursuing, what was, to him, a political ideal.

Having taken the only photographs of Chin Peng, other than those taken in Baling by the press and the official government photographers, I received a request from the government asking for the loan of my negatives to enable prints to be made. I thought that would be the last I would see of them, but some months later, after I had left the Police Force and become a planter, I received them back with a letter of thanks from Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, and a splendid album of both the photographs I had taken and the official photographs taken at Baling. It was ample reward, and I treasure the album to this day.

It was interesting to see, many years later, one of my photographs reproduced on page 372 of Chin Peng's autobiography 'My Side of History' and attributed in the photo credits to 'Chin Peng's Archives'.

#### **Lt Col Gerry Birch writes:**

At the end of World War II in South East Asia there were movements in the former European colonies such as the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), French Indo-China



and British Malaya that sought independence. The successful Japanese invasion and conquest of these territories exploded the myth of European supremacy. Prior to World War II there had been emergent colonial movements and at the conclusion of hostilities these organisations gained in strength with the support of the local populations. There were quite bloody conflicts in both Indonesia and Indo-China, in which British forces were involved, including units of the Brigade of Gurkhas as the former colonial administrations sought to return and re-establish their rule. In the case of Malaya the main pro-independence organisation was the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) that had been formed mainly from the Chinese population with pre-war origins. During the war the CPM formed the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army. The MPAJA were supported by the British Force 136 in their operations against the Japanese. A leading light in the CPM was Ong Boon, later known as Chin Peng, whose father had emigrated from Fujian province in South-East China. He was awarded the OBE for his wartime service. Chin Peng took a hard line in 1948 advocating a violent armed struggle. This led to the 'Malayan Emergency' which lasted beyond Malayan independence in 1957 until

1960. The operation described above was an attempt in 1955 to bring about an amnesty but although it was clear that Malaya was moving towards independence Chin Peng wanted terms that the Malayan authorities could not agree to. His view was that the new government were 'colonial stooges'. Hence it was not until 1960 that organized opposition ceased. Chin Peng fled over the border to southern Thailand and subsequently went to Beijing. It was not until 1989 that the Malaysian and Thai governments and the CPM finally signed a peace agreement. Chin Peng, needless to say, had his OBE rescinded and was never permitted to return to Malaysia. He died in September 2013. Units of the Brigade of Gurkhas were involved throughout the emergency and with the Malayan Police Field Force bore the brunt of the campaign. In 1947 at Indian independence the Brigade was split between the Indian Army and the British Army. The British authorities realized that there were still considerable defence commitments in Asia notwithstanding the forthcoming 'end of empire'. This was the main *raison d'être* of the Brigade post war, and led to the expansion of the Brigade to include not only infantry units but the formation of the corps units.

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## THE SHA TAU KOK BORDER INCIDENTS – HONG KONG

*(This is a famous incident in the Brigade's history of service in Hong Kong. The 1/10th Gurkhas, who were involved in this incident, were commanded by Lt Col Ronnie McAlister whose obituary is elsewhere in the journal. The so-called Cultural Revolution was in full swing at this time. An incident such as that described below could have had catastrophic implications. Hong Kong was indefensible as was shown during WWII and noted by Lt Gen Norton in 1940 - see book review elsewhere in the journal. Sha Tau Kok was a small village that lay right on the border with communist China, with the border going down the middle of a main street. The piece below is taken from sources at the time. Ed.)*

*Headlines:*

### **Gurkha officer who confronted Chinese forces in Hong Kong in 1967**

“The voice of the British Gurkha battalion commander could be heard across the paddy fields: “Kukris out!” Within an instant, the sun reflecting off the steel of the Gurkhas’ curved, unsheathed knives sent a flash of brilliant light into the sky.”

It was the defining moment in an action that could have led to war between Britain and China over Hong Kong — and it instilled sheer terror into the minds of the hundreds of Chinese troops who had burst over the border into Hong Kong’s frontier village of Sha Tau Kok.

They retreated.

Lieutenant-Colonel Ronald McAlister, commander of the 1st Battalion 10th Gurkha Rifles, had been ordered to secure Sha Tau Kok, using minimum force. Destined to become a general — he already had a distinguished war record — Colonel McAlister took two companies from his battalion, about 240 Gurkhas, and advanced across mostly open paddy fields. With troops on either side of him, he marched up the road backed by a troop of armoured cars

provided by the Life Guards. He was to fire only if fired upon.

With Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution in full sway across the border in China, pressure was mounting in Hong Kong; there had already been a border incursion the previous month when a civilian mob threatened Sha Tau Kok, a tiny fishing port where the border was marked only by a line of stones.

On July 8, about 500 Chinese troops entered the village. They attacked the police post and opened fire on a police contingent heading to the scene, killing two and wounding several others. A mob of armed men, believed to be Chinese militiamen, rushed the police post and shot dead two more officers who had manned loopholes in the walls. By midday, the incident was being reported around the world.

The besieged policemen sent out appeals for help. McAlister was ordered to clear the British territory of aggressors. He gave the order to his Gurkhas to unsheathe their kukris when they were 300 yards from the village. There followed a burst of gunfire from Chinese troops across the border, providing cover as their comrades withdrew. The policemen were released and the dead

and wounded evacuated. The relief of Sha Tau Kok had been achieved without a shot being fired.

The drama of that summer was not over. A month later, soldiers manning the Man Kam To crossing point were besieged by a howling mob while McAlister was visiting the small garrison. Chinese troops were positioned only yards away across the Shum Chun river, which formed the border. McAlister was joined in the wire compound by Trevor Bedford, district officer for the New Territories, but they struggled to calm the mob. Just before midnight, a gang of armed Chinese leapt over the fence and both McAlister and Bedford found themselves with knives at their throats. After negotiations lasting all night, the two men were released minutes before the 1st Battalion 10th Gurkha Rifles was due to move on the compound to prevent

them from being taken into China. The story of the incident, naming Colonel McAlister, was on the front page of *The Times*. A number other incidents took place at Sha Tau Kok and the two major crossing points, Man Kam To and the bridge at Low Wu.

There was considerable tension in the colony with riots and bombs. The 2/7th Gurkhas were ordered to Hong Kong to strengthen the garrison. They too deployed to the border in September. To counter Chinese propaganda broadcasts from loudspeakers on the Chinese side of the border 2/7th Gurkhas deployed their Pipes & Drums! At times during this period of tension fire was exchanged with the Chinese resulting in the use of tear gas and phosphorous grenades by the Gurkhas. The tension eventually died down and more serious actions were stalled.

## **SOCIETY TIES SCARVES AND LAPEL BADGES**

Mrs Jenifer Evans has kindly taken on the sale of the Society ties and scarves which cost £15.00 each including postage. They are available from her at:  
Bambers Mead, Lower Froyle, Alton, Hampshire GU34 4LL  
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.

# THE EARLIEST BUDDHIST SHRINE: EXCAVATIONS AT THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE GAUTAMA BUDDHA, LUMBINI

By Robin Coningham, Kosh Prasad Acharya and Christopher Davis

*(Professor Robin Coningham is UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage, Department of Archaeology, Durham University. He is also the University's Pro Vice Chancellor. He addressed the Society on 7th May 2015.)*

Dr Anton Führer and General Khadga Shumsher Rana noted the presence of archaeological remains within a thicket of trees, close to their camp at Rumindei in the Nepal Terai in 1896. Raised above the surrounding land and bounded by a meandering stream, they exposed brick rubble close to a modern shrine on the summit of the mound and uncovered a nearby stone pillar with an inscription carved in Early Brahmi Script. It recorded that (the) “*Beloved of the gods, King Piyadasi (Asoka) when 20 years consecrated came to worship saying here the Buddha Sakyamuni (Sage of the Sakyas) was born*”. Belonging to the corpus of edicts erected across South Asia in the third century BC by the Mauryan Emperor Asoka, the inscription confirmed the site as Lumbini, the birthplace of the Gautama Buddha. Dr Führer and General Rana had successfully rediscovered the last of the four great Buddhist pilgrimage sites of Buddhism, Kusinagara, the place of his great passing away or *Mahaparinirvana*, having been identified in 1861; Sarnath, where he first preached his teachings or *dhamma*, in 1835; and Bodhgaya, where he achieved his

enlightenment, in 1892. Their work at Lumbini brought to a close an endeavour that had occupied many European and South Asian scholars during a period of vigorous interest in early Buddhist texts and their associated heritage and historical geography.

Lumbini soon became a focus for archaeological enquiry and after the limited excavations in 1899 by P.C. Mukherji, who also worked at the nearby site of Tilaurakot - a candidate for ancient Kapilavastu, the childhood home of the Buddha - the site was subjected to a major phase of remodelling and landscaping in the 1930s under the direction of Kaiser Shumsher J B Rana. This included the rebuilding of the exterior of the main Maya Devi Temple and the formalisation of the Sakyas



*Location map*

Bathing Pool, as well as general clearing and the conservation of exposed brick monuments. Unfortunately, many of these activities also cleared important archaeological deposits from around the monuments, destroying stratigraphic evidence for the development of the site. The monuments conserved during this intervention and the pillar inscription at Lumbini became central to the development of a UN Masterplan devised by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange at the request of the then UN Secretary-General U-Thant in the 1960s. Later, Lumbini was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1997 on the basis that as “the birthplace of the Lord Buddha, the sacred area of Lumbini is one of the holiest places of one of the world’s great religions, and its remains contain important evidence about the very nature of Buddhist pilgrimage centres from a very early period”.

At this time, it became apparent that a large tree located beside the Maya Devi Temple was causing structural damage and this led to a campaign of joint excavations led by the Government of Nepal and the Japanese Buddhist Federation (JBF). These aimed to remove the tree and expose the earliest Temple but they also revealed a six metre deep sequence of temples beginning with Kaiser Shumsher J B Rana’s remodelled temple from the 1930s through to a newly exposed third century BC brick temple associated with Asoka. One of the major

challenges following this excavation, was the protection of the newly exposed Asokan brickwork and the newly discovered ‘Marker Stone’, a conglomerate that some believe marks the exact location of the Buddha’s birth.

Unfortunately, against the recommendations of a UNESCO Monitoring Mission, a new girder and brick shelter was erected over the Asokan Temple in 2002. It subsequently produced a damaging micro-climate for the archaeological remains within and increasing pilgrim numbers to Lumbini accelerated the detrimental effects of the humidity within the Temple shelter, causing further degradation of the Asokan brickwork. In response, UNESCO, the Government of Nepal and the Lumbini Development Trust launched a new project in 2011 to enhance the protection of the site and design a new conservation program. Funded by the Japanese-Funds-in-Trust-for-UNESCO and led by Professor Yukio Nishimura of the Tokyo University, the program also undertook to evaluate the presence of subsurface early



*Aerial view of the Maha Devi temple.*

archaeological sequences at Lumbini. The archaeological component of this UNESCO Mission was conducted between 2011 and 2013 and was led by Professor Robin Coningham of Durham University and Mr Kosh Prasad Acharya of the Pashupati Area Development Trust. The project team comprised a multidisciplinary team of Nepali and international archaeological experts, who applied a variety of traditional and cutting-edge archaeological techniques including excavation, geophysics and geoarchaeology across the site, including investigations within the Maya Devi Temple.

