

Chairman's Report

(Presented at the 31st AGM, May 2012)

Since the last AGM, your Council has met four times in its 30th anniversary year, and hosted some successful and interesting events.

First the acclaimed Islands Picnic on 18th June in Great Missenden – which was written up in the last PISUKI Report. Our warmest thanks to Agnes Henson-Derby, to whom also Happy Birthday, and her team including Norman Shackley and John Wilson for a really wonderful event, including a hog roasted by the local Fire Brigade! And an amazing Meke dance workshop by Ana Lavekau, much enjoyed by all the students. Pictures on Facebook and Picasa.

On 30th November, we enjoyed the hospitality of our Secretary Canon Rex Davis at a 30th anniversary party at the beautiful Green Rooms at Grosvenor Chapel, in Mayfair, which was our first opportunity to welcome High Commissioner Kiap.

On 7th December, we foregathered in the CPA, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Room at the Houses of Parliament – an oversubscribed event - to hear Lord Howell, Minister of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office address us on “The Modern Commonwealth and the Pacific Island Nations” Whilst very bullish about the Commonwealth, there was little comfort in what he had to say regarding reopening of missions in the Pacific. High Commissioners Kiap and Mara were joined on this occasion by the Tonga First Secretary, Sonata Tupou, and Vijay Krishnarayan, Deputy Director of the Commonwealth Foundation.

This year, in lighter vein, on 3rd March, at St Philips the Society hosted a Pacific Book Special, the initiative of Nicola Baird, a former publicity Officer. Will Randall spoke engagingly about his best-selling travel memoir, Solomon Time, Rosie Millard read with brio from Bonnes Vacances: A crazy family adventure in the French Territories, and Nicola, author of e-romance Coconut wireless organised her delightful family to do much of the admin work.

I think I'm right in saying that there have been two editions of the excellent PISUKI Report produced by Editors Tom Hughes and Margaret Taylor, to whom much thanks.

Farewells precede welcomes and last year, we bade farewell to the indefatigable former PNG High Commissioner, Jean Kekedo, in office since 2003. I was pleased to represent the Society at the farewell for Jean hosted by the Tonga High Commission in July. It is also pleasing since then to have been invited to sit as a Trustee of Wantok Support, the newly registered UK Charity, four Trustees of which are present today, which was the brainchild of Jean Kekedo. Do ask Tandy Lubett, Oe Jameson or myself for more information, if you would like more information, or to support the charity.

It would take a braver woman than I am to comment on the current political situation in PNG, although HE the High Commissioner may provide informal insights later on. Suffice it perhaps to say that the Commonwealth Secretariat yesterday issued a statement:

"Responding to events this week in Papua New Guinea, Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma today strongly reiterated his call for respect of the rule of law in that country. He urged all parties to exercise restraint in their actions and to ensure a peaceful and constructive resolution to the present situation through democratic and lawful processes.

The Secretary-General said that the rule of law, the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, and constitutional, democratic governance are core Commonwealth values, which must be preserved in Papua New Guinea."

Last year I reported that Social networking and mobile telephones have taken firm hold in Papua New Guinea and the wider Pacific.. Updating you, in May 2011 Facebook had already attracted 35,000 users in PNG. By this May, the figure has more than doubled. According to the Guardian this week that there are now over 80,000 Facebook users in-country. Looking to the June election, Alphonse Gelu, registrar of PNG's Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates Commission commented: "There's an unprecedented amount of action by civil society groups and trade unions, taking stands against Government decisions."

On your behalf I attended the 41st Anniversary of the Republic of Fiji's Independence, at which HC Mara had just come from presenting his credentials to HM The Queen.

Our hearts went out, last year to Queensland and to those in Christchurch. This year, we were devastated to hear of the terrible floods in Fiji, and sent a donation of £200 to the appeal mounted by the High Commission in London,

We were greatly saddened to learn of the death in March of the much loved King George Tupou V of Tonga. On Saturday, 31st March, I was privileged to represent the Society at the Thanksgiving Service at Wesley's Chapel, City Road, for the life of the late King. I also signed the book of condolences at the High Commission on your behalf and, despite the sad circumstances –wrote to convey best wishes to the new King of Tonga, His Majesty King Tupou VI.

Also on 31st March, Tom Hughes represented the Society at the Memorial Concert at the Festival Hall honouring the late David Fanshawe, the internationally distinguished composer, ethnic sound recordist, archivist, record producer/author, entertaining speaker.

Finally, warm thanks to all who have served this year and given so freely of their time and energy – especially new members of Council, Aru Honeysett (Solomon Islands), and Roy Smith Principal

Lecturer, in International Relations at Nottingham Trent University and co-opted members Oe Jameson (PNG) and Brian Macdonald-Milne – all present today

Chris Luxton

Chairman