

KING ARTHUR COMES TO TIBET: FRANK LUDLOW AND
THE ENGLISH SCHOOL IN GYANTSE, 1923-26¹

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With the spread of the British Empire, the British educational system also spread across the world, and this is the story of how, in the early 1920s, it reached as far as Tibet.

The English School at Gyantse in southern Tibet had its origins in the aftermath of the 1903-04 Younghusband Expedition which enabled Britain to gain a foothold in the “Roof of the World”. Britain consolidated its advance in the Simla Convention of 1913-14. At about this time it was decided to send four young Tibetans, aged between 11 and 17, to Rugby school in England to learn English and the technical skills necessary to help their country to modernise. At the Simla Convention, the idea of setting up a British-run school in Tibet also came up. Sir Charles Bell, doyen of British policy in Tibet, noted that it was the Tibetan Plenipotentiary who broached the subject: “Something of the kind seems indispensable to enable the Tibetan Government to meet the pressure of Western civilization. And they themselves are keen on it. Without such a general school education Tibetans cannot be trained to develop their country in accordance with their own wishes.”²

Britain was anxious that it was not viewed as imposing its values on Tibet, and another Government of India official stressed that it should be “made clear that the school is being established by the Tibetans on their own initiative and will be entirely their own affair—

¹ I am grateful to Dr Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, editor of the *Bulletin of Tibetology*, for her support, and to Dr Mark Turin for suggesting that I submit this article to the journal. I am also grateful to Joyce Hill, Richard Mildon, Jean Rasmussen, Eileen Walsh, Michael Walsh, Malcolm Lyell and Ruth Whall for shedding light on Ludlow’s early life, and to the late Stephen Aris, Hugh Richardson, William Stearn and Sir George Taylor for their personal reminiscences.

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² British Library, Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC), L/PS/11/208, C.A. Bell to Secy of Govt of India in the Foreign and Political Affairs Dept, Simla, 3 September, 1921.

i.e. it is not in any way a British enterprise betokening ‘peaceful penetration.’”³

It is easy in this post-colonial age to be cynical about British colonial officials setting themselves up as guardians of Tibetan freedom, but many British administrators did undoubtedly have a genuine respect for the Tibetan people and their culture. Arthur Hopkinson was later to worry that the encounter with Western culture had brought “the worst aspects of capitalism” to Tibet⁴, while works such as *Lhasa the Holy City* (1938) by F. Spencer Chapman are suffused with the respect felt by this distinguished mountaineer for the Tibetan elite, or at least for the more progressive elements among this class.

In any case, it was eventually decided to open an ‘English school’ at Gyantse, the scene of the main battle of the Younghusband Expedition and where there was already a British Trade Agent and military escort. The presence of a British community there “offers the opportunity to the students of mixing with a few people of British race,” a Government of India official noted, adding: “The number of students likely to attend the school at the beginning will be between 25 and 30, none of whom will presumably have had any previous education even in Tibetan. It is proposed to give the boys sound education in both English and Tibetan for 5, 6, 7 or 8 years according to their requirements and send them thereafter to European schools at hill stations, such as Darjeeling, Mussoorie, Naini Tal, etc., for about a year in order for them to mingle with European boys and to learn European ideas, manners and customs.”⁵

The 13th Dalai Lama himself approved of the idea and the Sikkimese police officer Rai Bahadur Sonam Wangfel Laden La reported that “He is very keen to introduce English school, bring in Mining Engineers to work the Tibet Mines, & Mechanics to improve the arsenal, & experts to improve the making gunpowder & cartridges, also to improve his army & introduce Power in whole Tibet.”⁶

³ Op. cit., note, 1922.

⁴ Cited in *Tibet and the British Raj* by Alex McKay (Richmond, 1997), p. 180. This, together with *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951; the Demise of the Lamaist State* by Melvyn C. Goldstein (Berkeley, 1989) and *Tibet, China and India 1914-1950* by Alastair Lamb (Hertingfordbury, 1989), provides an excellent account of the political background to the events described in this article.

⁵ OIOC, L/PS/11/208, from H. Sharp, 17 April 1922.

⁶ Letter from Laden La (to India Office?), 21 October, 1921, LP&S/10/538. Laden La had been in charge of the Dalai Lama’s security during his exile in India and was in 1922 invited to Lhasa to set up and train a modern police force in Tibet.

Sir Charles Bell outlined the purpose of the school in some detail in his book *Tibet Past and Present* (Oxford, 1924). “Put briefly, our main requirement was that Tibet herself should be strong and free” (p.190), he declared, adding that “In Tibet also we had an ideal barrier against Bolshevik aggression, for the latter is abhorrent to the orderly Tibetan mind and to the religion which inspires it” (p.191). “[Tibet’s] deliberate but sustained advance would be promoted by the establishment of an English school in Tibet”, Bell added, but noted that “Tibetans of the upper classes were averse from sending their boys or girls to school in India for education, and wished to see a school established in Gyantse or even in Lhasa itself” (p.196).

“The late Prime Minister, Lönchen Shatra, discussed the question with me in 1914. His views of the subjects that should be taught showed that even leading Tibetans are slow to realize the limitations of Western education and the long years that it requires. The school was to be for boys of twelve to twenty years of age, and the subjects to be taught were as follows:

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| a) English | e) Weaving |
| b) Engineering | f) Working in leather |
| c) Military training | g) Working in iron |
| d) Carpentry | h) Utilisation of horns
and bones” (p.196). |

“All with whom I discussed the matter insisted the head master should be British” (p.197).

Plans for the school were made public in 1922, when *The Times* published a short report noting that “A notable indication of the realization on the part of the Tibetan authorities that the permanent isolation of their country from modern influences is impossible is afforded by the decision of the Lhasa Government to start a school on English lines in Tibet for the education of the sons of officials.”

“The boys will be given a sound education in both English and Tibetan ... At first the number of boys will be small—perhaps not more than about thirty—but the school will expand as time goes on, and the boys will be kept at school for terms ranging from five to eight years, according to requirements, and afterwards will be sent to European schools in the Indian hill stations ... The school will be at Gyantse,

For an authoritative study of Britain’s role in Tibet see McKay’s *Tibet and the British Raj*, although it is mistaken in stating that Ludlow was the son of a Cambridge lecturer in Botany (the author confuses him with Kingdon-Ward, see below) and that he was educated in Chelsea before going to Cambridge (p. 226).

where there is a British Trade Agent, and there will be an opportunity to mix with a few English people.”⁷

A few months later, on January 30, 1923, a draft agreement was reached on appointing Frank Ludlow of the Indian Educational Service as headmaster of the school at a salary of 600 rupees per month, rising to 1,000 rupees, on a three-year contract. Ludlow, who was later to become a renowned Himalayan botanist and ornithologist and also to be influential in Anglo-Tibetan diplomatic relations, was born in Chelsea on August 10, 1885, the son of a grocer. Frank’s father, Walter Ludlow, is commemorated in a window in St George’s church, Dunster, Somerset, where he was a churchwarden. The family had moved to Somerset when Frank was a child; he attended a private school in Alcombe near Dunster, followed by King’s College, Taunton and Wellington School, Somerset⁸ before graduating from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, in Natural Sciences in 1908. Attracted by the opportunities for natural history and shooting in India, he joined the Indian Educational Service in September, 1908 as vice-principal of Dayaram Jethmal Sind College, Karachi, and by 1920, after serving with the 97th India Infantry in Mesopotamia in the First World War, he had risen to the rank of Inspector of European schools.⁹

However, after 12 years in India, Ludlow was tired of the suffocating heat of the plains and could not resist the lure of Tibet with its little known wildlife and mysterious culture. He was asked by his director to submit the names of candidates for the post of head master of the proposed school in Gyantse. “The work and the prospect of living for three years in a mediaeval country appealed to me. I submitted my own name, and was eventually selected.”¹⁰

Negotiations over the details of his contract continued for some months. Ludlow stressed that “I do not expect to live in Tibet in the

⁷ The Times, late London edition, July 13, 1922, p. 10. This report is listed in the *Official Index to The Times* but does not appear in the microfilmed edition of the newspaper.

⁸ Wellington School, also known as West Somerset County School, is not to be confused with Wellington College, Berkshire which Ludlow’s friend F.M. Bailey attended.