Although the JBF excavations had removed the majority of archaeological stratigraphy from the Temple, small areas of in situ archaeological deposits remained within the footprint of the Asokan brickwork. The cleaning back of some of these archaeological sections revealed that cultural horizons actually ran underneath the Asokan walls, confirming that there had been human activity at the site prior to Asoka's pilgrimage. Furthermore, within the centre of the Temple, we identified an area that had the potential to provide evidence for the structural character of these earlier deposits. There, running below the Asokan brickwork, we identified three successive brick pavements defined by a kerb formed by two rows of large bricks. Placed on edge, the bricks of the kerb were on an east-west alignment and were all exceptionally large, each measuring roughly 48 by 38 by 7 centimetres and weighing 20 kilograms. All had been impressed with large grooves drawn by fingers down their surface. Evidence for this distinctive paving was found below

the footprint of the Asokan brickwork in other areas of the Temple during our investigations, suggesting that the Asokan Temple had followed an earlier plan.

A further discovery within our excavations inside the Maya Devi Temple was the exposure of a cardinaly-oriented line of postholes following the same east-west alignment directly below the brick kerb. This early posthole alignment was thus enshrined in successive brick pavements and kerb, before finally being incorporated within the Asokan Temple. Representing the earliest known architectural phase within the Temple, the alignment appears to have comprised part of a wooden railing adjacent to a circumambulatory path that defined a central space. Our colleagues from the University of Stirling have analysed thin-section soil samples from the archaeological deposits within this area and suggest that the central space was occupied by an ancient tree – a spatial pattern replicated up to and including the Mauryan period. Although such monuments are a common feature of modern Buddhist sites and are often depicted on ancient coins and sculpture, this is the first time that a tree shrine has been scientifically identified and excavated in Asia.

These important discoveries within the Maya Devi Temple have led to several other major developments in the archaeology of Buddhism. Although much is known of the Buddha's life, there is little information provided in textual sources to help identify the exact period of time when the historical Buddha lived. This has led to various competing chronologies that vary from long chronologies, such as the Nepali and Sri Lankan tradition of 623 BC, the long

‘southern Buddhist’ chronology of 544/3 BC and short chronologies between 390 and 340 BC. The new evidence from Lumbini provides the first scientific dating that can contribute to this debate, with the radiocarbon measurements of samples from within the fills of the posthole alignment suggesting the presence of a delineation of sacred space within the Maya Devi Temple in and around the sixth century BC. If the posthole alignment at Lumbini is related to the earliest veneration of the Buddha in a period close to the date of his *Mahaparinivana*, we may have the first archaeological and chronometric evidence regarding the date of his lifetime, supporting the long chronology.

Our evidence from Lumbini also indicates an earlier, gradual and continual development of ritual architecture at Buddhist sites, rather than the traditional model that Asoka was the main driver for the propagation of Buddhism throughout South Asia. Our radiocarbon dates suggest ritual activity at Lumbini several centuries before Asoka’s pilgrimage and subsequent building activities at the site, and offers the possibility that such a sequence of development may have occurred at other major Buddhist pilgrimage sites such as Kusinagara, Sarnath and Bodhgaya. Furthermore, our work at Lumbini has shown that this early architecture was timber and we have successfully illustrated the potential for the discovery of non-durable architecture at other Buddhist sites if archaeological methodologies penetrate below monuments of brick and stone. Whilst these upper durable monuments likely represent the patronage of the Mauryans and Asoka, they were not necessarily the first monumental constructions at such

sites and are more likely later embellishments and new creations over existing structures and edifices.

In addition, research implemented within Lumbini’s Sacred Garden, including areas outside the designated UNESCO World Heritage Site, highlighted that the Maya Devi Temple was not an isolated monument. Indeed, our investigations included the adjacent village settlement, which would have serviced the Temple complex and surrounding monastic communities. Occupied as early as 1300 BC, long before the life of the Buddha, the archaeological sequence confirms the presence of long established human settlement in the region, comparable to results from the nearby site of Gotihawa, where early occupation was followed by the construction of a brick stupa and the erection of an Asokan pillar in the third century BC.

The focus of our fieldwork has now moved towards the wider Natal landscape of the Buddha, again generously sponsored by the Japanese-Funds-in-Trust-for-UNESCO, the LDT and the Hokke Shu with the support of UNESCO and the Government of Nepal. In an article in this Journal in 1998, we reported on non-intrusive archaeological investigations, which had successfully



*Excavations within the Maha Devi temple.*



identified a previously unknown monastery at the relic stupa of the Buddha at Ramagrama and the uncovering of part of the city of Tilaurakot's urban plan. Our current work at Tilaurakot has furthered these findings, with geophysical survey now tracing a grid-iron street pattern across the entire city and a previously unknown monastery outside to the city's eastern gate. These non-intrusive investigations have been followed up with excavations that are beginning to reveal the chronology and character of the site and we eagerly await the results of our laboratory analyses. Coming up to the final season of our work within the city in January 2016, our research is shedding new light on the society and landscape in which Buddhism blossomed and we hope to expand our methodology and work to additional sites in the Natal landscape, such as at Kudan.

Working at both Lumbini and Tilaurakot has illustrated the very real tension between the promotion, protection and preservation of heritage, especially at active pilgrimage sites. Annual visitor numbers to Lumbini have increased from 17,000 in the year 2000 to 800,000 in 2011 and there are estimates that such numbers will expand to 2,000,000 visitors by 2020. The development of a new international airport at nearby Bhairahawa will further contribute to increased visitor numbers. Although providing a potential catalyst for economic development, such numbers also poses a risk to the heritage of Lumbini and Tilaurakot as well as the archaeology of the Natal landscape with unplanned urbanisation and industrialisation. In response, UNESCO and Durham University has recently

established a UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage to evaluate the economic, ethical and social impacts of cultural heritage. Working with partners in the UK and South Asia (particularly Nepal), our archaeological interventions hope to design approaches to ascertain the nature of subsurface archaeology at heritage sites to produce Archaeological Risk Maps, which can guide the management and placing of infrastructure and amenities for visitors to help facilitate sustainable pilgrimage and development whilst protecting heritage for the enjoyment and spiritual needs of future generations.

The archaeological investigations at Lumbini were sponsored by the Japanese-Funds-in-Trust for UNESCO, the Lumbini Development Trust, the National Geographic Society and the Universities of Durham and Stirling. The team comprises archaeologists from Durham University, the Department of Archaeology, Government of Nepal, the Lumbini Development Trust, the University of Stirling, the University of the Highlands and Islands and Tribhuvan University. The team's current work at Tilaurakot is also sponsored by the Japanese-Funds-in-Trust for UNESCO with additional support from the Hokke Shu and Lumbini Development Trust. These projects would not be possible without the support of the Government of Nepal, UNESCO Kathmandu Office, the Risshon Shanti Vihara and the communities of Lumbini, Tilaurakot and the Terai.

For more information about these archaeological projects visit: <http://community.dur.ac.uk/arch.projects/lumbini/>

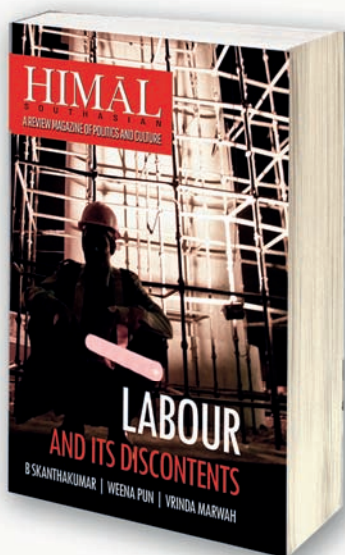
# HIMAL

S O U T H A S I A N

*Himal Southasian* is a review magazine of politics and culture that publishes in-depth articles on issues and events around Southasia.

Re-launched as a quarterly in 2013, *Himal Southasian's* first issue of 2015, 'Labour and its discontents' (Vol 28 No 1) examines the precarious position that labour occupies in today's Southasia. We look at the labour unrest at the Maruti-Suzuki plants in India, privatisation and the decline of workers' rights in Pakistan, the history of unionism in Sri Lanka, and the informalisation and fragmentation of labour around the region. This issue also includes a reportage on Delhi's electronic waste problem as well as two original fiction pieces.

To find out more, buy *Himal* or subscribe now at [www.himalmag.com/buy-online](http://www.himalmag.com/buy-online) or email us at [subscription@himalmag.com](mailto:subscription@himalmag.com).



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[info@himalmag.com](mailto:info@himalmag.com)  
+977-1-5547279

### **Expatriate Nepalis working abroad**

Over recent years members will have seen reports in the press and on radio & TV concerning the treatment of expatriate workers in the Gulf states. Large numbers of unskilled workers find jobs in the construction industry but on arrival find poor living and working conditions. They are often accommodated in camps with little or no basic facilities. Some States restrict activities of such workers. Firms have been known to retain workers' passports. A recent article in *Asian Affairs* (journal of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs) highlighted the plight of such workers. Home governments are often reluctant to interfere on behalf of their nationals for fear of upsetting host governments. The construction of football stadia in Qatar in preparation for the World Cup series particularly attracted adverse comment in reports. The Nepalese ambassador to Qatar made representations but was subsequently recalled.

### **A New International Appointment for Professor Subedi**

As he was about to complete his six-year appointment as the UN human rights envoy for Cambodia, Professor Surya P. Subedi has been appointed by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development in Geneva, as a member of a Task Force on Investment Policy with a mandate to develop global policy on investment. The World Economic Forum in Davos is a very prestigious forum for world's political and business leaders to discuss

global economic policies, challenges, and opportunities. The Task Force on Investment Policy consists of a group of eminent experts drawn from leading institutions from around the globe. It is understood that Professor Subedi was appointed on the basis of his expertise in international law in general and in international investment law in particular. He has published a book in international investment law which has become popular internationally. He also has published several other scholarly articles in this area in prestigious professional international law journals. Commenting on his appointment, Professor Subedi said that the new appointment would enable him to make a contribution to global policy making on investment and sustainable and equitable global economic growth. He is Professor of International Law at the University of Leeds and a Barrister in England.

### **A Request for Old Trek Maps of Nepal**

If you have any old trekking maps of Nepal, and no longer want to keep them, then the Flora of Nepal team at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh would be delighted to use them for their research. Naturalists have been collecting plant specimens in Nepal for over 200 years, but most collections date from the 1950s when Nepal opened its doors to foreign expeditions. Today we have GPS receivers that give our locality to astonishingly accurate levels of precision, but back in the day of these early collectors they had to rely on early, often primitive trek maps or asking locals the names of villages they were passing

through and passes they traversed. These locality names are recorded on the labels of the dried plant specimens, along with altitude, collector, date and other supporting information.

The challenge that we now face is to try and put a latitude and longitude on these historic collections, so that we can map the localities and use the occurrence data in species distribution modelling projects. One way we have been able to do this is to try and find trek maps of the same era as the collection and equate the names on the maps to those on modern maps.

Through this cartographic detective work we have managed to retrospectively georeference many old specimens. However, some locations still baffle us, as we don't have a complete holding of all the old trek and other historic maps of Nepal. So if you have any old maps of Nepal that are looking for a good home, then we would be very pleased to receive them.

Please contact Mark Watson:  
m.watson@rbge.org.uk , Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh,  
20a Inverleith House, Edinburgh, EH3 5LR. 0131 248 2828.

