

FRANK LUDLOW AND THE ENGLISH SCHOOL IN TIBET, 1923–1926

MICHAEL RANK

Michael Rank is a graduate in Chinese from Downing College, Cambridge University. He also studied at Beijing University and Fudan University, Shanghai in the mid-1970s. He was a journalist in China in the early 1980s and visited Tibet in 1983. He is now a Chinese–English translator and freelance journalist. His interest in ornithology also drew him to Ludlow and to do research on his life.

With the spread of the British Empire, the British educational system also extended across the world. 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 1903–1904 Younghusband Expedition which enabled Britain to gain a foothold in the ‘Roof of the World’. Britain consolidated its advance in the Simla Conference of 1913–1914. At about this time it was decided to send four young Tibetans, aged between 11 and 17, to Rugby School to learn English and the skills necessary to help their country to modernize. At the Simla Conference, 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’.¹ 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—i.e. it is not in any way a British enterprise betokening ‘peaceful penetration.’ ”²

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. A Government of India official noted that ‘It is proposed to give the boys sound education in both English and Tibetan for 5, 6, 7 or 8 years’ and send them thereafter to European schools at hill stations such as Darjeeling for about a year ‘in order for them to mingle with European boys and to learn European ideas, manners and customs’.³

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’.⁴

In 1922 Frank Ludlow of the Indian Educational Service was appointed headmaster on a three-year contract. Ludlow, who was later to become a renowned Himalayan botanist and ornithologist,⁵ was born in Chelsea on August 10, 1885, the son of a grocer. He grew up in Dunster, Somerset, and graduated 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 shortly after graduating and by 1920 he had risen to the rank of Inspector of European schools.⁶

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 and put his own name forward. Negotiations over the details of his contract continued for some months. He was concerned whether he would be able to continue shooting in Tibet. He had been told of "the dislike the Tibetans have to shooting and the taking of life generally",⁷ but to his great relief was assured this would not be a problem. The Political Officer Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, Major Frederick (Eric) Marshman Bailey,⁸ a 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".⁹

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".¹⁰

Ludlow arrived in Gyantse¹¹ on 27 October, 1923, and found himself faced with a mountain of problems. One of the biggest was disagreement between the Tibetan authorities and himself on 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, the day after his arrival in Gyantse, he made this proposal to the Kenchung,¹² 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 three 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" (Ludlow diary, 1923, 28 October).

Thus began a history of conflict which continued until Ludlow left Gyantse three years later. Ludlow's diaries do not tell only of disappointment: they are a vivid, sometimes amusing, sometimes angry document through which Ludlow's attractive personality shines through. Ludlow 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.

Those who remember Ludlow recall a “charming, modest man who seldom talked about himself – but had a quiet sense of humour”.¹³ There was a prickly side to his character too, however. One person he did not get on with was Hugh Richardson, Britain’s legendary last envoy in Lhasa. He regarded Richardson as obstructive and indiscreet (Ludlow diary, 1946, 11 July), 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 ...”.¹⁴ But this is not others’ view of Ludlow. In his diaries he comes across as a dedicated teacher, albeit with little patience for obstructive bureaucrats, British or Tibetan.

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. 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, nothing pains them more” (Ludlow diary, 1924, 6 April). 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 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 (Ludlow diary, 1923, 8 November).

One of the difficulties of getting the school started was that there was still no sign of any boys from Lhasa a month after Ludlow arrived. He was told that they would not be arriving 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 DL [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 16000 ft high. I don’t think many English parents would view the proposal with much favour (Ludlow diary, 1923, 30 November).

By the end of November, 30 boys had arrived, aged eight to 18, though none of them was from Lhasa or 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!! (Ludlow diary, 1923, 8 November).

This being an 'English School', games formed an important part of the curriculum. Ludlow's enthusiasm for football even reached the ears of the Dalai Lama.

Although Ludlow was scathing about the traditional Tibetan educational system, he was respectful of Tibetan culture. In an official report to the Government of India (15 October 1927, referred to as Report in subsequent quotations) which he compiled after the school closed, 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 [Council of Ministers]. They approved, and thereafter there was no further trouble in this connection.

Ludlow was adamant that the purpose of the school was not to turn his pupils into imitation Englishmen, and he was determined that they should receive 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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 12 May).

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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 24 July). Three weeks later he received a discouraging 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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 15 August).

Ludlow knew no Tibetan before he arrived in Gyantse, so he faced a daunting problem in finding a way of teaching his pupils English:

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. 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... (Report)

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 existence [*sic*] of another. 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 Galileo's [*sic*] fate would be mine if I preached to the contrary... (Report).

By June 1924, Ludlow later reported, "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" (Report). On the surface, matters seemed to be progressing smoothly and evenly.