⁹ See *A Quest of Flowers* by Harold R. Fletcher, with historical introduction by George Taylor (Edinburgh, 1975), *Tibet and Its Birds* by C. Vaurie (London, 1972), which is dedicated to Ludlow, Frank Ludlow (Obituary) by W.T. Stearn, *Ibis*, 116, p.234 (1974), *India Office List*, 1930 (which says he became principal of the Karachi college in 1916) and OIOC V/12/306, History of Services, Bombay 1920-1.

¹⁰ Report on the School, Ludlow Collection, OIOC, Mss Eur 979, hereafter “Report”.

same luxury as in India, but if I am going to stay at Gyantse for a minimum of 3 years, I shall have to take something more than a camp bed and a roll of bedding etc.” He was deeply concerned whether he would be able to continue shooting in Tibet, shooting being an essential part of ornithology in those days of relatively primitive optical equipment as well as a popular ‘sport’. He had been told of “the dislike the Tibetans have to shooting, and the taking of life generally,” and asked: “Does this mean that no Europeans in Gyantse are permitted to take a gun or rifle into the country? Also, are they absolutely forbidden to shoot even in out-of-way places where there are no towns, villages or monasteries? I ask this because I am a keen naturalist. The study of birds is my particular hobby, and I should like to be free to collect occasional specimens of scientific interest where there is no danger of wounding the religious susceptibilities of the people.”¹¹

To Ludlow’s relief this did not prove to be an obstacle. The Political Officer Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, Major Frederick (Eric) Marshman Bailey¹², the writer, adventurer and spy who was to become Ludlow’s friend and mentor, reported that “The officers at Gyantse have always been accustomed to shoot here and no objection has ever been raised. It has always been the custom to avoid shooting near monasteries and generally to avoid hurting the susceptibilities of the Tibetans but I know of no single [sic] case in 18 years when any question has been raised on the subject by the Tibetans.”¹³

Ludlow was also concerned about the age of the boys who were to be his pupils: “Within reason, the younger the boys are, the better, 9-13 would be the most suitable ages. It will probably be best to discourage big boys of 15, 16 or 17. The latter would not benefit greatly from a year in a European school. Their knowledge of English and other subjects would be small, and they would find themselves classified with small boys in primary schools.”¹⁴

¹¹ OIOC, L/PS/11/208, to E.B. Howell, Secretariat, Delhi, 27 November. 1922.

¹² Bailey was well acquainted with Tibet, having served on the Younghusband Expedition and was later British Trade Agent in Gyantse. For a biography of Bailey see *Beyond the Frontier* by A. Swinson (London, 1971) and for a much more critical appraisal, *Loneliness and Time* by Mark Cocker (London, 1992), ch. 2.

¹³ Op. cit., from F.M. Bailey to Howell, 11 January 1923. Bailey epitomised the Edwardian love of hunting, and in an article entitled *A quiet day in Tibet* describes how, on being woken up by his servant, he would wonder, “What is to be done today?... The obvious answer to the question has just presented itself — Let us kill something” (cited by A.C. McKay in *British Trade Agencies in Tibet*, JRAS, 1992, p. 409).

¹⁴ Op. cit., Brief Notes to E.B. Howell, undated.

He was also all too aware that no school building existed. He did not have unrealistic expectations however, and noted: “Lighting and ventilation are important but I doubt if much attention is paid to these requirements in Tibet and the best must be made of what is available.”¹⁵

Ludlow arrived in Gyantse on 27 October, 1923, and soon found that almost all the issues he had raised were indeed problems, with the exception of shooting, which he was able to indulge in unhindered, so long as he was reasonably discreet.

One of the biggest sources of disagreement between the Tibetan authorities and himself was the length of school terms. Ludlow suggested that as some boys were expected to come from as far away as Lhasa, the year should be divided into two terms, with a summer vacation of 30 days and a winter vacation of 65 days. On 28 October, on the day after his arrival in Gyantse, he made this proposal to the Kenchung, the senior local official who was to become his main Tibetan official contact and his chief adversary: “To my intense surprise the Kenchung suggested there should be only one term of nine months followed by a winter vacation of 3 months. In vain I protested that boys and masters would be bored to tears long before the expiration of this huge term. No, he wanted one long term per annum.”¹⁶

Thus began a history of conflict which continued until Ludlow left Gyantse three years later, when the school closed due to political and parental opposition, leaving Ludlow a deeply disappointed man. But Ludlow’s diaries do not tell only of dashed hopes: they are a vivid, sometimes amusing, sometimes angry document that tell the story of the Gyantse school in considerable detail in which Ludlow’s highly attractive personality shines through. True, he could be impatient with Tibetan officialdom who, not surprisingly, had little understanding of Western ways, but he was so devoted to his pupils and to Tibet’s best interests as he saw them that his exasperation is entirely understandable.

Ludlow comes across in his diaries as something of a sociable loner. Anyone prepared to spend a few years in a remote town in Tibet would have had to have considerable reserves of self-sufficiency, but Ludlow was no hermit, and those who remember him recall a

¹⁵ Ditto.

¹⁶ Ludlow diary, OIOC, Mss 979, October 28, 1923. Hereafter all quotes from Ludlow’s diary are indicated with a date in the main text. Ludlow’s photograph albums, including pictures from his Gyantse days, are also in the OIOC (Photo 743).

“charming, modest man who seldom talked about himself — but had a quiet sense of humour.”¹⁷ This seems to be the impression most people had of him, but there was also a prickly side to his character, and he did not get on with everybody. He intensely disliked Hugh Richardson, Britain’s legendary last envoy in Lhasa, whom he regarded as obstructive and indiscreet (July 11, 1946), while according to Richardson, Ludlow was “unpopular with his staff as well as Tibetan officialdom for his brusque and impatient manners. He was a difficult person and remote ...”¹⁸ Ludlow could certainly be acerbic: he noted to Bailey that so far as their mutual friend Williamson was concerned, “Marriage, I am sorry to say, has not made him less self-centred”¹⁹, while as for (later Sir) Basil Gould, “Never have I known a man so egocentric.”²⁰

But this is not the Ludlow most people knew and loved, and in his Gyantse diaries he comes across as an enthusiastic and devoted teacher, albeit contemptuous of obstructive bureaucrats, British or Tibetan, or anybody else whom he saw as a threat to the best interests of his pupils. His decency is underlined when a friend named Patterson, an official of the British Trade Agency, died and his effects were put up for auction. “Things sold well; personally I bought nothing, as I dont [sic] like bargaining over a dead friend’s belongings. Silly, I know” (19 March, 1924).²¹

Things did not go smoothly at the school from the beginning. There was no school building, and no desks when he arrived, and little agreement with the Kenchung on just about anything. Ludlow was determined that the school should not neglect Tibetan language and culture as well as teaching the basics of the English curriculum. Early on, he asked the Kenchung if all his students could read and write Tibetan: “He said some would and others would’nt [sic]; and that those who could read and write *would be made to mark time until the others had caught up!!* A very absurd proposal, of course, to which I judged it better to say nothing. The Khenchung’s views on education are

¹⁷ Mrs Joyce Hill, letter to author, July 13, 2001. Stearn in his obituary (op. cit.) speaks of Ludlow in similar warm terms.

¹⁸ Letter to author, July 19, 1995.

¹⁹ Ludlow to Bailey, November 26, 1934.

²⁰ Diary, December 4, 1945.

²¹ It must be admitted that Ludlow in his youth had one deeply unappealing quality, albeit one that was pervasive among Britons of his time. His notebooks contain a couple of anti-Semitic comments, including this in a poem dated 1909 entitled *The Wail of the Wanderer*: “... And bid the helmsman steer into the West/And cast the Jewish lustful greed aside ...”.

obviously very primitive, and it is no use worrying him with educational principles. He seems to have no idea of classes, and thinks all boys, big and small, of varying degrees of intelligence, can be grouped together in one class" (8 November, 1923).

By the end of November, 30 boys had arrived, aged 8 to 18, though none of them was from Lhasa or hence the son of a Lhasa government official. "Some of them were charming kiddies, well-bred and well-clothed. Others were not so prepossessing and evidently came of more plebeian stock. I got the boys to seat themselves at my rather primitive benches and had one or two cut down to suit their size. Everybody was so solemn whilst this was being done, and the boys looked so glum, that I fished out a couple of footballs and told all except 2 or 3 to go out and play in the compound. This worked wonders, and five minutes later when I went out I found them running all over the place, laughing and chattering in the very best of spirits ... There is no doubt about the boys being keen on games, and there will be no difficulty on this score — one football found missing!" (8 November, 1923).

