

THE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March 2012

Number 17

Chairman's Report

2011 was again a very difficult year for restructuring the organisation. Since the AGM held in October last year, we have had many discussions on unresolved matters and as a consequence, we decided to replace key personnel. Please see the article about Jeff Bateman's introduction as new Deputy Chairman.

We have, however some good news as well.

Since I, myself visited Shonai City, Yamagata Prefecture in November 2010 (please see the previous newsletter in which I wrote about the 31st Division, General K Sato), I was invited to participate in the Kohima Memorial Service at York Minster in April 2011.

It was a great pleasure for me to attend such a distinguished occasion where there were many British Burma Veterans and their families paying their respects to war victims.

After the Christian service in York Minster, we moved to a garden where the Kohima memorial is situated. It was a fine day and good for me to be amongst veterans paying their respects at the memorial.



The reception in the garden

I also joined the British Kohima 2nd division veterans at Imphal barracks for a reception including their wives and relatives. A veteran of the Kohima battle who I sat next to at the table told me, how much he used to hate all Japanese and never allowed his wife to buy any Japanese products, particularly a Japanese car. He had a change of heart regarding Japanese people after seeing the suffering caused by the earthquake and subsequent massive tsunami of March 2011 that hit the east coast of Japan. He said to me when he watched the TV news report, he cried out "Poor Bastards!" referring to the Japanese victims. On seeing this disaster he donated money to the Tsunami Appeal. He proudly told me that the amount he donated was the largest amongst his friends. His stance against Japanese also changed because of all the many conflicts and wars that occurred over the last 60 years, which shows that any country can do unspeakable things to other fellow human beings.

PROJECT A: Link with Shonai-City and Kohima Museum in York



Brian Ward, Akiko McDonald, Bob Cook

After meeting all the people on my trip to York, I started to think about a project to make a link between Shonai-city, in Japan and Kohima Museum in York.

I spoke to Mr. Bob Cook who is the curator of Kohima Museum in York, about my idea to promote ties between Shonai-city and his museum. He was very enthusiastic about my proposal and agreed to cooperate to push the project forward. He also became a BCS member. (See his introduction article) I am also communicating with Mr Okuyama who is the deputy mayor of Shonai-city. They also enthusiastically approved the project proposal. They are planning to visit York sometime this year to establish stronger ties.

PROJECT B: Japanese Memorial Erection at Sangshak Battlefield in India

We received an inquiry via BCS member, Chris Johnson from Mr Rajeshwor Yuman who lives in North Eastern India about the names of dead Japanese soldiers. Rajeshwor produced a documentary film about the Sangshak Battle. Sangshak is located between Kohima and Imphal just on the Indian side of the border with Burma. We have this copy of the DVD, so if anyone wishes to see it, please let me know and I will post you one. Rajeshwor now also became a new member of BCS. When he was making the documentary, he met an old Manipur veteran; his name is Mr Shishak who fought against the British Indian Army. At the Battle of Sangshak, many soldiers perished including 400 Japanese soldiers, but there isn't any memorial. Mr Shishak wishes to erect a memorial to Japanese soldiers and he gave his land to build it.

Sangshak villagers raised the funds to buy the memorial stone for this. Rajeshwor is asking if BCS can help to obtain the names of Japanese soldiers killed in this battle so that they can engrave them on the stone. (See Photo) I have been contacting people in Japan, but I could not get all the names just yet. I am still trying to get a result by contacting a Japanese local politician who may be able to help obtain the names of the soldiers. Once we get the names, the people of Sangshak will be able to have a memorial service.

Once the names have been found, I would like BCS to organise a pilgrimage from both countries to attend the service. There is already a British Commonwealth memorial/cenotaph located on the hill about 200 metres above Mr Shishak's land. It would be a wonderful opportunity to visit both sites and have a memorial service for both nations. We need to do more fund raising to realise this project.

PROJECT C: Making of Bibliography

Regarding the 9 boxes of historical war documents and albums, which the late Masao Hirakubo left with me, we will make a bibliography and hold an exhibition sometime in the future; Professor Ryugo Matsui of Ryukoku University and Dr Kyoko Murakami of Bath University have kindly agreed to help with this work. Ryukoku University has now given 1,000,000 yen (nearly £8,000) for this project. Prof. Matsui is coming to the UK this year in the spring time to start this project with Dr Murakami. We need more bilingual volunteers to complete cataloguing the documents.

