

ANDRÉ ALEXANDER

MESSAGE FROM PRINCESS HOPE LEEZUM

About two years ago I received a letter from Chogyal Wangchuk mentioning that the wall paintings at the Tsuglakhang—Gangtok’s royal temple—had become very dark due to the natural aging of the varnish which had been applied as well as from the smoke of the butter lamps that had been kept burning after the death of Crown Prince Tenzing and the late Chogyal, Palden Thondup Namgyal.

Chogyal Wangchuk wasn’t sure how to clean the walls but suggested some traditional methods including using a dough made of barley flour (*tsampa*)—the way we used to clean silk brocade in the old days—sort of like our version of dry cleaning.

I first got to know of Dr André Alexander through Dr Saul Mullard. I had mentioned my dilemma in getting the walls cleaned at Tsuglakhang to Saul and he very kindly told me he had met this conservation expert at a symposium and maybe he would have some suggestions. Saul had André Alexander’s contact information and we emailed him on the spot.

I really had no idea at that point how the face of *gonpa* conservation in Sikkim would change by that one simple email and the great gift André Alexander would give us in teaching us how to restore and protect our monasteries. I didn’t even quite realise how renowned André was in this field; nor his compassion as well as his passion for preserving our culture through architecture.

I wrote to André of Tsuglakhang and our intention of cleaning the walls and perhaps doing some repair work to the cracks that had developed over time and he gave some helpful tips over email. I asked if it was possible for him to please come and see the Tsuglakhang and give some first hand help and he replied that he really would like to but was very busy with his Ladakh Museum project and also his area of interest was in very very old structures and as Tsuglakhang was less than 100 years, it wasn’t really his field. I repeated the invitation but it wasn’t till I threatened to rub all the walls down with a large ball of *tsampa* dough that he finally gave in.

When André arrived in Sikkim and saw the Tsuglakhang the first thing he said was, “as so many of the old Buddhist temples no longer exist, this is perhaps some of the finest examples of Central Tibetan wall art left in the world today”, and agreed to take on the project.

Now at Tsuglakhang, the once hidden paintings are visible again, the cracks in the walls have been consolidated using the original formula for the mortar, and the entire building stabilised and reinforced through the posts.

More than just the Tsuglakhang though, André has left us in Sikkim with a legacy of preservation and conservation tools which we can apply to all our old monasteries. Now we know how to care for our rich architectural heritage and culture without resorting to new constructions and cement. And although André Alexander is no longer with us, his compassion and knowledge will remain as a testament to his life for all those who were ever fortunate enough to have met him.



Dr André Alexander
working on the wall murals at the Tsuglakhang in Gangtok

RICHARD KEITH SPRIGG (1922-2011)

HELEEN PLAISIER

With the death of Richard Keith Sprigg on September 8, 2011, the Himalayan scholarly community has to say farewell to this pioneering intellectual, who was a generous mentor and engaging friend to many of us. Keith Sprigg remains well-known for his important contributions to Tibetan, Lepcha, Limbu, Burmese and other languages, as well as for his Firthian approach to phonology applied to the field of comparative Tibeto-Burman linguistics.

Keith Sprigg was born in Melton Mowbray in the United Kingdom on March 31, 1922 and completed his first academic degree in Cambridge in 1942, where he received a First Class Honours in the Classical Tripos. He joined the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and between 1943 and 1947 he served in the UK, India, Ceylon, Singapore and Japan. During this eventful period, he managed to pursue his linguistic studies and obtained War Degrees, a B.A. in 1944 and an M.A. in 1947.

In 1948, Keith started working at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London as a Lecturer in Phonetics. He studied Tibetan in Kalimpong and Gyantse, during visits in 1949 and 1950, during which time he was mentored by David Macdonald. This visit not only kindled a long-lasting interest in both Tibetan and Lepcha, but in Kalimpong, Keith also met his future wife Ray Margaret Williams, a great-granddaughter of David Macdonald. Keith and Ray married in 1952 in Melton Mowbray.

During 1951 and 1952, the Lepcha scholar Karphoo Tamsang from Kalimpong worked with Keith on the Lepcha language at the School of Oriental and African Studies. In 1955 and 1956, Keith and Ray went on an expedition to Nepal to do fieldwork for six months. The country had not been open to foreign visitors for long as they travelled from eastern Nepal to Kathmandu, which made for an interesting and impressive journey. Keith was able to collect abundant material on the languages he had become interested in, such as Limbu, Newari, Bantawa, Sherpa and Tamang.

Following this long fieldtrip, Ray and Keith had two children, David, born in 1957, and Maya, who was born in 1958. Keith continued to work at SOAS, and the first fieldtrip would be followed by many others, to Sikkim, Pakistan and India. He completed a Ph.D.

in the 'Phonetics and Phonology of Tibetan (Lhasa dialect)', and was promoted to Reader in Phonetics at SOAS in 1968.