This being an 'English School', football and games generally formed an important part of the curriculum. There were also regular matches between Tibetan teams and the British military detachment, with plans for a league (6 March, 1924). Ludlow had been a member of his college football team at Cambridge, and it was noted in an official report that "Mr Ludlow pays attention to games and the building of character, as well as to book work ..."²² Ludlow's enthusiasm for football even reached the ears of the Dalai Lama, who asked about the result of a match between the school and an army team (the school lost 2-1), and then "enquired if it was true that I was very fond of 'kicking the ball with my head'!" (19 October, 1926).

Ludlow's diaries are also full of fascinating insights into Tibetan social mores. 'Tiffins' were the main social distraction and a chance to mingle with Tibetan officials informally. After one such tiffin, "we played the gramophone & Tering played his Tibetan mandoline. His daughter danced with her brother, Miss Macdonald [daughter of the veteran Gyantse Trade Agent, David Macdonald] & one of my servants. That is one of the pleasing things about Tibetan society — the daughter of the house, or any other member of the family, has'nt [sic] the slightest objection to dancing with a servant" (20 March, 1924).

At another tiffin, given by the new British Trade Agent, Frederick (Derrick) Williamson, there were 25 guests including about five ladies.

²² OIOC, L/P&S/11/208/4835, quoting Gyantse Trade Report.

“The ladies insisted on having tiffin in a room apart from us men, not that they minded having food with us Europeans so they said, but apparently it wasn’t the custom to sit down with men-folk from their own country” (13 August, 1924).

Imported tinned food was in reasonably good supply, and at a “Big break up tiffin” the menu consisted of “Soup, Salmon mayonnaise, Chicken & York ham, Mashed potatoes & salad, Curry & rice, Fruit Salad (Strawberries, Raspberries, Pears, Cherries, Grapes), Stilton Coffee & Liqueurs. Beer was on tap for everybody who wanted it. To my surprise, the Oracle had one or two glasses” (28 June, 1924).

To keep his spirits up, Ludlow would also from time to time order food from home via India. “Wrote to Calcutta and ordered some beer, Stilton cheese, and Harris’s Wiltshire bacon from the Army & Navy Stores. One must indulge oneself occasionally in these parts” (11 January, 1924).

Visitors formed a further distraction, and there were more of these than one might expect. These included the celebrated plant hunter Frank Kingdon-Ward and his friend Lord Cawdor, who had a passport from the Tibetan government to go botanising in eastern Tibet. Ludlow discovered that he and Kingdon-Ward were contemporaries at Cambridge and that he had been taught botany by his father, Professor Harry Marshall Ward. In a typical Ludlow phrase he describes his two visitors as “awfully nice men” (2 April, 1924).²³

Another visitor was the celebrated French mystic, explorer and writer Alexandra David-Néel. David-Néel, author of such works as *My Journey to Lhasa* (1927) and *With Magicians and Mystics in Tibet* (1931), could hardly have been more different from Ludlow. She was obsessed with the supernatural aspects of Tibetan Buddhism, while he was down-to-earth and sceptical. When David-Néel turned up unexpectedly, Ludlow mistook her for a Tibetan nun. “To my surprise the lady addressed me in somewhat broken continental English, & said she had come from China & wished to be put up in the dak [postal] bungalow. I explained to her that the bungalow was practically full as two of the rooms were being used as classrooms & I was occupying the other. I advised her to go to Macdonald, gave her one of my men to show her the way, & offered her my pony as she appeared to be tired. She went off but refused my pony.” Ludlow learnt from colleagues that

²³ See also *Frank Kingdon-Ward* by Charles Lyte (London, 1989), p. 70, which quotes from Lord Cawdor’s diary in which he describes playing football at Gyantse (“I played for the Tibetan team”) and also mentions the “good hard [tennis] court made of local cement.”

she “had just come from Lhasa where she had spent 2 months without anybody in authority there being a penny the wiser, that she had reached Lhasa from Kansu, & that for the last 13 years she has been wondering about East & Central Asia & has visited the Gobi desert, the Koko Nor desert, the source of the Hoang Ho, Kansu & various parts of China ... She appears to have spent a couple of years in a nunnery also ... She is naturally very fluent in Tibetan. She of course led the life of a Tibetan absolutely, eating tsampa & drinking buttered tea. She had no tents. She was remarkably cheery considering the privations she had undergone.”

When he met her again a couple of days later, Ludlow found that “Madame Neel is not very fit & seems to be feeling the reaction after her strenuous travels. She has only the clothes she stands up in & a local Tibetan has been very busy cutting up some Tibetan cloth for her. I made her come to my store & insisted on her taking some Bovril, Macaroni, sugar, rice, sardines, onions, etc. She wants feeding up badly” (5, 7 May, 1924).²⁴

Ludlow seems to have welcomed the distractions that the visitors provided, as there were endless frustrations from the very beginning. For example, no preparations had been made for the planned school before he arrived. To his consternation, he found that there was no wood in Gyantse for building desks, etc. and it would have to come from the vicinity of Lhasa. “How benches, tables, and chairs are going to be made in time I do’nt [sic] know. The carpenter also tells me he has no nails, screws, bolts, hinges or any fittings. Here’s a pretty state of things. The Tibetan Govt have known for at least a year that furniture would have to be made directly I arrived; yet they made no preparations for its manufacture ...” (5 November, 1923).

Fortunately the wood arrived a few days later, but the design and location of the school building were the next bone of contention. After receiving a telegram from Bailey, Ludlow asked if the Tibetan authorities had sanctioned expenditure on doors and windows which were to be made in Gangtok in Sikkim. But from the Kenchung Ludlow gathered that “Apparently the Tibetan Govt have no intention of putting up a building according to the Gangtok plans. They will erect some ramshackle affair just to save money. They hate spending it,

²⁴ See also *Forbidden Journey, the Life of Alexandra David-Néel*, by Barbara M. Foster and Michael Foster (San Francisco, 1987), which refers to her visit to Gyantse. For a photograph of this extraordinary but controversial woman at Gyantse, see Ludlow’s photo albums and also *Le Tibet d’Alexandra David-Néel*, “album conçu et réalisé par Françoise Borin” (Paris, 1979), p. 195.

nothing pains them more” (6 April, 1924). Tibetan reluctance to spend money on education became a frequent refrain and a cause for deep frustration. “I don’t suppose there is a civilised country in the world that spends less on education than Tibet. I don’t see how there can be, as there is no other paid schoolmaster in the whole country save myself” (23 August, 1924).

This was not the only aspect of Tibet that Ludlow found shocking. He was appalled to find that one of his students whom he had examined by the British doctor at Gyantse had venereal disease. “I had Lehding examined today by Vance. It turns out that he is suffering (and has been for the last 2-3 months) from gonorrhoea! The boy can’t be more than 14. Surely there cannot be a country in the world where morals are more lax than Tibet, nor can there be a country where syphilis and gonorrhoea are more prevalent. A huge percentage of the population, rich & poor alike, are infected & the only person up here who can effect a cure is the M.O. here. There ought to be a regular campaign against these diseases”. He discussed Lehding with the Khenchung, who was “absolutely dead against the dismissal of the boy & says if it is done, other boys will voluntary [sic] get the disease in order to escape being sent to school. Did you ever hear of anything approaching this. Lehding denies any contact & when I told the Khenchung this he said it was quite common to get this disease in Tibet without having had sexual connections!! He told me, he himself, had suffered from the disease some years ago! He proposes to fine the boys Rs50 or Rs60 & devote the proceeds to giving a tiffin to the other boys!!” (24, 25 November, 1924).

Ludlow was also appalled at how dirty the boys were. One boy sent round a servant to request a holiday so that he could wash his hair. “The holiday was refused of course, but it shows that *washing* is an unusual event & one that looms large in the toilet of a Tibetan boy” (21 August, 1924). Another boy complained of suffering from sores. “He showed me his legs which were filthy & covered with them. I sent him round to Vance [the British medical officer], who made him strip. His sores were simply due to rank filthiness & I don’t suppose the boy had washed his body for a couple of years.” But Ludlow consoled himself with the fact that standards of hygiene had risen under his guidance. “Many of the boys really do wash & I cannot help noticing that almost all of the boys in my class are visibly cleaner than they used to be” (10 August, 1925).