### **E- Visas for India**

Members travelling to Nepal are well aware of the ease of obtaining tourist visas for Nepal but those wishing to take in India will doubtless have experienced the bureaucracy surrounding visas for India. Press reports indicate that it is now possible to obtain an e-visa for India without the need to travel to an issuing centre. Biometric data would be taken on arrival at one of the 16 e-visa designated entry points to India. I doubt that this list includes the land borders with Nepal.

## **DISCLAIMER**

Responsibility for opinions expressed in articles and reviews published and the accuracy of statements contained therein rest solely with the individual contributors.

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REVIEW ARTICLE  
DOWN FROM THE HILLS

By Dr Andrew Hall

**Battles of the New Republic: A Contemporary History of Nepal**

*By Prashant Jha. Aleph Book Company, New Delhi, 2014. Pp. 358. Pb.*

*ISBN: 978-93-82277-99-6*

**The Bullet and the Ballot Box: The Story of Nepal's Maoist Revolution**

*By Aditya Adhikari. Verso, London, 2014. Pp 304. Hb. ISBN-13: 978-1-78168-564-8*

When Nepal went to the polls in late 1994 a minor but extreme faction of Nepal's fractured communist movement boycotted them. Few observers then would have thought it likely that the Nepalese state would within a few years be brought to its knees by what was to become the Maoist party. And yet by late 2008 the Maoist leader known as Prachanda was the elected Prime Minister, the 240-year-old monarchy had been abolished and Nepal had embarked on writing a new republican constitution providing for a federal state - a contentious task, still unfinished.

By the time a peace agreement was signed in late 2006 some 16,000 Nepalis had been killed in a 'people's war' - in reality a civil war: policemen, soldiers, 'class enemies'; teenagers recruited to Maoist militias and later the People's Liberation Army; teenagers with no terrorist affiliations but picked up by a suspicious Royal Nepal Army, tortured and 'disappeared'; public officials, teachers, bus passengers, innocent bystanders. The death toll kept mounting but there was a military stalemate.

Where had the Maoist movement sprung from, what sort of people were its leaders and its followers, what finally convinced the party to sign the peace agreements, what has since been achieved by the new republic, what did those 16,000 die for? And is the conflict finally over or could it

erupt again under a new disaffected generation?

These books, by two of Nepal's best young journalists - friends and contemporaries - complement one another well. Aditya Adhikari concentrates on the rise of the Maoists, how it was that they took the decision to come "down from the hills" (in a phrase used by an Indian academic to describe India's goal of promoting a change of Maoist tactics), abandoning guerrilla struggle to re-join the democratic process. Prashant Jha, while also providing a perfectly serviceable account of the Maoist rise, gives a more personal account of what happened next, particularly in the Terai, the narrow strip of plains bordering India, and an in-depth examination of India's often contentious role.

Many of the Maoist leaders came from impoverished rural backgrounds, particularly the Mid-West. In the 1960s and 1970s they had been among the first generations to benefit from the increasing provision of general education in Nepal. A significant number then found employment as teachers themselves, giving them a platform from which to spread their ideology. When, following the peace agreements, the Maoist army was dispersed to holding camps or 'cantonments' (where they languished for several more years) it was found that over 4,000 - around a fifth of the verified total -

were child soldiers under the age of sixteen.

The Maoist leadership showed no shame or contrition over this waste of young lives. But the Maoist followers did not regard themselves as the dupes of unscrupulous leaders, still less as terrorists. As far as they were concerned they were patriots helping to rescue Nepal from its capture by a corrupt elite who were in the pockets of India. Some joined the movement out of a sense of adventure, others out a sense of hopelessness, still others seeking revenge for the wrongs their family or their community had suffered at the hands of the state. Adhikari draws on numerous memoirs, diaries, novels, even poems and songs, to give a strong sense of how the Maoists themselves, at all levels within the organization, understood their struggle.

The 'people's war' was launched in 1996 with attacks on police stations by a ragtag band armed with a couple of rusty old rifles. Quite rapidly they had increasing success in capturing more weaponry and pushing the police out of poorly protected villages. Local political opponents were dealt with summarily or fled. Before long the Nepalese state had shrunk to the capital Kathmandu and district headquarters towns; the Maoists filled the vacuum in the countryside.

Aditya Adhikari provides an admirably lucid account of the extraordinary knots the Nepalese political establishment tied itself in in trying to address the Maoist threat. Stealing a march on political opponents always trumped trying to agree a united stand on terrorism. Governments came and went with startling rapidity. The politicized police force was rarely a match for the Maoists and the Army stood firmly aside from the fray.

The dynamics changed after the murder of King Birendra and much of his family by the then Crown Prince in 2001. Within

eighteen months of ascending the throne his brother and successor Gyanendra had taken over executive power himself, cancelled elections and mobilized the Army against the Maoists. But the outcome was scarcely an improvement. Peace talks with the Maoists failed. Human rights abuses by the state mounted - the Army, although its numbers doubled in a short space of time, was neither trained nor equipped for extensive counter-insurgency operations. Nepal's international partners, including India, the UK and the US, became increasingly uneasy. Added to which Gyanendra had now given the democratic parties cause to seek common ground with the Maoists.

India helped bring the political parties and the Maoists together for talks in late 2005 which achieved broad agreement on a future without the monarchy and a Constituent Assembly to draft a new Constitution. In Spring the following year a massive public protest (Janandolan 2) convinced the King he had no choice but to step aside: neither his Army nor India was prepared to back his untenable position. In late 2006 peace agreements were signed which saw a United Nations Mission (UNMIN) invited to monitor both sides' adherence to the terms - but with no mandate to mediate.

Within weeks of the signature of the peace agreements it looked as though the process might collapse, with a risk of Nepal descending into a new battle between the hills and the plains. The signatories - the Maoists and the established democratic parties, principally the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Unified Marxist-Leninists (UML) - had contrived to overlook the claims of one of the country's most underprivileged groups, the Madhesis (plains dwellers of Indian cultural/linguistic heritage). The proposed

interim constitution and elections for a Constituent Assembly (CA) would only have entrenched the second class status which had driven Madhesi support for change. Clashes in various Terai towns during 2007 between Maoist and Madhesi groups poured petrol on to the already volatile situation. Madhesi political parties united in threatening to derail the constitutional process.

Mercifully the major parties rethought their plans and introduced proportional representation in the legislature and CA, helping to assuage Madhesi fears that they would be left out of account. But the Maoists had now lost the trust of a major section of the population, people one might have thought would be among their most ardent supporters. This was ultimately to play a significant part in undermining their ability to govern despite winning almost 40 per cent of the seats in the CA in the 2008 elections.

But it was not the only cause. Equally to blame were other crass political miscalculations – above all, the Maoists' attempt to dismiss the Chief of Army Staff and replace him with his Deputy and the Maoist failure, or inability, to handle the crucial relationship with India. Prachanda was forced to resign in May 2009 after less than nine months in office, having achieved little.

The 601-member Constituent Assembly formed by the 2008 elections - and said to be the most representative body Nepal had ever had - was given repeated extensions to try and complete its task of writing the new Constitution. It repeatedly failed, stymied by the inability of the main political players to agree on the number, names and boundaries of new provincial divisions and on whether executive power should lie with the President or with the Prime Minister in Parliament.

The peace parties had repeatedly asserted that the new Constitution would have to be created through consensus. But they seemed to have forgotten that consensus can only be sustained through willingness to compromise and there was little sign of that. Or more charitably, as Prashant Jha allows, each side felt that compromise would have meant betraying fundamental principles of freedom, justice and equality. There were also deep practical difficulties in finding any way of carving new federal units out of Nepal without leaving some sections of the population severely disgruntled and likely to take out their anger on whichever party they felt had betrayed their interests. So the stand-off continued.

Eventually time was called and in late 2013 fresh elections were held - peacefully and fairly, with a record voter turnout - for a new Constituent Assembly. The CA may have been new and the balance of forces within it had shifted - the Maoists had a much reduced presence - but the political leaders were just the same and the fundamental problem of bridging incompatible positions remained. A new government was formed, the Maoist party split with a more extreme faction threatening to resume armed conflict, the new CA's allotted year went by, marking its ending in January 2015 with a brawl in the Assembly. But with no sign of a new Constitution. *Deja vu* all over again... Sometimes one suspects that stalemate suits the political establishment, and maybe India, better than any available alternative outcome: why else does the situation remain so intractable and progress so limited more than eight years after peace was agreed?

If you read only one of these fine firsthand accounts of Nepal's contemporary history, read Aditya Adhikari to understand

better the Maoist movement and the risks that Nepal's dysfunctional political system could provoke a similar convulsion in the future. Well-written, his narrative maintains a good pace and he provides enough signposts to guide the reader not necessarily familiar with some of the more tangled thickets of Nepali politics and parties.

Or read Prashant Jha for an insight into the dynamics of often-overlooked Madhesi politics and an understanding of the critical role India played and continues to play in trying to nudge/cajole/browbeat/threaten - depending on your point of view - Nepal's political class towards a settlement of its issues. Ideally, read both.

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REVIEW ARTICLE  
JOHN CROSS - AUTHOR AND NOVELIST  
By Gerry Birch

**The Throne of Stone: The Genesis of the World-famous Gurkhas. (1479 – 1559)**  
Cost £12. Through: [jpxpkr@wlink.com.np](mailto:jpxpkr@wlink.com.np).

**The Restless Quest: How Britain's Connection with the Gurkhas began. (1746 – 1815)**  
Special price £10. Through: [www.blenheimpressltd.co.uk](http://www.blenheimpressltd.co.uk)

**The Crown of Renown: Gurkhas and the Honorable East India Company. (1819 – 1857/58)** Cost £19.95. Through: [hallmarkpress@googlemail.com](mailto:hallmarkpress@googlemail.com)

**The Fame of the Name: How there is much more to the Gurkha than sheer courage. (1857 – 1947)** Special price £14. Through: [www.blenheimpressltd.co.uk](http://www.blenheimpressltd.co.uk)

**The Age of Rage: Gurkhas, Gorkhas and Nepal in the post War World (1947 – 2008)** Special price £16. Through: [www.blenheimpressltd.co.uk](http://www.blenheimpressltd.co.uk)

**A Face like a Chicken's Backside. An unconventional soldier in South East Asia 1948 to 1971.** Under re-publication by the History Press, Nov 2015. Cost £13.99. See [www.thehistorypress.co.uk](http://www.thehistorypress.co.uk) . This will be reviewed in the 2016 journal.