The Honorary Secretary's Report

2011 has been an eventful and particularly a trying year for BCS with a lot of changes for good and bad. I shall touch to all of those positives as well as negatives in the course of explaining what had happened throughout the year in 2011 below in chronological order.

Meetings:

1. 1st failed attempt of AGM in May 201 due to lack of member's attendance (less than 10). But, it was quickly switched to informal Committee Meeting there then, as there were enough Committee Members present. (6 present)
2. Informal Mini meeting was called after work hours, to have some brain storming for a few issues.
3. Emergency Committee Meeting was taken place a few days earlier in prior to the AGM meeting to discuss the urgent issues, including the Constitution.
4. AGM to place on 17th September 2011.
14 members including Miss Tomoyo Nakao participated through internet attended. Many apologies for absence received from members who were unfortunately could not attend due to a prior engagement or ill or simply too frail to travel. It was a lengthy and heated meeting at a time due to the new 3 projects Akiko brought in (two of which she's engineered) and heated, because of some issues concerns BCS fund. But, there were some bright and exciting news at the AGM were:
 - 4.1 Gained 2 brand-new members. One is Mr Jeff Bateman who is now our new Deputy Chairman and the other is Mr Bob Cook, who is a curator of British Kohima Museum in York.
 - 4.2 New projects 1, 2 & 3 have been brought in by Akiko – Please see the chairman's report.
 - 4.3 We had also a distinguished and interesting Speaker, Mr Bob Cook who is now BCS member as mentioned earlier.
5. After the AGM meeting, a regular mini informal gathering was suggested by some members, and the Chairman, Akiko is now regularly holding such a gathering at a café or Nippon Club in West End in the afternoon of normal week day. The idea is to get to know each other as well as familiarising younger members with BCS's movement – i.e. increasing the understanding of the projects currently progressing. There's no formality and anyone (old members, new one and potential ones are welcome) can walk in and join in the conversation.
6. Unfortunately though, we lost 2 long standing members under ** the regrettable circumstances, especially, when one of them was the Treasurer. But, now we quickly replaced the post with the new Treasurer, Mrs Tokuko Maertin in its place, who has a strong background of accounting career for many years. And the Chairman and I are very much looking forward to working with her, to rebuild a long lasting trust for the sake of the stronger BCS.

7. With regard to the numbers of BCS membership, naturally, we are sadly losing the Veterans every year due to their age - this year alone we found out 5 such veterans left us for eternal peace. But, at the same time, we are gaining the second and the third generation of young people with a strong interest in what BCS believes in and is trying to do. The current total No. of BCS Membership is 47 + and is steadily increasing. And, our aim is to increase membership through referral and/or direct recruit through networking for the better future.

In conclusion, I would like to finish my report in a high note by stating my observation of BCS as; positive and exciting with the prospect of new development and the eventual result (positive) from the projects and, above all, having new and younger generation of people, yet still share the same value in life with the older generation, on board is an strong encouragement and definitely looks to give a positive effect to us all!! In view of this positive effect, a little help from all members, in order to increase younger generation member would be very much appreciated.

Hideko Hayasaka
The Honorary Secretary
The Burma Campaign Society

** “the regrettable circumstance: this will be explained to all members in a separate letter later.

Jeff Bateman, our new Deputy Chairman

My name is Jeffrey David Bateman and I am originally from Cardiff in South Wales. Everybody calls me Jeff apart from my mother who will soon be 89. Being a Welshman I used to play Rugby and still enjoy watching the six nations.

I have been a member of BCS for a few years now and hearing of the work of the late Mr. Masao Hirakubo originally inspired me. I was pleased to be able to meet him before he passed on.

My Father was an NCO with the South Wales Borderers and served in India, Burma (The Arakan Offensive) and later in Sumatra after the end of the War. He never spoke so much about his time in Burma and what I have found out has been though my family as my father passed away in 1967 from an unusual Blood poisoning (aplastic anemia), however we think that this may have also been due to his Malaria from his time in the jungle in Burma.