Returning to the difficulties of getting the school started, for one thing, there was still no sign of any boys from Lhasa a month after

Ludlow arrived. He was told that as the Tibetan capital was a week's journey away, they would not arrive for almost three weeks. "The delay appears to be due to the fact that the parents of two high officials when ordered to send their sons to the school, objected, and were, in consequence, punished by the Dalai Lama... The delay is very annoying as the boys will hardly have a month before they have to return home for the New Year... Laden La told Rechok [Ludlow's teaching assistant] that the 20 boys would all be young boys of 9 to 10 and that they would be well looked after. Some of them would have as many as four servants! I sincerely hope they *will* be well looked after, as it is no small undertaking to transport boys of 9 or 10 across passes of 16,000 ft high. I don't think many English parents would view the proposal with much favour" (30 November, 1923).

It also soon became clear that there would only be about 25 pupils, not 100 as first envisaged, which Ludlow called "a miserably small effort & a great mistake," although at this stage he was still hopeful, adding that "It ought to grow however, & the building should be planned so it can be extended." (24 July, 1924). But this optimism did not last long. Three weeks later he received a letter from Bailey, who had discussed the school with officials in Lhasa. "The parents there apparently are all dead against it. They say that the Tibetan Govt are paying large sums on education! but they would rather pay these large sums for English teaching in their homes. This is of course utter nonsense" (15 August, 1924).

It became increasingly clear that senior Tibetan officials were unenthusiastic about the school, and some were downright hostile. On 31 October, 1925, Ludlow wrote to Foreign Secretary in the Indian Government, Sir Denys Bray. "I told him, in my opinion the school would close when my agreement terminates next year, unless there is a change of power in Lhasa or something unforeseen happens. I shall be disgusted if it does. Although the Indian Govt cannot, of course, coerce the Tibetan Govt to keep the school on, it would certainly be worth their while to bring all their powers of persuasion to bear on the Tibetan Govt; not only in the interests of Tibet itself, but for their own political advantage as well. Boys brought up on the lines I am bringing them up on, are not going to forget me or the teaching they receive at my hands."

But the Tibetan government became increasingly uncooperative. Ludlow was furious when one of his best pupils, Tsewang, was removed from the school in order to become a *tsi-truk* or apprentice in the Kashag (council of ministers) in Lhasa. "To take this kiddie away

from school at his age is simply crass stupidity. If the Kasha[g] think that a boy of 14-¹/₂ after two years with me is fit enough to leave school the sooner they close down this establishment the better. I will never work for them if they are going to pursue this policy. Am writing to the Major [Bailey] to tell him so. Either Tsewang comes back to school or I go home" (15 May, 1926).

The following month Bailey sent Ludlow a draft of a letter he was sending to the Dalai Lama saying Ludlow would stay on only under certain conditions, namely no more withdrawals of boys like Tsewang, the appointment of a proper Tibetan teacher and that steps were taken to ensure boys return punctually to school. "It won't be the Major's fault & I hope it won't be mine if the whole experiment collapses. If the Tibetan Govt allow it to collapse, they will be damn fools, for without some sort of education they can stir neither hand nor foot in the future" (12 June, 1926). Soon rumours were circulating among the boys that the school was going to close, and Ludlow felt that "There is every likelihood of this being true" (25 June, 1926). "Poor old Tibet ... Two courses are open to it. To shut itself up & endeavour to ward off all outside influences as in the past, or advance a little with the times. If it attempts the latter, education is imperative, & I am confident in these days it cannot attempt the former" (15 July, 1926).

The Khenchung also threw some light on political factors behind the closing of the school. He told Ludlow of a Tibetan army plot in 1924 to deprive the Dalai Lama of all temporal powers, in which Shape Tsarong, the progressive, modernizing head of the Tibetan army, and Laden La were involved. The Dalai Lama uncovered the plot, and normal punishment would have consisted of being sewn up in a bag and thrown into a river, Ludlow states. But the Dalai Lama was reluctant to lose Tsarong who had served him well, so he was simply dismissed and the other plotters were fined. "If this story of the Khenchung's is true, & I see no reason why it should not be, & indeed have heard vague rumours of the plot before this, it helps us to understand why my efforts in the school have been of no avail. If Laden La, a British subject & a servant of the Indian Govt, is such a damn fool as to mix himself up with a treasonable plot in a foreign country, no wonder suspicions as to the usefulness of a school run by me should prevail" (19 September, 1926).²⁵

²⁵ For a detailed study of the coup plot, see *Tibet 1924: A Very British Coup Attempt* by A.C. McKay (Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society [JRAS], 1997, 411-424).

With some justification, Ludlow felt that to use the boys' lack of progress in Tibetan as a reason for closing the school was quite unsupportable. He told the Khenchung that he had "repeatedly asked them [the Kashag] to send a qualified Tibetan teacher during the past two years & had told them that education in their own language was of primary importance." (16 September, 1926). This was very true. Ludlow was adamant that the purpose of the school was not to turn his pupils into imitation Englishmen, and he was determined that they received instruction in their own language and culture as well as in English language and customs.

But how this was to be done was a continual bone of contention, and agreement was never reached. The Tibetans proposed that six hours a day be devoted to the Tibetan language in addition to four hours of teaching by Ludlow. "A more idiotic proposal I've never heard of. With 4 hours with me & 6 hours with him [the Tibetan teacher] the boys would collapse in a month" (12 May, 1924). But the Khenchung insisted that at least four hours a day be devoted to Tibetan, although Ludlow believed "that if efficient methods were employed 2 hours should prove ample. I said I intended to give the boys only 2 hours instruction in English & if I found this time sufficient for my purpose a similar period ought to be sufficient for Tibetan. Finally, I said it was obvious we should never agree, that what we were trying to do was to run the school on English & Tibetan lines at the same time - a perfectly impossible task, that we had better put the whole case before the Kasha & ascertain their wishes" (28 May, 1924).

Ludlow had little respect for Tibetan teaching methods: "Any system more utterly dull & boring it is difficult to conceive. On a pillar in the room hangs a whip, the Tibetan method of enforcing discipline. These protracted school hours have got to be altered. Fancy boys of 8 years of age having to work 8 hours a day! Three with me & 5 hours on their haunches in the monastery doing nothing else but write & re-write copies" (21 May, 1924).

Ludlow knew no Tibetan before he arrived in Gyantse, so he faced a daunting problem in finding a way of teaching his pupils English. "I found myself up against as big a difficulty, I suppose, as has fallen to the lot of any master ... Somehow or other I had to teach a class of boys who were unable to understand a word I said. I knew no Tibetan. They knew no English ...

"Employment of the 'direct method' was the only way out of the difficulty and I started on it immediately," he wrote in his Report. "As time went on and the boys' vocabularies grew, things became easier,

and I soon began to realize that my very ignorance of Tibetan was in reality a blessing in disguise. The boys simply *had* to understand me...”

English conversation was a top priority, and Ludlow was proud to report that by the end of three years “most of the boys in my class were able to carry on an intelligible conversation on any ordinary topic.” Once his pupils understood enough English, he added geography to the curriculum, “a subject in which I found not only my boys, but all Tibetans, amazingly ignorant. They knew little enough of their own country and except for China, Japan, Russia, India and England, had never heard of the existance [*sic*] of an other. England, they thought, was somewhere in India. When I produced maps and a globe I suddenly discovered that all Tibetans believe the world to be flat, and I began to wonder if Galileos [*sic*] fate would be mine if I preached to the contrary ...,” he wrote in his Report.

Once their English was strong enough, Ludlow introduced his pupils to the *Arabian Nights* and Grimm’s *Fairy Tales*. By 1926, four years after the school opened, the more advanced boys were “making excellent progress in English. Their spelling and handwriting were excellent, they were beginning to talk with commendable fluency, and were deeply interested in such books as Robin Hood, William Tell, King Arthur’s Knights, etc. In arithmetic they had obtained a good grasp of fractions, decimals, and simple interested. They delighted in their progress. ‘Only the cleverest Tibetans,’ they said, ‘are able to do fractions, and nobody has ever heard of decimals.’”