There can be few members who have not heard about or are unaware of Lt Col John Cross, often referred to as 'JP Cross'. A good number will have read his books, some will have met him in Pokhara where he now lives and, by now, a somewhat diminishing number will have served with him in the Far East. He has contributed to the journal and his books have been reviewed in the journal. His early works were autobiographical, describing his unique career with the Gurkhas. He joined

1st Gurkha Rifles in 1944 and saw action in Burma and French Indo-China. It was here that he started what was to become a career largely devoted to counter-insurgency warfare, particularly against communist guerrillas. Works such as *First In Last Out* concern his time in Indo-China at the end of the war and in Laos as Defence Attaché in the early 1970s and *A Face like a Chicken's Backside* his operations in Malaya against the communist terrorists and later 'Confrontasi'



in Sarawak and Borneo. Having spent the whole of his career in the Far East he retired in 1982 after a period as Recruiting Officer for the Brigade of Gurkhas. He remained in Nepal and for a time studied in Kathmandu at Tribhuvan University. In later years he turned to writing historical fiction based on the background of the expanding British India and its connections with Nepal and its Gurkhas. He wrote a series of five books covering the period 1479 to 2008. In his mind he estimated that this project would take ten years to complete. The first was *The Throne of Stone* that covered 1479 to 1559; this was reviewed in the journal edition no. 25, 2001. It was published in 2000 and re-published in 2012. This is obtainable through [jpxpk@wlink.com.np](mailto:jpxpk@wlink.com.np). The work covers very early history and is something of an historical scene-setter for the rest of the series. It was reviewed in the 2001 edition of the journal. To quote from the review: "Cross has used his researches whilst at Tribhuvan University to good effect providing an outline of real historical story events within which to weave his plot, much based on the history researched by Professor Regmi. The story surrounds the inter-action between differing tribes at various levels in the Western hills and with the plains people. He describes how the Tibetan monks go about obtaining young recruits for the remote monastery and how the traditional relationships between the villagers of the high and middle hills and the plains of northern India interact....The plot centres around a small area of Nepal whose tribal chief had, by tradition, been proclaimed on a large stone on top of a mountain, but the story stretches to Delhi and its Moslem rulers of that time. The dramatic khud race described in the story is a true life event, and the knick in the wooden roof of the temple at Gorkha is

actually there to see. The plot is complex and requires concentration....Cross has realised this and provided a list of the main players....there is also a chronology of events."

*The Restless Quest* has in its extended title '*The start of the British-Gurkha connection in 1746 – 1815*'. This work was reviewed in the 2005 edition of the journal. To quote from that review by Col Jimmy Evans: "The background is the sweep of history over the seventy years which saw the Honourable East India Company extend its sway inexorably westwards from Calcutta. Parallel with this was the seemingly unstoppable advance of the burgeoning new Kingdom of Nepal, leading inevitably to a collision of interests with the British. The historical background, meticulously researched by the author in his mountain retreat, is supported by some sixty reference notes throughout. Woven into recorded history is the colourful and sometimes earthy narrative of the adventurous life of a Gurkha boy called Chegu Dura." The story goes on to the time of the Anglo-Nepal War where Chegu is killed in brave action against the British led by General Ochterlony. This action led to the recognition of the Gurkhas as excellent fighters and material for the expanding East India Company Army, the Treaty of Segauli of 1816 and the imposition by the British of a Resident in Kathmandu.

*The Crown of Renown* was originally published in Kathmandu by Mandala Books. It was republished in 2009 by the Hall Mark Press ([hallmarkpress@googlemail.com](mailto:hallmarkpress@googlemail.com)). This is set in the final stages of the East India Company's existence. It explores what happened when Brian Hodgson, the East India Company's Resident, met Gurkha hillmen in Kathmandu. It tells of the siege

of Bharatpur, 1825/26 which was the first time that Gurkhas fought alongside British soldiers. A short review appeared in the 2009 edition of the journal.

*The Fame of the Name* covers the period 1857 to 1987. In this work Cross concentrates on how the hard life of hill men in Nepal breed self-reliance, keen powers of observation, cunning and single-mindedness of purpose. There is no single thread or plot in this work, covering as it does so many events. The stories are around individual events. These include how Gurkhas were made into spying 'pundits', the Delhi Durbar, working for the Amir in Afghanistan, World War I at Neuve Chappel, the campaign in Sikkim, and Malaya 1942.

*The Age of Rage* covers the post war period 1947 to 2008. This period mirrors much of Cross's service with the Gurkhas and his subsequent life post retirement in Nepal. Some of the characters he has based loosely on people he met and served with. In his extensive list of acknowledgements he makes the point: "All real persons named are now factually dead and none in any way is purposely mentioned in a derogatory fashion. For the rest, events and personalities only exist in the author's imagination and on the printed page, albeit influenced by those he once knew." In his 'Background' (p. xi) he explains his rationale for writing this series of was based on the idea of presenting known historical events through the eyes of 'hill men' from the villages through the medium of fictional novels. This is a fascinating tale of intrigue as Nepal comes to terms with the events of 1947 with Indian independence. The British Gurkhas are deployed to Malaya to combat the Chinese inspired emergency and the story tells of a Soviet-inspired plot to subvert Gurkhas to reduce their effectiveness in that theatre. In

the 1962 Sino-Indian war some Indian Army Gurkhas are captured and the Chinese attempt to brainwash/re-educate a small group of them and then infiltrate them back into Nepal and to Malaya. The plot is foiled by a British officer. It makes a diverting read of what might have been.

The three novels, *The Restless Quest*, *The Fame of the Name*, and *The Age of Rage* bracket the 200 years of service of Gurkhas to the British Crown. To this end John's publisher, Blenheim Press, have re-published them at a special rate to mark this important Gurkha anniversary. A flier to this effect is enclosed.

However as Cross progressed from what he initially thought would take ten years to write the five books, with all the background research that was needed, it eventually became seventeen. Initially his idea was to write the series based on known Nepalese events seen through the eyes of Gurkha hillmen at village level, but as time went on he realised that he was presenting the interaction between the Nepalis and British, Indians and others in south Asia over a long stretch of time. His latest work *Operation Four Rings* was reviewed in the last edition of the journal and is another fine tale of intrigue with cloak & dagger operations based the author's intimate knowledge of Laos.

Other earlier works have included *The Call of Nepal* described as a 'Personal Nepalese Odyssey in a Different Dimension'. A description is in the 1996 edition of the journal.

In 2002 Greenhill Books published *Gurkhas at War* an edited collection of experiences that Cross and his adopted son, Buddiman Gurung, collected from old soldiers as a result of a long trip through the hills on audio tape. This provided a permanent audio record of campaigns that the old soldiers had fought from World War II

up until that time. Some members may remember the book launch that took place at the Royal United Services Institute that year. A review is contained in the 2002 edition of the journal.

In 2008 Pen & Sword published *Jungle Warfare Experiences & Encounters*. This reflects his long service in the Far East finally becoming Commandant of the Jungle Warfare School in Malaysia. He uses many examples from World War II and subsequent operations in Indo-China, Malaya, Borneo and Sarawak. More recently he wrote *Gurkha Tales* published by Pen & Sword and reviewed in the 2012 edition of the journal. The 'tales' describe a series of unusual incidents in Cross's military career and life associated with Nepal.

The aim of this review is rekindle interest in Cross's literary output covering the period of Gurkha service to the British. Cross's own military service and subsequent life in Nepal covers a large proportion of that time. As was announced to the Society last year, Cross, now in his ninetieth year, finally achieved his goal in obtaining Nepali citizenship..

I hope this has renewed interest in JPX's works, all written in his own unmistakable style and all good stories even if some of the historical novels require a reasonable level of concentration. You will see from the latest appeal from JPX that he has not yet put down his pen!

### **AN APPEAL FROM JOHN CROSS**

I have been asked by The History Press to produce a book of stories of Gurkhas as experienced by British officers. The proposal is for between fifty to seventy-five stories of 1500 to 2500 words each, written in the first person singular. I am asking that you send your contribution to me for editing and onward transmission to

the publishers. My contact details are given below.

The subject matter will mostly be about war, with octogenarians and above writing about Burma, partition in India, the Calcutta riots, the North-West Frontier, then on down the years until the most recent experiences. Incidents on exercises and overseas training could well fall within the template, in fact anything that you particularly treasure and would like to see in print for permanency but have never had enough material to bring it up to book size. A particular incident that you would like your grandchildren's children to know about, that would bring an 'oh ah' and a surprised hush at the vicar's wife's tea party and that you can never forget.

If offers could reach me by latest 1st August 2016, the book will be published in early 2017. I will select (provided there are enough to select from!), edit and send the results on to the publisher. Any relevant maps and photos on offer will, of course, be returned.

*My contact details are:*

Address: Lt Col J P Cross

BG Pokhara

BFPO 4

Phone: Landline ++977-61-431181;

Mobile (Buddhiman's) ++977-98560-23285

e-mail: [jpxpkr@wlink.com.np](mailto:jpxpkr@wlink.com.np)

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**Natural History and the Indian Army.**  
*By JC Daniel & Lieut Gen Baljit Singh (Retd). The Bombay Natural History Society. 2009. Pp 260. Illus, colour & B&W. Hb. ISBN (10)0-19-806450-0. ISBN(13) 978-01-98063-503*

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) has produced a medium sized coffee table book describing a wide range of natural history topics written by members of the Indian Army over the period 1778 to 2002. The BNHS was founded in 1883 and has produced works of reference since 1886 and is the leading non-governmental organisation in the Indian Subcontinent. The authors or co-editors, JC Daniel and Lieutenant General Baljit Singh (Retd), have put together a unique record of observations carried out by Indian Army officers from the time of the initial East India Company to the post 1857 'Raj' period and up to the present day (2002). The early days, particularly in what we know as the 'Victorian era', was a time of initial exploration when not much was known and it was fashionable for English (& also the Scottish et al) gentlemen to take an interest in such matters as amateurs. Many became collectors and taxonomy and field sports featured strongly. In those days rifles and shot guns were used for collecting specimens which have largely been replaced by high powered optics which were then not available. The Indian Army attracted high quality young officers most of whom achieved high marks on passing out of Sandhurst. Whereas those with less financial means would not have been able to afford the life-style in a British regiment, candidates selected for the Indian Army could afford to play sports such as polo,

pig sticking and hunting, often big game, on Indian Army pay. There was always the chance of action and possible glory with skirmishes on the Frontiers. Many found themselves in remote places with, compared to today, time on their hands. The differing articles reflect their interests and activities. The chapters in modern times indicate the growing need and understanding for conservation which today's officers have taken on board. Many come from land-owning families so are able to see the effects on wildlife in modern India close to.

Each chapter is a paper on a particular topic taken from the authors' work which the editors have researched. Short biographical notes on each of the contributors accompany each paper. Contributors include Lt Col JH Williams other wise known as 'Elephant Bill' on elephants. Maj RWG Hingston, medical officer with the 1924 Everest Expedition, whilst a knowledgeable 'birder', has written a detailed piece on caterpillars. There are chapters on the 'big cats', the history of hunting with local packs of hounds which was developed in the garrisons around the country and fishing. One chapter, written by Surgeon Major TC Jerdon of the Indian Medical Services, is about the 'hunting leopard'. Jerdon is more usually known in the birding world as his name is connected a number of Asian species including Jerdon's Babbler, Jerdon's, Bushchat, Jerdon's Laughing-thrush and Jerdon's Bushlark. It is interesting to note that a good proportion of the papers have been written by members of the Indian Medical Services presumably due to their scientific training.

The book is well illustrated with colour and black & white photos and

reproductions of 19th century prints. This work will appeal primarily to those who have had the good fortune to travel around India and the national parks and to those who love India or whose relatives once lived and worked there.