Jeff Bateman

He had a great respect for the Solders he was fighting with and against. I think you could say he had a respect for life itself. Even though his brother was a POW in Singapore I never new or heard of him speaking badly of Japanese people.

For my own part I have always been interested in various aspects of Japanese culture. Practicing Judo and a Teenager; getting interested in Bonsai, Zen and other things Japanese more recently I spent some time learning to play the Japanese flute (shakuhachi) which is used in both traditional music and as a means of meditation.

I started my professional life as a Metropolitan Police Cadet. I have worked in a number of fields including Sales and Marketing and have lived and travelled extensively, in particular in the USA and UK. I currently work as a counsellor, therapist, public speaker and life coach as well as being involved in a number voluntary organisations, local, national and international. I hope that my experience and knowledge can be of service to BCS in some way. It is good that we have both British and Japanese as well as others engaged in the various projects we are planning and working on. I see myself as one of the second generation and I hope that one day my children may be involved in further work of a similar nature.

I see BCS as a one of many ‘bridge building’ projects where we can get to know people of different cultures and backgrounds. Those that were once our enemies can become good friends. Even if we cannot become good friends we can make steps that are moving in the right direction. I am married with three sons and my wife is from Austria.

Bob Cook, curator of the 2nd British Division Kohima Museum Trust

My name is Robert Melville Christopher Cook (Bob). I have 3 sons, a stepdaughter and 3 grandchildren. I am 63 years old and currently I own and run a Guest House in York with my wife Claire.

Prior to this, I was a soldier in the Royal Signals. I enlisted into the army at the age of 15 years and 3 months and served for 34 years and 3 months. I started my service career as a 'boy soldier' and became a Radio Technician until I reached a particular rank and switched from technical to Stores and equipment management and accounting.

On further promotion to Warrant Officer, I became a management supervisor, commonly known as 'Sergeant-Major'. It was at this rank that I came to the end of my service career and moved into the Guest House in 1998. In 2003 I was selected to be the Branch Secretary for my local branch of the Royal Signals Association (RSA) in York. In 2004 I took on the role of representative for the Northern Region of England on the National Council for the RSA. A role which I carried out for just under 3 years

In 2006, I was elected as Chairman of my local branch of the Royal British Legion, a position I held for 2 years.



Kohima museum: The Curator Bob Cook and Assistant Brian Ward

In 2008, I volunteered (and was accepted) to be the curator of the 2nd British Division Kohima Museum Trust. I was able to take the museum into full accreditation in just 6 months. I remain as the curator at this time. In 2009, I was invited to accompany the then General Officer Commanding 2nd Division and his party on a formal visit to the Battlefields and War Cemeteries of Kohima and Imphal. It is because of being the curator that I have come to the attention of BCS, a situation I am quite happy with.

Mutual Link with Shonsai City Library

In mid-2010, I was approached by Akiko McDonald to contribute a written greeting to the townspeople of Shonsai city on the occasion of her visit to the final resting place of General Sato – the Commanding General of the 31st Division of the Japanese Imperial Army. I was happy to contribute in this way and on her return Akiko outlined to me her plan for a greater and stronger link between Japan and the United Kingdom through the medium of the BCS. I was asked to participate in a proposed Link between the Kohima Museum in York and the Shonsai City library in Japan. This library holds a number of articles and documentation belonging to the late Gen Sato. It is felt that the link would be a good opportunity to exchange good-will and information to the great benefit of both countries in general and the 2 institutions in particular.

Sadly the Tsunami in Japan and the nuclear disaster which resulted has put these plans on a back burner for the moment.

COMING EVENTS.

31 March 2012, Free Event: Discussion meeting at Nippon Club,
2nd floor, Samuel House, London , 6 St. Albans Street, London SW1Y 4SQ.

Programme:

11:00: Screening

Documentary film – “Granddad, I am in England” regarding Burma Campaign
“Save the Enemy” TV Documentary
Anglo-Japan Joint Music Concert

12:00: Lunch Break

13:30: “War in the Wilderness”, Chindits in Burma, Speaker, Tony Redding

15:00-16:00:Q&A, Discussion and Get to Know Each OtherBCS

The Newsletter is edited and produced by Jeff Bateman and Dr Lucien Chocron

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