Ludlow was particularly gratified with the progress his pupils made in arithmetic. He was appalled at the traditional Tibetan method of teaching the subject, which consisted of boys laying peach and apricot stones, small sticks and broken bits of china on the floor and singing the sums at the top of their voice. “The result, of course, is pandemonium. If a boy does his sum wrong he has to sing it all over again as he cannot find out where he went astray.”

“Of all the things I ever taught my boys nothing impressed them more than our system of arithmetic. They learnt in 6 months what would normally have taken them 6 years to accomplish according to their own method, and when the school finally closed down, they were doing sums beyond the comprehension of any Tibetan in the country.”

Although Ludlow was scathing about the traditional Tibetan educational system, as we have seen he was deeply respectful of Tibetan culture. In his Report, he describes how two young men aged about 18 and 20 turned up for school “dressed in most ill-fitting European clothes ... and asked leave to cut off their queues. Probably

they thought this was the correct thing to do, or imagined I should be pleased at their request. I disillusioned them without delay. I told them I had not come to Tibet to turn them into imitation English boys, and that they must attend school dressed in their national dress, and follow the custom of their country and not cut their hair.”

“The following day the elder boy, Piche, son of the Postmaster General, disobeyed my order and cut his hair, whereupon my wrath descended. I published a school rule forbidding European dress except when playing games, and ordered Piche to grow his hair again and affix his queue as soon as possible. I reported my action to the Kashag. They approved, and thereafter there was no further trouble in this connection.”

But for all Ludlow’s efforts and the boys’ hard work, the school was probably doomed from the beginning due to opposition by conservative senior officials and parental hostility. By June, 1924 he reported that “On the whole, I was satisfied with the progress that had been made. I now had a school of 25 boys, most of whom came from good families. Work and games had been organised and school terms fixed. The boys themselves seemed happy and contented and showed early promise of excellent work. On the surface matters seemed to be progressing smoothly and evenly, but from Lhasa came grave and disquieting rumours that all was not well.”

“Parents, for example, were actively hostile. They said they would rather pay for an English education in their homes than send their sons to Gyantse, and they pestered the Kashag with constant petitions for exemption.”

“In fact there seems very little doubt that at this time the Tibetan Government were seriously meditating the closure of the school.”

“That this did not happen was largely, if not entirely due to Col. Bailey’s visit to Lhasa. It was most opportune. He was able to explain matters in detail to the Kashag and offer sound advice. With Tibetans, more than with most people, it is the spoken word that carries weight. The written is often viewed with suspicion and carries but little conviction.”

Ludlow reported that the results of Bailey’s visit “were seen immediately” with the building of a new school. Ludlow had been pressing for a proper school building rather than the *dak* bungalow since he first arrived, but the next two years had been declared inauspicious for all building work, and even for repairs. Although the new school building was not ready until the following year, Bailey’s visit to Lhasa seemed to mark an important victory.

But the parents remained as unenthusiastic as ever. “One of the greatest difficulties I had to contend with during my stay in Tibet, was the gross slackness on the part of parents sending their sons back to school after the holidays were over.”

“Once the boys reached Gyantse they attended school with the utmost regularity. But the difficulty was to get them back.”

“At the commencement of every new term I could always count on two thirds of my boys being absent. They would return a month late, just before the end of term, or even miss out a term altogether.”

“I complained frequently to the Kashag, and sent them lists of absentees, but all to no purpose; ... Not that my boys were the only culprits. Unpunctuality prevails throughout the country ... What is time in Tibet? Of no consequence whatsoever,” Ludlow complained in his Report, echoing a frequent refrain in his diaries.

Not long after the go-ahead was given for the new school building, Tsarong Shape, commander-in-chief of the Tibetan army, arrived in Gyantse. Tsarong Shape was the only senior Lhasa official to visit the school, and as the leader of the modernising faction in the Tibetan government he was highly popular with British officials, including Ludlow. “He is not at all a typical Tibetan either in his views or in his habits,” Ludlow wrote. “He dresses in European style & has very little pomp & ceremony about him. He seems to be the *one* man who is really wide-awake in Lhasa” (22 September, 1924).

But the visit—the first of two—was largely fruitless, although Ludlow was unaware at the time of the unsuccessful plot in which Tsarong had been involved a few weeks earlier which had led to his loss of influence. As Ludlow put it in his Report, “When I first arrived in Gyantse in October 1923 there seems to have been a strong progressive party in Lhasa headed by Tsarong Shape, who viewed the school with favour and desired advancement on modern lines in other directions.

“In the summer of 1924 this party lost power and most of its principal adherents were deprived of office. I cannot say for certain what the causes were which led to the summary dismissal of the principal officers in this progressive party. But Tsarong Shape was deprived of his Commander-in-chiefship, and in him the school lost its most influential supporter.”²⁶

²⁶ Tsarong’s wife Rinchen Dolma Taring describes in her autobiography *Daughter of Tibet* (London, reprinted 1986, p. 90) how her husband learned that he had been sacked as they returned to Lhasa from Gyantse. A messenger arrived when they were only a day’s ride from the capital informing him that by order of the Dalai

Despite the construction of a new school building, the omens were getting increasingly bad for the future of the school. Shortly before Tsarong Shape's visit, Bailey told Ludlow "it seems to be touch and go" whether the Tibetan government kept it going and cited "(i) Expense ii) the opposition of parents & 3) the hostility of the powerful lama element which hates all innovation" (1 September, 1924).

But Ludlow was convinced that the school was essential if Tibet was to survive in the modern world. He told Shape Tsarong "that I had only one object in mind — the good of Tibet & that any proposals I made concerning the school, however strange they might seem, would be made with one purpose & one purpose only, viz in the interests of the boys themselves & their country" (23 September, 1924).

But he failed to convince the authorities of this, and his confidence in them was not increased when he discovered that one of his pupils was from a low-ranking family and not the son of an official as he had been told. "Apparently some official or other was ordered to send his son here & being unwilling to do so has bribed some poor individual in his neighbourhood to send his son as a substitute. This shows the estimation in which the school is held" (11 September, 1924).

The outlook got gloomier and gloomier over the next year. The following April, when Tsarong Shape and his wife again visited the school, Mary Tsarong commented that it would be a great pity if the Tibetan government abandoned the project. "I know of course, the continuance of the school is a very doubtful question, & this remark of Mary Tsarong confirms it" (4 April, 1925). The Khenchung's attitude tended to confirm Ludlow's worst fears. One day the Khenchung failed to turn up as arranged when they were to meet early one morning to photograph a monastery which was falling into disrepair, a matter that was causing the Dalai Lama some concern. Ludlow was furious that the Khenchung failed to keep the appointment: "Pretty bad manners on the Khenchung's part ... However, I am getting used to these little pin-pricks of his. If he thinks I am going to lose my temper, or chuck the whole thing in disgust, he is very much mistaken. During this year I want to lay such solid foundations that the school will carry on. I know the Khenchung does'nt [*sic*] want it to, & I know heaps of others of his persuasion don't want it to, but *I* want it to, & am going to do my damned'st to see that it does carry on" (10 August, 1925).

Lama, "as there is no anxiety in the country at the moment, so we need not a Commander-in-Chief." Rinchen Dolma Taring had attended an American mission school in Darjeeling and was known to Westerners as Mary.

Ludlow expressed his worries to Sir Denys Bray, telling him that “in my opinion the school would close when my agreement terminates next year, unless there is a change of power in Lhasa or something unforeseen happens. I shall be disgusted if it does. Although the Indian Govt cannot, of course, coerce the Tibetan Govt to keep the school on, it would certainly be worth their while to bring all their powers of persuasion to bear on the Tibetan Govt; not only in the interests of Tibet itself, but for their own political advantage as well. Boys brought up on the lines I am bringing them up on, are not going to forget me or the teaching they receive at my hands” (October 1925).

Meanwhile, Ludlow’s relations with the Khenchung continued to deteriorate. When Ludlow and his friend the medical officer, Major Vance, went to India in January 1926, the Khenchung decided to use Ludlow’s bungalow for a Tibetan new year tiffin. “Damnable impertinence on the Khenchung’s part! ... I know that he has not built the school, or my bungalow with any view to their being permanent school buildings. He is just waiting until my 3 years’ contract is over & then intends utilising them for other purposes. Will he succeed or won’t he? Shall I fail or shall I not? I wonder. It won’t be my fault if I do fail” (January 1926).