Gerry Birch

*(It is understood that this work may be available through the RSPB or directly through the BNHS, cost ICRs 1200 + p&p. Ed.)*

**Arc of the Gurkha – From Nepal to the British Army.** *By Alex Schlachter. Elliot and Thompson Ltd. London. 2014. Pp 287. Illust. Index. Hb £30. ISBN 978-1-90965-399-3.*

This is a lavishly illustrated work in both black & white and colour in a medium-sized coffee table format. It has a short introductory piece by Brigadier Ian Rigden on the history of the Brigade of Gurkhas. The subsequent chapters follow the Gurkha soldier from initial recruitment until retirement. There are separate sections that look at each of the main constituents of the Brigade's units, the RGR, the Corps units, Band and Training Company. Each chapter has a short explanatory note and all the photographs have full descriptions. Although there are a few archival pictures to help set the scene, by far the most are those taken by Alex Schlachter. The majority of these are of individual Gurkhas at all stages of their life and service and into retirement. Alex Schlachter is an Austrian photographer who has carried out extensive work with police and military units in the United States and Europe. It was whilst she was embedded with the US Marine Corps in Helmand that she came across the Royal Gurkha Rifles. She became interested in this unique British unit and was able to see and accompany them on their operations as she had done with the

US Marine Corps. The commanding officer of 2 RGR was extremely impressed with the photographs she had taken whilst in Afghanistan to the extent that he suggested she be asked to produce a work to cover all aspects of the Gurkha's life and work in the Brigade which would coincide with 'Gurkha 200', the 200th anniversary of Gurkha service to the British Crown. *Arc of a Gurkha* is the achievement of Schlachter's three year project. She has brought an uncanny depth of understanding and feeling in her photographs. The notes accompanying these include many personal anecdotes about the individual 'sitter'. Schlachter achieved a depth of empathy with her subjects that shines out very clearly. The photographs have been described as 'as honest and frank images that tell the story of an amazing lifelong journey – the physical act of being a Gurkha soldier.' I fully endorse this view and to quote Brigadier Rigden again: 'This is an exceptional book, with images of rare beauty. It is a very special contribution to the history of the Brigade.' I unreservedly recommend that this work be included in the library of everyone who has had service or connection with the Brigade. Its publication has coincided well with 'Gurkha 200'.

Gerry Birch

**Letters from the Empire – A Soldier's Account of the Boer War and the Abor Campaign in India.** *Stepen Morris (ed). Spellmount Military Memoirs an imprint of The History Press, Stroud, UK, 2011. Pp 271. Illus B&W photos. Bibliog. Appx. Index. Pb. £14.99. ISBN 978-0-7524-6518-0.*

This book consists of a collection of letters written by a young man, Allan Hutchins, from a well-to-do family from mid Wales. He volunteered for service in the Boer

War, joining from the militia in which his father was the commanding officer and went on to join the Indian Army. He was commissioned into 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles. His career was tragically cut short by pneumonia which he contracted whilst on the little-known Abor Campaign, fought in the remote jungle of Assam. The letters were brought to light by Yvonne Wagstaff and Sheila Shaw, distant relatives of Hutchins following a series of coincidences which led to the discovery of trunks of letters and family artefacts. Both Wagstaff and Shaw became fascinated by their find. This edited collection is the result of their long and detailed researches that included visits to South Africa in the steps of their ancestor some 100 years before. In order to take part in the Boer War Hutchins resigned his commission and became a trooper in the Montgomeryshire Imperial Yeomanry where after a period of active service, home leave and re-enlistment he is again commissioned rising to temporary captain. At the end of Boer War hostilities Hutchins was gazetted out of the Imperial Yeomanry. He then took the Infantry, Militia and Yeomanry competitive examination becoming the first officer to pass from the Yeomanry into regular service. He arrived in India in 1903 and did the mandatory one year's service with a British unit, the Leicestershire Regiment, before joining the 73rd Carnatic Infantry for another year before being gazetted into 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles. He achieved his captaincy ahead of his length of service in 1910 being stationed at Sadiya in Assam as Second Assistant Commandant Lakhimpur Military Police. It was from here that he took part in operations in the dense jungle between Assam and Tibet before succumbing to pneumonia.

The letters are split into two distinct

halves with explanatory sections on Hutchins' family background and the war in South Africa preceding the letters from there and a piece on India introducing the Indian correspondence. There are a few good black & white photographs of the family and events in South Africa and Assam. The photograph of Sadiya on the Brahmaputra looks little different from how it looks today on this reviewer's trip there in 2012.

The Hutchins' writing is of the rather 'Boys Own' idiomatic style of the day when the British Empire was probably at its zenith. He clearly wanted travel and adventure and he seems to have had it. There are interesting vignettes of mess life, worries of promotion, cash flow and how to build up savings, and concern not to miss out on any action. Issues not uncommon for today's career young officers! Readers will probably find that Hutchins' view of the Boer War naïve and politically incorrect by today's take on that conflict. Young officers' accounts of the recent operations in Iraq & Afghanistan are similarly written in today's modern language but I believe have a greater depth of knowledge of why they are there. This is due to wider education and of course the explosion of global communications. All this notwithstanding, he was a keen and promising young officer with ideas and initiative, sadly brought to a premature end. This is an interesting read and particularly for his time with the Gurkhas and the little-known Abor campaign.

*Gerry Birch*

**Everest Revealed – the Private Diaries and Sketches of Edward Norton, 1922-24** *Christopher Norton (ed). The History Press. Stroud, Gloucs, UK. 2014. Pp 156. Illus B&W and colour photos. Maps. Notes, Index. Glos. Bibliog. Hb. £20. ISBN 9-7807-5095-5850.*

Lt Col Edward Norton took part in both the 1922 and 1924 Everest expeditions. He led the latter expedition on which Mallory and Irvine disappeared, last seen by Odell 'going strong' high on the mountain. This is a beautifully produced work in a medium-sized coffee-table format. Norton wrote the official record of the 1924 expedition entitled '*The Fight for Everest, 1924*' which would have been based on his diary and notes taken at the time. This is to be re-published by Vertebrate Publishers in late 2015 with some new material and includes a preface by Doug Scott. In '*Everest Revealed*' Norton's son, Christopher Norton, has put together his father's private diaries, sketches, photographs and letters for the first time. The introduction written by both sons outlines his life and career. Born in 1884 his life spanned the reigns of six monarchs and two world wars. He was commissioned into the Royal Horse Artillery and served through World War I and was awarded the DSO and the MC. (Later he rose to the rank of lieutenant-general and his son, Bill Norton, told me that in 1940 he was sent to Hong Kong to assess the possibilities of its defence. Unsurprisingly he declared it was not defensible!) Prior to the war he had served in India for seven years so he was familiar with India and its languages and people which proved vital to both expedition teams with his proven leadership qualities. He developed a deep interest in mountaineering as a result of his family's chalet in the French Alps. He took great interest in wildlife and assisted Tom Longstaff, the 1922 expedition's naturalist, collecting bird skins for the Natural History Museum and plant specimens for Kew Gardens. These interests are well demonstrated in his notes and sketches. The approach to Everest in those days was via the

Darjeeling District, into Tibet through the Chhumbi valley and the trek via the Rongbuk monastery to base camp on the Rongbuk glacier. The well-produced maps clearly show the approach routes and the line taken on the mountain. Officers of this era, especially Gunners and Sappers, were, I believe, encouraged in their ability to draw and sketch in the field – no digital cameras then. Norton had an excellent hand and the more leisurely approach marches gave him the opportunity sketch to his hearts content. Sketches include general views, plants, trees, animals and people and give a very good impression of the area through which the expedition moved and on the mountain. The format of the diary pages is well laid out and easy to follow, giving date and site details. Entries vary in length depending upon the situation. For example:

'31/3/24 Gnatong (*This is below the Jelep La before crossing into the Chhumbi valley. Ed.*)

'Marched at 7.30 – I climbed about 3,000 feet & then sat & sketched gorgeous view of Kinchenjunga with brilliant red rhododendrons in the foreground [*Pl. 44*]. Then rode up to the little tea shop at Langtu. Then walked by N. side of hill to the col & thence walked & rode alternately arriving 1.15. As before found this the most delightful march of the lot. Magnolias & the red rhododendrons in full bloom – higher the mauve primula in beds of colour. On the plateau there was a lot of freshish snow, & it was pretty chilly tho' warmer than last year. After lunch issued coolies' blankets & c – painted a bit [*Pls 45-6*] and then did high altitude stores with Mallory until dinner. On the way up saw a flock of siskins, lammergeyer, a bronze green laughing thrush I don't know,

Indian redstart & some pipits & finches I couldn't identify. A happy day.'

'6/6/24. No III (*ie Camp 3. Ed.*)

Still stone blind after night of pain. Mallory, Irvine & party got off about 7.30. About 10.30 Hingston, Nima Tundoo & Chutin arrived to look after me. Decided to go down, stone blind as I was – Hazard escorted and roped me as far as bottom of chimney & the other three the rest of the way – a notable performance on the part of Hingston. Was carried into III from edge of glacier down the moraine on one-man carrier & got in about 4.30.'

Norton himself climbed to 28,126 ft without oxygen on the 1924 expedition and was the world altitude record until Hilary and Tenzing finally reached the summit in 1953.

To maintain the diary, vital for later records and reports, took a great deal of effort when high on the mountain. His water colours are very evocative and again were often completed with difficulty with frozen paints at high altitudes. Similarly taking photographs at altitude with the then available equipment was no mean feat. His leadership of the 1924 expedition, although tinged with great sadness at the loss of Mallory and Irvine, resulted in him receiving awards from the French Alpine Club and the RGS. He was held in very high regard as this quote from Somervell:

'When he took over the leadership in 1924, he showed himself the ideal leader. He continually asked us all what our opinions were, and respected them and then led us in such a way that we all felt we had our hand in his, and were as it were yoked to him.' Sir Francis Younghusband, chairman of the Mount Everest Committee in London

stated: '...it was Norton who set the standard and established the code....Especially had he ingrained in him

the principle that a leader must look after the least of every one of his followers before himself....'

The 1924 attempt had a tragic ending and this is well demonstrated in the touching letters that Norton wrote on his return to England. This work is an excellent, informative and well-produced addition to the history of Himalayan mountaineering and to the life of Tibet of that time and well deserves a place in the library of anyone who has an interest in this subject.

*Gerry Birch*

**The Prisoner of Kathmandu – Brian Hodgson in Nepal 1820 – 43.** *Charles Allen. Haus Publishing Ltd, London, 2015. pp xv + 288. Illust colour plates, line drawings. Notes. Hb. £20. ISBN 978 1 910376 11 09.*

The years 2015 and 2016, represent respectively the 200th anniversaries of the start of Gurkha service to the British and the end of the Anglo-Nepal War. Allen has brought out, in timely fashion, his autobiography of Brian Hodgson, arguably the most well-known and longest serving of the Honourable East India Company (HEICO) Residents in Kathmandu. A book launch was held at the Royal Asiatic Society (RAS) in September, an appropriate venue as the RAS holds a considerable collection of paintings, manuscripts and artefacts that Hodgson sent from Nepal during his tenure in Kathmandu. The title includes the word 'prisoner' which reflects the fact that although the Nepal Durbar had to accept the imposition of a Resident from HEICO in 1816, following the Treaty of Segauli (or Sugauli), Residents were largely confined to the Kathmandu Valley. The treaty had trimmed Nepal's borders following its earlier expansionist policy



that had brought the Nepal Durbar into conflict with the HEICo. The Durbar needed to ensure that the Resident's influence was kept to a minimum amongst the machinations of the ruling families of the time, Shahs, Ranas, Thapas and Pandes being the most important and not to stir up the 'native' population residing outside the Valley.

Allen has described Hodgson's career in a series of chapters in chronological order, giving much fascinating detail about his life and times. This throws light on how HEICo chose to administer their territories and how Hodgson spent his time in Nepal and how he developed his studies. This is written a very readable style that clearly masks the amount of detailed research needed to produce a work of this nature.