When Ray suffered a stroke on New Year's Eve of 1975, she remained partially paralysed and her health was fragile. In 1980, Keith took early retirement and he and Ray settled in Kalimpong. In Kalimpong, Dr Sprigg became somewhat of an institution. He was much-liked by the local residents, to whom he would often address an elaborate greeting in their native language, which left some of them dazzled even after many years of doing so. Many scholarly guests from all over the world came to seek his advice and guidance, or simply to enjoy the delightful company of him and his wife. Those who did not know him personally in Kalimpong recall the sound of Keith's bagpipes, which travelled far in the hills and was familiar to many.

In 1982 he was awarded a Litt.D. by the University of Cambridge, and on his 65th birthday a Festschrift was presented to him (D. Bradley, M. Mazaudon and E.J.A. Henderson, eds, 1988, *Prosodic Analysis and Asian Linguistics to honour R.K. Sprigg*, Pacific Linguistics). A bibliography of his work up to 1987 can be found in his Festschrift. For his work on Lepcha language, culture and history, Keith was awarded the K.P. Tamsang Lepcha Language and Literary Award in 1996. He was made a life member of the Indigenous Lepcha Tribal Association in 1997, who refer to him as 'a champion of the Lepchas'.

When Ray died in 1999, Keith returned to the UK and initially stayed with his children. Keith later remarried and lived in Crowborough, Sussex, with his second wife Elizabeth. In his later years, Keith was struck by macular degeneration, but although his eyesight slowly deteriorated, he kept working and completed a dictionary of Balti, which was published in 2002 (RK Sprigg, *Balti-English English-Balti Dictionary*, London: Routledge Curzon). Elizabeth and Keith enjoyed travelling and visited several conferences together. Keith kept in touch with the academic world and his colleagues and former students until his health started giving away. The last year of his life, Keith was not in good health and his eyesight was very poor. He was lovingly nursed by his wife at home.

Those of us who have had the privilege of knowing this remarkable man may recall Keith appreciated saying a cheerful goodbye, along the lines of 'Happy we have met, happy we have been, happily we part and happy we shall meet again'. We remember his intellectual sharpness, his generosity and his unfailing sense of humour. Keith Sprigg shall be dearly missed by many.

Richard Keith Sprigg's contributions to Lepcha Studies:

- 1966a 'The glottal stop and glottal constriction in Lepcha and borrowing from Tibetan', *Bulletin of Tibetology* (Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim) 3, 5-14.
- 1966b, 'Lepcha and Balti-Tibetan; tonal or non-tonal languages?', *Asia Major* new series 12 (2), 185-201.
- 1982, 'The Lepcha language and three hundred years of Tibetan influence in Sikkim', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 24, 16-31.
- 1983, 'Hooker's expenses in Sikkim, an early Lepcha text', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 46 (2), 305-325.
- 1986, 'The syllable finals of Tibetan loanwords in Lepcha orthography', *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 9 (1), 27-46.
- 1989, 'Oral vowels and nasalized vowels in Lepcha (Rong): as the key to a puzzling variation in spelling' in: Davidson, J.H.C.S., ed., *Contributions to South-East Asian linguistics: essays in honour of Eugénie J.A. Henderson*, London: SOAS.
- 1996, 'A foreigner studies heroes of the Lepcha race', *King Gaeboo Achyok Birth Anniversary 1996*. Kalimpong: King Gaeboo Achyok Birth Anniversary Committee, 6-25.
- 1997, 'Lepcha orthography: An earlier and later stage', in David Bradley ed., *Tibeto-Burman languages of the Himalayas* (Papers in Southeast Asian Linguistics No 14), Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 175-182.
- 1997, 'The oldest dated documents of the Lepchas', *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* (Kalimpong) 1:2, 9-11.
- 1998, 'Original and sophisticated features of the Lepcha and Limbu scripts', *Nepalese Linguistics* 15, 1-18.
- 1998, 'The earliest printed books in Lepcha', *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* (Kalimpong) 2:1, 14-19.
- 1998, 'The Lepcha text of the deed of grant of Darjeeling', *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* (Kalimpong) 2:2, 4-11.
- 1998, 'Dr. Hooker's Lepcha treasurer (1848-49)', *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* (Kalimpong) 2:3, 5-8.
- 1999, 'An appeal to Captain Lloyd by Kazi Gorok, of Ilam (1828)', *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* (Kalimpong) 3:1, 5-11.
- 1999, 'The Lepcha Raja', *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* (Kalimpong) 3:2, 6-7.
- 1999, 'An Anglo-Lepcha and 'Linguistic Survey of India'(1899)', *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* (Kalimpong) 3:3, 5-18.