An outbreak of smallpox the following March was extremely worrying, but fortunately all the boys at the school had been vaccinated by Vance, and none contracted the disease, even though Ludlow was refused permission to isolate his pupils. However, many local people did contract this terrible disease, and Ludlow tells of a woman in the paper factory just behind the school who had smallpox, so he asked her to be removed without delay. The Khenchung agreed to this, but three or four children were living with her in the same room. “They have not been vaccinated, having been told by a lama that evil will befall them if they are. Lamas are the curse of this poor country. Hopelessly ignorant themselves, they prey on the superstitious fears of an equally ignorant laity. I am very concerned about my boys” (31 March, 1926).

Ludlow reports that the Tibetans “have a curious custom - revolting one - with regard to people who die of smallpox. They are not buried, burnt or cut up in the ordinary way, but the corpses are kept in a kind of mortuary until the epidemic ceases or abates. No wonder smallpox is the scourge of the country” (27 March, 1926).

But it was not all gloom, even at this especially worrying time. Ludlow visited the monastery at Gobshi, where he was told there are “two very strange things ... ‘the horn of a horse and a piece of the sky.’ I asked the head lama if I could see the latter, but he told me these

wonderful relics were under lock & key ... Great pity! I should very much have liked to have seen a piece of the sky" (29 March, 1926). Ludlow derived much amusement from certain Tibetan beliefs, sometimes at the Khenchung's expense. One day conversation somehow turned to eggs. "[The Khenchung] said cocks sometimes laid eggs!! & that he had a cock's egg at home. I think he was rather rattled because I roared with laughter at the idea. He said the eggs were small & round & when I suggested they were malformed hen's eggs he swore they were not & persisted in saying that cocks did sometimes lay eggs" (23 April, 1926).

Other superstitions Ludlow regarded as "simply heartbreaking." He set the boys an essay on Ngakpas (Tantric adepts), who, he was told, "keep off hail first by blowing conches, if this fails by blowing thigh bone trumpets, & finally by hurling stones at the sky with slings (ürdo). They can cure sores & ulcers by expectoration. One notorious Ngakpa at Shallu near Shigatse, having lived in a cave for 12 years is capable of passing his body through a small hole which no other human being can get his head through!!" (7 June, 1926).

At around this time an electricity plant was being brought in by mule from India to be installed in Lhasa by Ringang, one of the Tibetan youths who had been sent to Rugby School in 1912. By the time he had returned to Tibet in 1920 he had forgotten all his Tibetan, "But it soon came back to him & now he speaks it fluently. He is a good fellow & what I like about him is that he hasn't forgotten that he is a Tibetan" (September 1925).

But by the following year Ludlow was so generally despondent that he had little faith that the electricity plant would ever work. "Ringang's electric machinery is still going up to Lhasa in bits. I wonder if the plant will ever be pieced together, & still more if it will ever work for any length of time. The whole idea of an electric plant in Lhasa at the present stage of advancement in this country appears to be an act of utter folly" (5 June, 1926).

Despite the ill omens for the school, Ludlow approved a letter Bailey had written to the Dalai Lama stating the terms under which he was willing to renew his contract. He was prepared to relinquish further increments in pay "as long as I have enough to live on ... It won't be the Major's [Bailey's] fault & I hope it won't be mine if the whole experiment collapses. If the Tibetan Govt allow it to collapse, they will be damn fools, for without some sort of education they can stir neither hand nor foot in the future" (12 June, 1926).

By this time Ludlow had virtually given up hope for the school. "There is a rumour today among the boys that the school is going to close down. There is every likelihood of this being true" (25 June, 1926). "Of course the boys have done well but what does it all matter. The school will close in October, if not sooner, & then they will forget everything. Most disheartening" (23 June, 1926).

A couple of months later, Ludlow received the news he had been dreading. "I got a wire from Williamson to-day definitely [*sic*] stating that the school was to be closed. So that's it, in spite of all my efforts. Rather bad luck that the work which has attracted me more than any other I have ever had in my life, should be snatched away from me. I would rather have made a success of the school than have reached the topmost rung of the educational ladder in India ... Some of the elder boys, perhaps ... may have derived some benefit & retain some of what I have taught them. But most of the others will just forget everything. Poor kiddies! How can it happen otherwise" (20 August, 1926).

Williamson sent Ludlow a copy of a letter from the Kashag explaining their reasons for closing the school. The parents, the Kashag stated, "have been continually complaining that unless their boys have learnt their own language thoroughly in the beginning, the boys cannot do the Tibetan Govt service satisfactorily for the present & in future." They reiterated the proposal that the boys be taught English by Indian babus in their own homes, but stressed they had nothing but the greatest respect for Ludlow. "As regards a future teacher for future we request that Mr Ludlow himself may be kindly appointed when we require the service again. Please inform to the Great British Govt to whom we solely rely on & to Mr Ludlow so that they may not be disappointed with us."

Ludlow was predictably appalled. "Did any Govt ever write a more futile, disconnected, illogical letter? We want to close the school for the present, & then re-open it when the boys know enough Tibetan! As if there was any stage in a boy's education when it could be said 'Now you know enough Tibetan we will switch on to English etc.' Then also to expect me to come back & begin all over again. But this of course is mere soft soap. Once the school is closed they will not open it again unless forces compell [*sic*] them to do so. And forces *will* compel them to do so eventually. How on earth can Tibet have a decent army, its post & telegraphs, doctors, mechanics for their electric machinery etc & etc unless it gives its sons some measure of Western education. The whole thing makes me weep. The work of 2 1/2 years thrown away!

“It seems as though the Indian Govt can do nothing right for Tibet. We lend them Lhasa to train their police, & they allow all his good work in Lhasa to rot. We train officers for their army & they are dismissed wholesale. We try & run a school for them & they throw it to the dogs. Tibet plays like a child at new ideas, & like a child gets tired of its playthings & casts it aside. They will regret their decision one day when they are Chinese slaves once more, as they assuredly will be. China will recover in time and return” (28 August, 1926). The prescience of the last two sentences needs no comment.

Ludlow’s deep suspicion of the Chinese also comes out in his loathing for the Khenchung, who he was sure was delighted at the closure of the school despite his protestations to the contrary. “Consummate liar ... In his secret heart he hates the English, but he makes money out of us, is hospitable, gives good tiffins & until you know him, seems a charming personage. In reality he’s a cunning fox with pro-Chinese leanings. He knows I hate him, I know he hates me” (16 September, 1926).

Ludlow did not blame the Tibetans entirely for the closure of the school, however, and felt that the British authorities in India were just as culpable. “I got a letter from Sir Denys Bray at the Foreign Office today saying how upset he was at the closing of the school. I don’t know why he should be. I have warned him twice that there was every likelihood of it happening. I agree with Col. Bailey. A little more sympathy, a little more advice, & a little more encouragement from India would be appreciated by Tibetans & will save a deal of trouble later on. If Sir Denys Bray had proffered a little advice & encouragement a year ago the school could have been saved, but as far as I know he has not lifted a finger” (13 October, 1926).

Bailey agreed that the Foreign Office could have offered much more encouragement. He told Ludlow that “if the Foreign Office were to encourage him to go to Lhasa more often something might be done, & also if [*sic*] a little personal advice & support of Tibet at the present time might save a great deal of trouble later on. I quite agree. What on earth does the Tibetan Govt know about the school & its work, except from prejudiced reports from the Khenchung & others. They see no good accruing from it in the future. The present Lönchen or Prime Minister is only an inexperienced youth of 23” (9 October, 1926).

Not only was Ludlow bitter at the Indian Foreign Office and at Tibetan officials such as the Khenchung, he was also at a loss as to what he was going to do with himself after the school closed. “So I am just going to book my passage for mid-November, pack up all my

treasures & go home. What on earth I am going to do at home goodness only knows. What's the use of teaching English boys, when there are thousands of other people capable of doing the work far more efficiently. I must find something to do, but a humdrum existence at home has no attractions for me, I must confess" (28 August, 1926).

Ludlow was appalled by a letter from the Kashag telling the boys that they "must engage 'Babus' & sign an agreement not to forget what I have taught them, but to carry on with their work. The absurdity of it all! How on earth can a boy sign an agreement that he is not going to forget what has been taught him. Besides, where are they going to get the Babus from. In addition, why write to the boys, why not to their parents. The whole thing is simply pitiful" (25 October, 1926).