Hodgson was born into an impecunious middle class family in Cheshire. It was necessary for him to make his way in the world. At this time there were opportunities for possible fame and fortune by taking service with the HEICo. Through influence he gained a place at Haileybury, the HEICo's own vocational training college (now a well-known public school). Hodgson did well achieving the top position amongst his intake of students to be posted to Calcutta and gave him the right to choose in which presidency he wished to serve. He chose the Bengal Presidency, the seat of government where there was the most action. On arrival (still at the age of seventeen) he completed his civil service training at HEICo's Fort William College. His frail constitution quickly became evident in the monsoon climate of Bengal. This had a lasting effect on his subsequent career. Through kind friends and their influence he was posted in 1818 to Kumaon, a 'hill station', a desirable appointment. The death in 1820 of John Stuart, assistant to Gardener,

Resident in Kathmandu, provided a suitable post for Hodgson. This set the tone of his future in Kathmandu. After some 18 months Hodgson returned to Calcutta in 1822 which put him at the centre of the politics of the Bengal presidency. However once again the 'Hot Weather' of 1823 intervened but this time there was no suitable appointment open. He was given a nominal appointment as Postmaster in Kathmandu. Eventually he was re-appointed in 1825 once again as assistant to Gardner, with the appropriate salary. Through all his early service he became absorbed by the languages and religion, particularly of Tibet and the Tibetans or 'Bhot' or 'Bhotias', the Nepali terms he always used. He had the ability to gain the confidence of local scholars and through them greatly increase western knowledge of the culture and religion, especially Buddhism. Throughout his time in Kathmandu he entered into detailed of correspondence with the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta and the Royal Asiatic Society in London. An interesting light is thrown upon the politics of both these academic societies of that period. The early members of HEICo, usually bachelors or at least unaccompanied, felt it necessary to learn the language and customs of the people of India with whom they had to deal. Strong emphasis was put on languages in which staff had to become proficient. Hodgson took great interest in this aspect of his work which led him into exploring other cultural areas. He was very much a pioneer in Nepalese studies and has been referred to as the 'Father of Himalayan Studies'. He was a polymath and developed interests in particularly Buddhist architecture, zoology, ornithology, law, religion, and ethnicity. In the field of ornithology he wrote a fair number of papers and his extensive network of collectors provided specimens,

many dispatched to Europe, and for his artists to make some excellent paintings, a large number of which is held by the Zoological Society of London. His attempts at publication came to nought much to his frustration. That he was able to spend time on these activities was due to the isolation of Kathmandu and unlike today he was not plagued by superiors wanting a constant flow of information! Nevertheless it was not all plain sailing. In 1837 the ruler of Afghanistan launched an attack on the Punjab in an attempt to recover territory lost to the Sikhs. This caused excitement in the Durbar giving the hope to the Prime Minister, the unreliable Bhimsen Thapa, that there would be an opportunity to throw off British influence in Nepal. There followed in 1839 - 40 the First Afghan War and the First Opium War. These apparent reverses gave more strength to the Durbar's thoughts of reducing British influence. Internecine struggles in the Durbar complicated the issue. A force of Nepalese troops once again crossed into British territory and was not withdrawn despite requests via the Resident. A mutiny in the army in Kathmandu, apparently they had heard that a pay cut was to be imposed, led to a potential threat to Hodgson and the residency staff as troops advanced close by. Negotiations followed. Hodgson warned them that messages had already been sent to Calcutta. It was a tense period, but once Hodgson had been told to instruct the Durbar that HEICo troops had been dispatched, the Raja accepted terms. At this time the Governor-General was Lord Auckland who was willing to accept the advice of the man on the ground.

Unfortunately changes in policy were afoot. Those early entrepreneurs of HEICo became known as 'Orientalists'. Hodgson through his initial training took this on

board. But as the nineteenth century progressed the Court of Directors in London came under more pressure to 'enlighten' the Indian population and spread education in English. Those advocating this approach were known as 'Anglicists'. Allen describes how these changes affected HEICo policy and hence the directives given to Hodgson as to how he should treat the Durbar. In 1842 Auckland was replaced by Lord Ellenborough. The latter was not one for accepting advice from the man on the ground. Hodgson was hoping to extend his service in Nepal but a series of disagreements with Ellenborough led to his extension being refused. He was offered another appointment but at lower status and so he retired from service. In later life he lived in Darjeeling where he could continue work, finally returning to England in 1858.

This is a serious academic work and the result of much research and study, written in Allen's inimitable style to which we have become accustomed, making this a good read for anyone interested in Nepal's somewhat complex history of that time and her relations with the Resident and the HEICo. Due to the need to publish on time, the work lacks an index; any future edition should include one to aid reference.

*Gerry Birch*

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## OBITUARIES

### **Lady Una Bishop 1918-2015**

Una Bishop, who died on 25 January aged 96, was the widow of Sir George Bishop (1913-99), civil servant and businessman. They were both keen climbers in the Alps and the Himalayas, and through that interest became involved in the Britain-Nepal Society. Una was born in Carlisle, where here father C. F. C. Padel was headmaster of Carlisle Grammar School. She grew up in a predominantly male world, living with her three brothers in the boys-only school. Her paternal grandfather, a retired concert pianist, also lived with them and taught her the piano, which she played until her death. She was evidently something of a tom-boy, joining her brothers in sliding down the glass roofs of the fives courts in the school. This environment prepared her well for later life, when she was active in worlds dominated by men, both in her own career and in accompanying George to many remote corners of the world. Una read philosophy at Bedford College (University of London),



*Una Bishop with the late Sir George Bishop.*

evacuated to Cambridge during the War. After graduating she had a very successful career in the Civil Service in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, where she also met George; by the time of her retirement in about 1961 she had become head of the horticultural department.

After she married George in 1961 they started making climbing trips, first to the Alps and subsequently to the Himalayas. These trips were planned and organised by George, who also took excellent photographs, both of the mountains but also of the people whom they met and worked with: they were as interested in the culture of Nepal as in the mountains. They continued these trips for over twenty years, between at least 1967 and 1989, climbing to over 20,000 feet into their sixties. During and after George's presidency of the Royal Geographical Society (1983-7) Una greatly appreciated meeting people of similar interests at its meetings. She also enjoyed the time when she and George acted as hosts in Britain to Pember, the Sherpa with whom they had worked most closely in Nepal: they were keen to repay some of the hospitality and kindness which they had enjoyed in that country. They took Pember to North Wales to show him where George had first climbed. Waking up early in the hut, he looked out and saw the sheep, grazing unguarded across the hillside. Thinking 'The wolves will get them!' he dashed out and rounded them up. On Tryfan a woman had sprained her ankle; people were about to send down for a rescue team, but Pember saved trouble by picking her up and running down the hillside. But what particularly interested him in Britain was (unsurprisingly) not the mountains but the sea, notably watching the

tide come in across the great area of Morecambe Bay.

Una was a warm family member, both as step-mother and step-grandmother to George's daughter Prudence and her family, and as aunt to eight nephews and nieces. She and George made a fine team. George's own very successful career would have been harder without Una's devotion and enthusiastic support, and she immensely enjoyed the travel opportunities to every continent, which were opened up for her through giving that support, and which she owed to his skills of organisation, particularly the superb trips to Nepal.

*Oliver Padel (nephew)*

*(Sir George Bishop took over as the Society's third president from Mr Arthur Kellas in 1980, the latter having followed Lord Hunt in 1976. An obituary describing Sir George's life is to be found in Edition No. 23, 1999. Ed)*

### **Lieutenant Colonel Henry Burrows 1923 -2015**

Henry Fairbridge Burrows was born on 21 April 1923 at Llanrug, North Wales. He travelled widely as a boy and was educated at Prince Edward's School, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia and King Edward VI School, Chelmsford, Essex. Aged 16 at the outbreak of WW II Henry decided to make the Army a career. He was granted an Indian Army Cadetship at 17, voluntarily enlisted in The Royal Scots in November 1941 and embarked for overseas service in February 1942 aged 18. After six months training at the Officer Cadet School in Bangalore he was commissioned into the 4th PWO Gurkha Rifles (4GR) on 4 October 1942. Soon after arrival at the Regimental Centre at Bakloh he applied for a Regular Commission and was sent on four long courses of instruction before successfully passing the Regular Commission Selection Board.

Henry commanded a Recruit Training Company in India before being sent to the 1st Battalion in Burma as a battle casualty replacement. After a spell with a rifle company he was appointed Signals Officer/Intelligence Officer and Battle Adjutant. The 1/4GR suffered heavy casualties during operations in the region of the Silchar Track and was eventually moved to a rest area near Imphal before being withdrawn to the North West Frontier of India. There Henry was appointed Adjutant before becoming a company commander in 1946.

Shortly after Indian Independence in August 1947 1/4GR moved from Gardai to Wana where it remained until it was ordered to move by road to Manzai for entrainment to Amritsar for control duties. En route they were ambushed by a large force of Mahsuds and suffered heavy casualties (27 killed and 26 wounded, appallingly high by Frontier standards). After three months of dismal duties in and around Amritsar (described by Winston Churchill as the bloodbath of The Punjab) all regular British Officers were posted to the 1st Battalion 10th PMO Gurkha Rifles at Rangoon in Burma.

Henry was appointed D Company Commander on arrival and, a few days after Burmese Independence on 4th January 1948, embarked for Malaya. Soon after arrival the battalion moved to Majedee Barracks in Johore Bahru which became its permanent base until 1962. Apart from occasional periods of leave and retraining the battalion was on active operations against Communist Terrorists in Malaya and later in Sarawak and Sabah against the Indonesian Armed Forces (Confrontation) until 1968. Henry was mentioned in dispatches for distinguished service in Malaya in 1953 and again in 1963 for service in Sabah. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1966.

Henry commanded the Royal Brunei Malay Regiment (now the Royal Brunei Armed Forces) for almost three years. It was a unique appointment for a Lieutenant Colonel as his command consisted of a battalion of infantry, a flotilla of patrol boats, a flight of helicopters and a large number of British civilian technicians. He was also responsible for a garrison of over 3,000 people. As Brunei was at war with Indonesia until 1968 his force was engaged on active operations in the jungles of Brunei State. The late Sultan of Brunei, Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin abdicated in October 1967 in favour of his son the Crown Prince Hassanal Bolkiah. Henry had to supervise the military side of the coronation. He was awarded two Datoships (knightships), the first (DSLJ) in October 1967 by the late Sultan and the second (DSNB) in March 1969 by the current Sultan. He was also awarded a PHBS for distinguished service. His last appointment in the army was as a Deputy President at the Regular Commissions Board (RCB) at Westbury. He retired from that appointment in May 1972 after 31 years service and subsequently joined the FCO as a Queen's Messenger but was soon transferred to the Security Service (M15) where he worked for 17 years before finally retiring in 1990. Henry and Elizabeth were strong supporters of the Society.

*(I am grateful to Col Rupert Litherland for the information above. Ed.)*

### **Mr David Inglefield (1934 -2014)**

The Society was sad to learn of the death in 2014 of David Inglefield after an eleven year struggle with cancer, husband of Jean Inglefield, one of the early members of the Society.