Ludlow was by now booked to return home on the P&O liner the *Ranchi*, leaving Bombay on 20 November. The very thought made him miserable. "I hate going down hill. It means India & the plains & heat & I loathe India & the plains & the heat after Tibet," he wrote on his trek near Yatung (7 November, 1926). "I'm *not* glad the gypsy life appeals to me & I hate the thought of the hurry & bustle of the west after the highlands of Tibet. I haven't had a watch for a year. What's the use of it? One knows when to get up, go to bed, have breakfast tiffin & dinner. What more do you want. I suppose I shall have to buy one in Calcutta, though, otherwise I shall get lost on the way home, miss the boat, or the *Rapide* from Marseilles or the beastly trains that start from Paddington at the exact second. What nonsense it all is, our complicated Western civilisation. Absolutely, hopelessly unnatural. Yet one can't help it or resist it. It's remorseless. We pursue a course of evolution just the same as plants or animals only a damn sight quicker to hither its all tending. I don't know" (8 November, 1926).

"This ends the whole business. I go down to Teesta tomorrow – Calcutta Bombay & home. I don't suppose I shall ever return to my work. If they wanted me I would come home from the ends of the earth to Tibet. But they won't want me." [last sentence deleted] (9 November, 1926).

Thus end Ludlow's Gyantse diaries, save for a note in which he says that in them "I have just scribbled down ideas as they entered my head, without any forethought or careful consideration whatsoever. Many errors have crept in. Perhaps one day the spirit may move me to revise & correct these errors, but for the present they must stand."

Although Ludlow was bitterly disappointed at the closure of the school, he won nothing but praise from Government of India officials. Ludlow's adversary, Denys Bray, commented, "The results were

surprising for the short time that the school was open and it is to be hoped that the Tibetan Government will return to the task when the present wave of reaction has spent itself. It is a great pity the school was not spared. But there were very strong forces working against it from the start and Ludlow has all the more reason to be proud of what he did manage to achieve.”²⁷

Frederick Williamson was even more effusive. “... The work done by Mr. Ludlow at Gyantse has been really excellent. I frequently visited the school and was very impressed with the progress made in so short a time. Some of the older boys now speak quite fluent English, though I fear most of them will rapidly forget it when the school is closed. Many of them are extremely intelligent, and would have proved most useful officials if their education had been continued. The thirty boys at the school provided quite a good football team and Mr. Ludlow’s influence in developing their characters was of the very best ... most of them will never entirely forget the impressions they have formed by associating with British officials, and the characters of all of them have benefited by Mr Ludlow’s influence.”

Williamson noted that “English education and progress are not popular with the clerical party [in Lhasa]” but nevertheless added that “The abolition of the school does not, I think, denote any new political developments. It is possible that the Tibetan Government may have been influenced by its expense, although they have not referred to it.” He also noted that “the Lhasa parents have disliked the school from the first, as they do not like parting from their boys for long periods. The opposition has not been so marked in the case of the boys from Shigatse, possibly because their parents are more afraid of the Government at Lhasa.”²⁸

The one person who fully supported Ludlow was his old friend Bailey, and Ludlow could not have been more grateful. “Nobody could

²⁷ Bray, Foreign and Political Dept, Delhi to Bailey, Sikkim, 31 January, 1928, L/P&S/11/208/4835. Ludlow continued to blame Bray long after the school closed. “Denys Bray broke my heart. He could have saved the school if he had instructed you to bring pressure to bear on the T.G. [Tibetan Government]. He was sadly lacking in foresight in this respect” (letter to Bailey, April 14, 1944). Bailey also had little time for Bray, see Swinson (op. cit.), pp. 199-200.

²⁸ F. Williamson, ICS, Political Officer in Sikkim, to Foreign Secy to Govt of India, Delhi, Gangtok, 18 October, 1926, ref. Ludlow knew Williamson well, although as noted above he did not much like him. On Williamson, who died in Lhasa in 1935 and was buried in Gyantse, see *Memoirs of a Political Officer’s Wife in Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan* by Margaret D. Williamson (London, 1987). The book includes photographs of Ludlow.

have helped me more than you have, and I only wish I could have repaid you better. I have failed, but I have done my best, although it has been a rather poor 'best', I am afraid (letter to Bailey, 10 August, 1926).

Ludlow was awarded the OBE in 1927 for his efforts in Gyantse, and thereafter set up a base in Srinagar, from whence he embarked on botanical expeditions in the Himalayas over the next 20 years.²⁹ In addition he inspected the Shyok dam, a remote natural barrage high in the Karakoram mountains that seemed on the verge of collapse, followed by an ornithological expedition to Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang) in 1929-30.

The main purpose of the school was to increase British influence in Tibet through the students, who, it was hoped would eventually become powerful officials in the Tibetan government. To this extent, the school was a failure and few if any of Ludlow's officials seem to have exerted a significant degree of influence in their country's affairs, just as the boys who were sent to Rugby "made no significant contribution in later life to the development of Tibet."³⁰ Evidence of this is the fact that only four former pupils of Ludlow are listed in the contemporary official publication *Who's Who in Tibet*, and none merits more than one star in a scale of zero to three stars to indicate degree of power or influence he exerted.³¹

But despite the political failure of the school and all the frustrations along the way, Ludlow would look back at those days with great affection. He once bestowed on the Ladakhis the ultimate compliment, calling them "The best natured people I have ever struck & on a par with the Tibetans at Gyantse" (11 July, 1932). He would occasionally hear from or meet up with former pupils. In Skardu in Kashmir he received a letter from Lhawang Tobgye in Lhasa: "He says he is still keeping up his English & asks me to send him a copy of stories from the Arabian Nights. He says the Dalai Lama ordered Ringang to conduct an examination in English of all my boys resident in Lhasa. Lhawang said with pride that 'he came out top' ... Lhawang has

²⁹ On Ludlow's botanical expeditions with George Sherriff, see Fletcher (op. cit.) and also the BBC Scotland documentary, *A Dream of Poppies*, directed by David Martin, 1980.

³⁰ *The McMahon Line* by Alastair Lamb (London, 1966), p. 603.

³¹ *Who's Who in Tibet*, 1938 and 1949, confidential Government of India Press publication, Calcutta. The entry for Lhawang Tobgye (Surkhang II), for example, states that he "knows a little English", and a handwritten note in one of the OIOC copies says he "proceeded to Peking, China, as leader of Youth League delegation in March 1953."

tremendous character & I expect one day he will grow up to be a powerful man in Tibet” (30 May, 1928). A few years later he met his star pupil, Sonam, in Kalimpong, and was pleased to see that “He has not altered much, & has remembered his English astonishingly well” (19 November, 1934).

There were occasional reports that the Tibetan authorities wished to reopen the school. The Trade Agent at Gyantse reported in 1932 that “It has been decided to start an English School in Lhasa and the building has already been erected. The Tibetan Government are anxious to obtain the services of Mr. F. Ludlow who was in charge of the school at Gyantse, as head”³². Nothing became of this plan, but it did not completely evaporate. Ludlow wrote in 1937 that “I learnt last year that the Tibetan Govt meditated re-opening the Gyantse School. I am afraid the job has no attractions for me now (even if I was wanted). They ought to have a younger man - [Spencer] Chapman for instance if he would take it. I’m too old to live at 13,000’ for any prolonged period ...” (letter to Bailey, 29 August, 1937).

Ludlow’s explorations at this time seem not to have been entirely for natural history purposes. Alastair Lamb notes that in October 1932 he and Williamson reached Nilang, east of Dehra Dun, as part of an investigation of a territorial dispute, and also comments that Ludlow and Sherriff “combined British official or semi-official service with apparently private travels in Tibet for purposes of botanical research ... During the 1930s the two men carried out a series of epic journeys in Tibet, many of them along the northern side of the McMahon Line, ostensibly solely in search of flowers. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that there was also a political motive behind their wanderings.”³³

During the Second World War, Ludlow was the British envoy in Lhasa, and it is hard to see how he could have been appointed to a senior and highly sensitive post without considerable political and diplomatic experience, although records of this are elusive.³⁴ Ludlow was appointed to this exalted position in 1942, his main task being to try to persuade the Tibetan government to allow Allied supplies to pass

³² L/P&s/12/4/66.

³³ *Tibet, China and India* by Alastair Lamb, pp. 372, 418.