David was educated at Eton and Trinity College Cambridge. It is worth pointing out in this 70th anniversary of VJ Day that David's father was a prisoner of the

Japanese and experienced the horrors of the Burma railway. David did his national service mainly in Malaya with the 12th Lancers a period which he enjoyed. On return he joined the Derbyshire Yeomanry in the county in which he had spent a happy childhood. Initially he started with a brief stint in insurance and then joined the printing firm De La Rue for four years before joining the family firm, the Inglefield Group of engineering companies. As his career and life progressed he developed many interests and became a member of the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers in which he took a great deal of interest in their schools and charities, becoming Master in 1998. In 1980 he was Sheriff of the City of London. Sadly he had to decline the appointment of High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire due to his illness. He was made a Commander of the Order of St John. His last job was working for the charity, the Police Foundation. David met Jean at a Gurkha Welfare Appeal event. Jean was at that time secretary of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association. They married in 1970 when Jean was a member of the Society's committee. Hence there was a Nepal connection. Although David was not technically a member of the Society he was hugely supportive of Jean in her efforts to help and guide the Society in its early days. Older members will remember him as an enthusiastic attendee of those early functions but latterly distance from London and illness prevented him joining Society events. His nephew, who spoke at his Service of Thanksgiving, stated that his uncle described dying in a tongue in cheek way as "the long walk to the pavilion after the final innings."

*(Jean described some of the early times of the Society in the 2010 Golden Jubilee issue of the journal. Ed.)*



### **Dr Robert Richard Jordan (1937-2014)**

Robert (Bob) Jordan grew up in Chiswick, London. At Chiswick Grammar School he took up rowing and became Captain of Boats. In 1958, following two years' National Service in the RAF, he went up to St John's College, Cambridge to read economics, where his main interest was rowing with the Lady Margaret Boat Club. He also became involved with the International Centre and taught English as a Foreign Language at a language school in the vacations. This led to a career in English Language Teaching rather than economics. He taught English in Finland from 1961-63 and then joined the British Council in 1964.

After gaining his PGCE in TEFL/TESL at the Institute of Education, London University, where he and I met, he was posted to Kathmandu for 4 years. I remember that we had to look it up in the atlas to check exactly where it was. However, this was a pivotal and exciting experience, which resulted in a life-long love of the country. We travelled by boat via the Suez Canal to Bombay, then across India by train to Calcutta and finally by air to Kathmandu, shipping out a Land Rover and a Wedgewood dinner set to start our married life together in a country that had only been open to the West since the 1950s.

Based in Kathmandu, Bob's job was to train secondary school teachers of English. This involved a lot of trekking to visit

schools and recruit teachers for a rolling programme of 5-month courses in Kathmandu. It was a chance encounter at an embassy cocktail party that led to one of his most memorable experiences. Sir Edmund Hillary, a regular visitor to the country since conquering Everest in 1953, was funding village schools for the Sherpas through his Himalayan Trust charity. "But once they've been built," Bob asked him, "Do you know what goes on inside them?" This astute question resulted in Bob, accompanied by me flying to Lukla in a 6-seater plane for the start of a hazardous 17-day expedition. Assisted by Sherpas, and sleeping in tents, we trekked over mountainsides to inspect the six primary schools Hillary had built at that time. Along the way we encountered leeches, viewed "yeti skulls" in the monasteries and met the well-known Sherpa artist, Kappa Kalden. Later in life, after Bob retired, he gave illustrated talks about this trip to raise funds for the Himalayan Trust UK, one of which was to the Britain-Nepal Society.

Our four years in Nepal came to an end and Bob was sent to Edinburgh to study for a Diploma in Applied Linguistics and it was here that our son was born. Then we were posted to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where we spent a difficult year because of political unease, at the end of which, for family reasons, he resigned from the British Council. He took up the post of Lecturer in Education and Tutor in English to Overseas Students at Manchester University in 1972 where he remained until he took early retirement in 1992. During this time he wrote eleven books and numerous articles on his specialism, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and became a leading figure in this field. He was a founder member of BALEAP (British Association for Lecturers in EAP) and carried out inspections for them.

He maintained his connection with the British Council by giving short teacher training courses and lecture tours travelling

widely including three return visits to Nepal in 1989 and the early 1990s on short consultancies. We also holidayed there for our 25th wedding anniversary in 1990, which coincided with demonstrations for democracy and celebrations when the king agreed to political parties. We paid a final visit to Kathmandu in 2010 together with our two children, when Bob was already suffering from Alzheimer's, for the publication of his book, *From Missionaries to Mountaineers: Early Encounters with Nepal* based on extracts from his large collection of antiquarian books on the country (*This was reviewed in the 2010 Edition of the journal. He and Jane also wrote of their experiences working for the British Council in Kathmandu in the same edition. Ed.*). In his retirement he continued writing and in 1998 gained his PhD at Manchester based on his publications. He had also been an active member of the Himalayan Yeti Association based in Manchester helping on the committee to organize the Nepal Festival on two or three occasions and regularly attended the meetings of the Britain-Nepal Society in London.

*Jane Jordan*

### **Major - General Ronnie McAlister CB OBE (1923 – 2015)**

Ronald William Lorne McAlister was born in 1923 in Teddington, Gloucestershire, the second son of Colonel Ronald McAlister and his wife, Nora. He was educated at Sedbergh and joined the army in January 1942. He was known to his family as Lorne, but the army said no one had ever heard of the name. He gave them Ronald as an alternative and, from then on, was known as Ronnie to his military colleagues.

He was sent by ship to the officer cadet training unit in Bangalore for a commission in the Indian Army. Arriving at Bombay in April 1942, he warmed to his new life in which he was served by smart bearers in white uniforms and green turbans in the

cadet mess, and cycled to Urdu lessons. He was commissioned into the 3rd Gurkha Rifles in October 1942, and was selected to be a jungle warfare instructor even though he had no experience of the jungle.

After six months, he was switched to a secret establishment in Poona where agents of a branch of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) known as Force 136 were being trained to harry the Japanese behind enemy lines. During one training programme he instructed his students to lay a mock explosive charge along the main Madras to Bombay railway. When the night express approached, it set off the low-powered detonator with a muffled bang. There was no danger to the train, but the driver brought it to a screeching halt. McAlister sneaked off quickly.

In December 1944, McAlister was posted to the 1st Battalion 3rd Gurkha Rifles, which had been fighting the Japanese as part of the 17th Indian Division since January 1942. He took part in the advance from the River Chindwin in Burma, which led to the defeat of the Japanese 33rd Army and the 350-mile fighting march to relieve Rangoon. He was mentioned in dispatches. At one point in the advance, he was sent off to discover what progress was being made up ahead. He took a Jeep and headed off. When he returned, he found that Japanese shells had landed on his battalion headquarters, killing seven men, including his orderly.

McAlister was mentioned in dispatches on two more occasions; during service between 1948 and 1950 with the 10th Gurkhas fighting the communist insurgency in Malaya; and for his outstanding leadership of the 1/10th Gurkhas operating against Indonesian special forces encroaching on the Sarawak border in 1965 during President Sukarno's confrontation with Malaysia.

He is undoubtedly best remembered for the Sha Tau Kok border incident which has been fully described elsewhere in the journal.

He went on to command the Berlin

infantry brigade from 1969 to 1971, and from 1975 to 1977 he was Major-General Brigade of Gurkhas and deputy commander British Forces Hong Kong.

General Ronnie was a modest man who said little about his distinguished military career. His name will long be linked with the relief of Sha Tau Kok and his leadership of the Gurkhas.

*(I am grateful to The Times and Daily Telegraph and HQBG for the above information. Ed.)*

### **Colonel Brian Thompson MBE L/RAVC (1935 – 2014)**

Colonel Thompson's last posting was as Commandant of the Defence Animal Centre in Melton Mowbray from 1987 until his early retirement in 1990. He enjoyed a very diverse and interesting career in the RAVC, with many one-off postings. Throughout his career, the welfare of the animals and teams under his command was his primary concern, and he was happiest in the field, contemplating the latest challenge that had been presented.

Brian John Thompson was born in Berkshire and educated at Reading School. After graduating from The Royal Veterinary College, London in 1962 he had a short stint in private practice in Hampstead. However, he quickly became bored with attending to pampered poodles and signed up for a short service commission with the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. His first overseas tour was on an emergency posting to Jungle Warfare School in Malaya. This appealed to his pioneering spirit and prompted him to apply for a regular commission. Aged 18 he had been part of a British Schools Exploring Society expedition to British Columbia. This trip had ignited a love of coping in a remote location with limited resources and throughout his career he relished the challenges created. One of the leaders on that expedition was a Lt John Chapple and was the start of a lifelong friendship. Hours

before his fatal heart attack, Brian had enjoyed reminiscing with the now Field Marshal Sir John Chapple at the Britain-Nepal Society AGM in London.

Whilst in Malaya Brian went to do a holiday relief at 5 Gurkha Dog Company in Singapore. He stayed in the RAMC mess and met a young army doctor, Captain Pat Evershed. They married in January 1965, only eight weeks after they had met, and then stayed on for a full tour in Singapore. The parish extended from Gan in the Maldives to Borneo, and Brian was putting in more flying hours than RAF aircrew. His hands on approach soon earned him a reputation for being the person to send on some of the army's more unusual postings. He spent time at Harwell involved in medical research, resulting in a lifelong aversion to the smell of goats, and was co-opted in to help with the foot and mouth outbreak in 1967. Then in 1971 he was seconded to the SAS to spend six months in Oman as part of Op Storm's 'Hearts and Minds' campaign to win over the local population. There he added camels, goats, chickens and the Sultan's prize bulls to his list of more unusual animals under the care of the RAVC. Within weeks of his return, he was posted to be the first vet to go to Northern Ireland where he established the Army Dog Unit, which was instrumental in providing canine support in counter terrorism. This role put him and his family in danger of attack by the IRA, and for a time their house was under the protection of Royal Marine commandos. In 1976 he led the first 'Long Look' where service personnel from UK and Australia swapped roles for four months, to learn how their opposite numbers did things. This involved training dogs with live mines, which he reported was a somewhat scary experience. Perhaps his most challenging posting, but one which he hugely enjoyed, was six months in the Falklands after surrender in 1982. He was tasked with re-establishing the veterinary services, which had been decimated by the war. Besides



advising on the use of army dogs to detect mines and establishing a base for guard dogs, his responsibilities ranged from holding radio clinics for the farmers and prescribing by numbers the drugs he had issued to them, to establishing a new slaughter house as the one in Stanley had been booby trapped. He also made regular helicopter flights with a marksman in order to destroy animals injured in the unmarked minefields and liaised with the RAF to ensure the breeding grounds for penguins and seals were not disturbed by low flying aircraft – none of which was covered by any RAVC manual.

He did two tours in Hong Kong, commanding the Hong Kong Dog Company from 1979 to 1981 and returning again between 1984 to 1987. The unit's role was to patrol the border with mainland China and stop illegal immigrants from entering Hong Kong and it was for this work that he was awarded the MBE in 1981.

Brigadier John Neeve remembers meeting Brian in Hong Kong in 1980 when he, as a major, was taking over as OC HQ & Signal Squadron: “ My first meeting with Brian Thompson was in the ante room of 48 Gurkha Infantry Brigade Officers' Mess in Borneo Lines, Sek Kong in 1979. I had just been posted back to Hong Kong after 9 years away and was keen to get up to date. On my preliminary visit to the Mess, I approached the solitary occupant of the room and introduced myself. I found myself talking to the Officer Commanding the Sek Kong Dog Unit, Major Brian Thompson RAVC. He was virtually invisible behind a thick cloud of pipe smoke but made me welcome, offered me a drink and then proceeded to explain the dark politics of life in Borneo Lines. I later came to realize that my reaction to these often acerbic revelations was Brian's way of gauging whether I was going to fit in - or not!”

Whilst in Hong Kong Brian worked with the philanthropist, Horace Kadoorie. The Kadoories had established a resettlement

farm in the New Territories to help Gurkha soldiers make the transition from soldier to hill farmer in Nepal. Brian undertook about 10 trips to Nepal, sometimes for up to a month at a time. He visited every Gurkha Welfare station, and advised on what practical help could be given. He spoke no Gurkhali and at times was three days walk from the nearest road, entirely dependent on two porters to carry his food and tents. It was a record that was the envy of many British Gurkha officers, very few of whom saw so much of the real Nepal.

Following early retirement from the RAVC, he continued his interest in welfare work as Overseas Director for the Brooke Hospital for Animals. He spent five years with them, leading their work in Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan and India to set up clinics for the working equines in poor and remote places. He led from the ground, visiting all locations and establishing links with the local workers.

Since 1995 he had enjoyed a fulfilling retirement. He did a Diploma in Archaeology at the University of Leicester, kept fit by walking his dogs and 'beating' on the Duke of Rutland's estate, and joined the management committee for Victim Support in East Leicestershire. In 2005 Brian and Pat decided to return to their roots in the south of England in order to be nearer to their children. They settled on the edge of Ashdown Forest in East Sussex, and were blissfully happy there. Brian was a well known dog walker, involved in the conservation work in the forest and was often to be seen striding out across the forest, pipe in hand and dog at his side. It was his long time interest in Nepal that kept his membership of the Society alive.

*(I am grateful to Mrs Pat Thompson and Brig Neeve for the information for the above. Sadly Brian died from a heart attack on his way home from the Society's AGM 4th December 2014 where he had had several conversations with members. Ed.)*

### **Richard McIvor Thwaites 1947– 2015**

Richard was educated at Uppingham and commissioned from Mons Officer Cadet School into the 10th Gurkha Rifles in 1966. He served in Malaya, Borneo, Hong Kong and Cyprus, and did a tour in Northern Ireland, over a period of 10 years during which he held a number of specialist appointments including Regimental Signals Officer and Motor Transport Officer. His last appointment was OC B Company in Hong Kong, at a time when Jo was also serving there in the QARANC. Richard was a very good athlete who trained and ran in a number of successful 10GR cross-country and Khud race teams; however it was his linguistic skills that made him stand out. He had a remarkable ear and was a wonderful mimic who amused his fellow subalterns with his astonishingly accurate mimicking of more senior officers' linguistic skills and ours (or lack of them by his high standards).

He left the Army in 1976. He and Jo were married in Kathmandu in 1977 where they worked, as Field Director and Clinic Nurse, for Save the Children for five years. Richard then moved into international development principally with PLAN International (a child orientated NGO) and over period of fourteen years worked in Indonesia, America, Kenya and Nepal again. He was in Nepal when the 1988 earthquake struck and was decorated by the King of Nepal for his distinguished work during the relief efforts. It was in 1996, when he was working at PLAN International's HQ in Woking, that he was diagnosed as having a brain tumour. His recovery from major surgery was slow and he had to learn to walk again. Ever determined he ran the Edinburgh marathon in 4 hours 20 minutes, three years after his surgery. A spell in Quito, Ecuador followed but the tumour re-grew and further surgery followed. This left him with balance difficulties and some loss of function down his right-hand side but he was undeterred by this and continued to work in post-conflict

relief. Assignments in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Liberia, Tajikistan and Libya followed and he was about to go to South Sudan when he died unexpectedly as a result of heart failure.

Combined with his determination and robustness as a soldier, Richard was caring humanitarian who liked nothing more than to be 'in the field' with people helping them. His linguistic ability, he spoke eight languages fluently, allowed him to do this well. That and his sometimes wicked sense of humour, enthusiasm for life and generosity of spirit were strong attributes and he was also a devoted family man. Our deepest sympathy goes out to Jo and their daughters Nicky, Katie and Alison.

*RL*

### **John Tyson OBE, MC (1928 – 2014)**

John Baird Tyson was born in Partick, Scotland, and brought up in London, where his father was Surmaster (deputy headmaster) of St Paul's School. He acquired a passion for climbing during family holidays in Scotland, France and Switzerland. I first met John when, as a schoolboy, I spent a month at the Outward Bound Mountain School in Eskdale, where John was an instructor and Eric Shipton was Warden. It was evident even from this first contact that he was a very determined character who, once he had decided on a course of action, would see it through to the end in an almost obsessive way.

In his National Service during the Malayan Emergency, he won the Military Cross for leading his platoon with great determination against a group of guerrillas, who were eliminated. While not unique, such medals were few and far between.

After demobilisation, John went to read Geography at Magdalen College, Oxford, and in 1952 led the first-ever Oxford University Scientific Expedition to the Himalaya. In addition to work on several high-altitude projects in the Tehri-Garhwal

region, the team made first ascents of Gangotri I and Gangotri III, both above 6500m. In the Alps, he had done such routes as the *Marinelli Couloir*, the *Zmutt Ridge* and the *Younggrat*. As a housemaster at Rugby School, over several seasons he introduced boys to guideless climbing in the Swiss and French Alps. His enthusiasm over the years led to many worthwhile routes being completed, many along the *Haute Route*.

In 1953, he and Bill Murray had made an exploratory journey to the Api and Nampa region in the far north-west of Nepal where they made the first ascent of several peaks in the 5500m-6000m range. Around this time, he bought a house in Eskdale. There, he and his wife Phebe offered renowned hospitality to visiting mountaineers and other friends. Then, in 1961, began John's obsession with Kanjiroba (6880m). This massif in west Nepal had become his blank on the map. Over the next nine years, he led expeditions through very rough country but, in spite of sustained efforts, he never reached the summit.

In 1964, I joined him in west Nepal. After a wonderful few weeks of surveying and climbing several peaks of around 5500m-6000m, we forced a route along the Langu Khola, the gorge of the Langu River, but turned off too early to get to the peak of Kanjiroba - no GPS at that time. The 1969 expedition learned from this and reached the mountain, but dangerous snow conditions precluded a successful attempt. John's final visit took place in 1998 when he had great pleasure in being reunited with Sherpas from the 1964 and 1969 expeditions. Kanjiroba had become 'John Tyson's mountain' to the extent that, when it was eventually climbed by a Japanese team, its leader sent a telegram to John to apologise: 'with your permission, we have climbed your mountain.' John was said to have been delighted.

Meanwhile, he was offered the headship of a school to be funded by the British

government in Nepal, but political differences between the British and Indian governments prevented this coming to fruition immediately. Instead, he was appointed headmaster of another British-funded school in Bhutan, where he spent three years before being invited by the Nepalese government to run its school in Budhanilkantha, where he spent six happy years.

Perhaps it was having done the *Zmutt Ridge* and *Younggrat* from a base in Zermatt, but, in his later years, year after year, he returned to Zermatt to be among and to look at the mountains of his youth.

He is survived by his wife Phebe Pope, and their daughter and two sons.

*John Cole*  
*(I am grateful to the editor of the Alpine Club Journal for permission to use this piece. The Budhanilkantha School Project was viewed in Kathmandu as a very successful school with the aim to educate potential leaders for Nepal. Sadly British financial support was cut back apparently on the grounds of expense and 'elitism' - a casualty of political correctness? Ed.)*

### **Peter Roberts OBE**

The Society was advised that Peter had died earlier in 2015. His wife, Diana had died in 2009 as noted in the journal. During his career in the FCO he held an appointment in the British embassy, Kathmandu in the early 1980s. As with many others who served in Nepal, both he and Diana retained their interest in the country and were strong supporters of the Society and he was a committee member for some years and will be remembered by older Society members.

*GDB*

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## USEFUL ADDRESSES

The UK Trust for Nature Conservation  
in Nepal  
c/o Conservation Programmes  
Zoological Society of London  
Regent's Park  
London NW1 4RY  
Tel: (020) 7449 6304  
Fax: (020) 7483 4436

The Gurkha Welfare Trust  
PO Box 2170  
22 Queen Street  
SALISBURY SP2 2EX  
Tel: 01722 323955  
Fax: 01722 343119  
[www.gwt.org.uk](http://www.gwt.org.uk)

School of Oriental and African Studies  
University of London  
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square  
London WC1H 0XG  
Tel: (020) 7898 4034  
[www.soas.ac.uk](http://www.soas.ac.uk)

The Britain Nepal Otolaryngology Service  
(BRINOS)  
Greensand Cottage  
Puttenham Road  
Seale  
Farnham GU10 1HP  
Tel: (01252) 783265  
[www.brinos.org.uk](http://www.brinos.org.uk)

Yeti Association  
(Nepali Association in UK)  
66 Abbey Avenue  
Wembley  
Middlesex HA0 1LL  
Email: [yetinepaliassociation@hotmail.com](mailto:yetinepaliassociation@hotmail.com)

The Esther Benjamin's Trust  
CAN Mezzanine  
32 – 36 Loman Street  
London SE1 0EH  
Website: [www.ebtrust.org.uk](http://www.ebtrust.org.uk)

The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust  
130 Vale Road  
Tonbridge  
Kent TN9 1SP  
Tel: (01732) 360284  
[www.thebritainnepalmedicaltrust.org.uk](http://www.thebritainnepalmedicaltrust.org.uk)

The Britain-Nepal Chamber of Commerce  
35 St Philip's Avenue  
Worcester Park  
Surrey KT4 8JS  
Tel: 020 8241 0313  
[www.nepal-trade.org.uk](http://www.nepal-trade.org.uk)

The Gurkha Museum  
Peninsula Barracks  
Romsey Road  
Winchester  
Hampshire SO23 8TS  
Tel: (01962) 842832  
[www.thegurkhamuseum.co.uk](http://www.thegurkhamuseum.co.uk)

The Royal Society for Asian Affairs  
25 Eccleston Place  
London SW1W 9NF  
Tel: (020) 7235 5122  
[www.rsaa.org.uk](http://www.rsaa.org.uk)

Bird Conservation Nepal  
PO Box 12465  
Lazimpat  
Kathmandu  
Nepal  
Tel: + 977 1 4417805  
Email: [bcn@mail.com.np](mailto:bcn@mail.com.np)  
[www.birdlifeneपाल.org](http://www.birdlifeneपाल.org)

HIMAL Southasia  
GPO Box 24393  
Kathmandu  
Nepal  
Tel: +977 1 5547279  
Email: [editorial@himalmag.com](mailto:editorial@himalmag.com)

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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, students, teachers, returned volunteers, aid workers, doctors, business people, members of the Diplomatic Service and Armed Forces. 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 £20, joint (same address) members £30 per annum. Life membership is a single payment of £350, joint life membership a payment of £550; corporate business members £75 per annum. Concessionary membership of £15 per annum is available to those under 25 or over 75 on production of proof of age. 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.

Those interested in joining the Society should contact the treasurer, Col Rupert Litherland at: [rupertlitherland@gmail.com](mailto:rupertlitherland@gmail.com)

Website:

[www.britain-nepal-society.org.uk](http://www.britain-nepal-society.org.uk)

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## THE BRITAIN-NEPAL SOCIETY

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