³⁴ As Lamb notes (op. cit., p. 419), botanical expeditions which also had a political motive “could well leave little or no archival trace ... A great deal could be achieved by a private word here or there. No formal instructions or records were needed. The Political Officer in Sikkim would do all he could to guarantee assistance for his close friends from the Tibetans without being told to do so by the Government; and Government would learn of any interesting items of news from the two travellers [Ludlow and Sherriff] by informal channels.”

through their country into China. He was unsuccessful in this difficult task and he did not find being a diplomat nearly as satisfying as being a teacher. There is no room to go into detail here, but Ludlow disliked Lhasa from the very beginning and found Tibetan government officials difficult to work with. His residence in the Dekyilingka palace was extremely dirty, and he had little time for botany or ornithology. One bright spot was getting to know the new Dalai Lama, then a young boy. He visited the Potala in February, 1943: "This was my first sight of the child potentate, & I must confess he rather appealed to me. A cheery, rosy-faced child, bubbling over with mirth & goodwill to all people ..."

As British envoy in Lhasa Ludlow's suspicions of Chinese intentions towards Tibet intensified. He told Surkhang, a senior Tibetan official,³⁵ that "I disagreed with the present policy of holding up all supplies for the Chinese Govt. I said it was a great mistake & I wasn't at all certain that the T.G. [Tibetan Government] were doing just what the Chinese Govt wanted them ie giving the Chungking Govt a good excuse for aggressive action after the war" (5 April, 1942). After he left Lhasa he became even more alarmed. When exploring in Bhutan in 1949, he wrote: "I heard on the wireless that the Chinese Communist Army had reached Sining and had announced that in due course they would proceed to 'liberate' Tibet which was an integral part of the Chinese Empire! Poor old Tibet. I wonder if America, Britain, or India will take up cudgels on her behalf, or just stand still & watch her gobbled up ..." (3 September, 1949).

Although the Gyantse school was the first English school in Tibet it was not quite the last. In 1944, the Tibetan government asked for an English schoolmaster to be appointed for such a school in Lhasa as soon as possible. "We are also anxious to meet request generously and quickly at time when Chinese contemplate approach through Education. Condition of success will be selection of man likely to appeal to Tibetans as worthy successor to Ludlow," wrote Sir Olave Caroe.

But it was noted that "The more conservative of the officials will have nothing to do with the proposal, but there are some who would like it." Hugh Richardson commented that "to avoid conservative criticism of the school, the Tibetan Government hoped that English habits of dress etc should be avoided. I reminded the Tsikhang that one of the first things Mr Ludlow did when his school was opened at

³⁵ Surkhang Surpa was the father of Ludlow's student Lhawang Tobgye. Surkhang and his three sons are attacked for being pro-British in the Chinese propaganda book *Tibet Transformed* by Israel Epstein (Beijing, 1983), p. 44.

Gyantse in 1926 [*sic*] was to report to the Tibetan Government certain boys who had cut their hair.”

The school officially opened on 31 July, 1944 under the headmastership of a Mr Ronald Parker, who, like Ludlow, was brought in from India. But there was “vocal opposition” from the abbots of Lhasa’s two biggest monasteries, Drepung and Sera, and “The possibility that the Chinese instigated the opposition through pro-Chinese (Khampa) elements in the monasteries, cannot be ruled out.”

Basil Gould reported in December that “Progress made in 4 months of half time work (mornings being taken up with Tibetan lessons) and in spite of interruptions and uncertainty of future is remarkable.” But just a week later, Sherriff, who had succeeded Ludlow in Lhasa, reported that the school was to close after just a few months.³⁶

After resigning as head of the British mission in Lhasa, Ludlow continued with his botanical explorations. He passed through Gyantse for the last time in 1946, and was “glad to reach the comfort of the dak bungalow” where he listened to Princess Elizabeth’s wedding, “which came through splendidly. The BBC, I must say, are pretty efficient.” But he was appalled to find the European cemetery “in a shocking state,” and that the graves of his friend Patterson and of Henry Martin, the veteran BTA Chief Clerk, had been lost. “It is obvious that no attention has been paid to this cemetery & no repairs have been carried out for years. It is a disgrace to the BTA’s Gyantse or whoever is responsible for its upkeep” (16, 20, 21 November, 1946).

His trip to Bhutan in 1949 was Ludlow’s 12th and last expedition in the Himalayas, but he was philosophical about this: “However, I must not grumble. Fortune has been very kind to me during the last quarter of a century” (3 November, 1949). It was now time for him to return to Britain, reluctantly at the age of 64. Earlier he had written that “I have only 3 uses for London (a) the Natural History Museum (b) a decent theatre (but it must be a seat in the stall where my knees don’t touch the row in front) (c) a lobster mayonnaise at Scots, or a roast beef lunch at Simpsons” (letter to Bailey, 3 June, 1930). Ludlow must have

³⁶ LP&S/12/4216, file 44. Tibetan opposition to the school was reflected in a popular verse current at the time: “In the holy place of Lhasa is that English school. Till our boots split we must go there, as their unwilling tool!” (cited in David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson: *A Cultural History of Tibet*, 1968, revised reprint, 1986, p.263). For a discussion of the Lhasa school from a Chinese Communist perspective see <http://www.zytzb.org.cn/xizhang/d2q-2000-e/past.htm>. For an article on the school in Chinese, by the rehabilitated aristocrat Lhalu Cewang Dorje (b. 1913), see <http://www.ctibet.org.cn/2000/00-2/xizangwangshi.htm>.

found it an enormous wrench to return home, but he found a congenial job in the botany department of the Natural History Museum where he worked quietly until retirement. He was an unobtrusive but popular member of the department, and colleagues recall enjoying going out with him for lavish curries. Ludlow never married, and colleagues whom I interviewed knew little or nothing about his personal life. His death in 1972 earned him an obituary in *The Times*,³⁷ but he always shunned publicity and he has been largely forgotten since then.

But he has not been forgotten by the Tibetans — or the Chinese. A report on Tibet under Chinese rule by a Tibetan exile group praises “an intrepid Englishman, Frank Ludlow” for his efforts at Gyantse, and adds: “Had the school flourished from 1924 [*sic*] until the coming of the Chinese in 1949 it seems reasonable to assume that at least several hundred Tibetans, many of them in powerful families, would have possessed the framework to recognize that the peril Tibet faced in 1949 was of a qualitatively different order to any dangers faced by Tibet in the past. It is also possible that such people might have been able to alert the Dalai Lama to the fact that Tibet was unlikely to survive unless helped by the international community and that all attempts to compromise with Communist China, inspired as it was by the zeal, intolerance and dogma of a missionary faith, would be unproductive.”³⁸

The official Chinese view is of course very different. A propaganda book on the changes in Tibet since the Communist takeover describes how education for all had been achieved by 1965, while only the sons of the richest families went to school before Liberation. “Among nobles’ sons some got special instruction so they could become *kashag* officials, others were taught by tutors at home and a few, the very richest, were sent to a school maintained by the British in Gyangzê, or to India and even to Britain. Whatever education there was served the interests of the feudal ruling class, or of the imperialists, who used it to gain influence in Tibet’s ‘top families.’ Even at that, every start at modern secular education was soon choked off by feudal obscurantism, lay and secular.”³⁹

³⁷ *The Times*, March 27, 1972.

³⁸ *Tibet the Facts* (Tibetan Young Buddhist Association, Dharamsala, 2nd revised ed., 1990), n. 408, p. 382.

³⁹ *Tibet Transformed* by Israel Epstein (Beijing, 1983), p. 335. A recent Chinese-language article on the school is equally scathing. It describes how “because the school made every effort to inculcate the students with Western culture and to nurture pro-British elements it roused unhappiness among the broad ranks of the Tibetan monks and people and stirred up a tide of resistance. The 13th Dalai Lama saw through the ambitions of the plots laid by the British and following the wishes of

Despite his deep suspicion of the Chinese, Ludlow would surely have agreed with the last sentence. Nothing gave him more satisfaction than his achievements at Gyantse, and he remarked to the Maharajah of Bhutan that his time in Tibet and Bhutan “had been the happiest days of my life and that the recollection of them would be the solace of my old age” (3 August, 1949).

the people ordered the closure of the school which had been open for three years” (*Xizang Lishi Wenhua Cidian [Dictionary of Tibetan History and Culture]*, Wang Yao and Chen Qingying, eds, Lhasa and Hangzhou, 1998, p. 126).