Ludlow was particularly gratified with the progress his pupils made in arithmetic. "They learnt in six months what would normally have taken them six 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" (Report).

The school seemed to be making progress, but behind the scenes there was deep unease:

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 [Council of Ministers] 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 (Report).

And if parents were not actively hostile, they were often apathetic, he complained:

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 ...

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 (Report).

Despite the construction of a new school building, the omens were looking increasingly bad. Bailey told Ludlow "it seems to be touch and go" whether the Tibetan government would keep the school going and cited "i) Expense ii) the opposition of parents & iii) the hostility of the powerful lama element which hates all innovation" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 1 September).

But Ludlow was convinced that the school was essential if Tibet was to survive in the modern world. He told the pro-Western Shape Tsarong, head of the Tibetan army, "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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 23 September).

Ludlow's diaries are also full of 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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 20 March).

At another tiffin, given by the new British Trade Agent, Frederick (Derrick) Williamson, there were 25 guests including about five ladies. "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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 13 August).

Visitors also involved entertainment, and there were more of these than one might expect. They included the noted plant hunter Frank Kingdon-Ward¹⁵ and the celebrated French mystic, explorer and writer Alexandra David-Néel.¹⁶

Ludlow seems to have welcomed the distractions that the visitors provided, as there were endless frustrations from the very beginning. 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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 23 August).

Then Ludlow was appalled to find that one of his students whom he had examined by Vance, the British medical officer at Gyantse, had venereal disease. "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". He discussed the case with the Kenchung, 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!! (Ludlow diary, 1924, 24, 25 November).

Ludlow was also disgusted 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" (Ludlow diary, 1924, 21 August). Another boy complained of suffering from sores. "He showed me his legs which were filthy & covered with them. I sent him round to Vance, 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". However, under Ludlow's guidance, standards of hygiene rose. "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" (Ludlow diary, 1925, 10 August).

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 smallpox, and Ludlow tells of a woman in the paper factory just behind the school who had the disease, so he asked for her to be removed without delay. The Kenchung 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" (Ludlow diary, 1926, 31 March).

Despite the discontent of the parents and the lamas, Ludlow was delighted that, by 1926, the 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 interest. They delighted in their progress. "Only the cleverest Tibetans," they said, "are able to do fractions, and nobody has ever heard of decimals" (Report).

However, it became increasingly clear that senior Tibetan officials were unenthusi-

astic about the school, and some were downright hostile. The Kenchung's attitude tended to confirm Ludlow's worst fears. One day he 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:

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 (Ludlow diary, 1925, 10 August).

On 31 October, 1925 Ludlow wrote to the Foreign Secretary in the Government of India, 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 (Ludlow diary, 1925, October).

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" (Ludlow diary, 1926, 25 June). "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". (Ludlow diary, 1926, 15 July)

The Kenchung also threw some light on political factors behind the opposition to 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 suspicious as

to the usefulness of a school run by me should prevail (Ludlow diary, 1926, 19 September; McKay 1997(a), 1997(b)).

Tibetan officials were often obstructive. Ludlow was furious when one of his best pupils, Tsewang, was removed from the school in order to become a *isi-truk* or apprentice in the Kashag 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 14½ 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 (Ludlow diary, 1926, 15 May).

Despite the ill omens for the school, Ludlow was determined to soldier on. 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” (Ludlow diary, 1926, 12 June).

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 ... 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 (Ludlow diary, 1926, 20 August).

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”. But they stressed they had the greatest respect for Ludlow. “As regards a future teacher for future [*sic*] 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 diary, 1926, 28 August)

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, mechanicians for their electric machinery etc & etc unless it gives it sons some measure of western education. The whole thing makes me weep. The work of 2½ years thrown away! ...

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 (Ludlow diary, 1926, 28 August).

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 Kenchung, whom he called a "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" (Ludlow diary, 1926, 16 September).

With some justification, Ludlow felt that to use the boys' lack of progress in Tibetan as a reason for closing the school was quite unreasonable. He told the Kenchung 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" (Ludlow diary, 1926, 16 September).

Ludlow did not blame the Tibetans entirely for the closure of the school, however, feeling 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 ... 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 (Ludlow diary, 1926, 13 October).

Despite all the frustrations, Ludlow knew he was going to miss Gyantse terribly. "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" (Ludlow diary, 1926, 9 November).

Although Ludlow was bitterly disappointed at the closure of the school, he won nothing but praise from Government of India officials. 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".¹⁷

Ludlow was awarded the OBE in 1927 for his efforts in Gyantse, and thereafter embarked on botanical expeditions in the Himalayas over the next 20 years.

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 Tibetan boys who were sent to Rugby "made no significant contribution in later life to the development of Tibet" (Lamb, 1966, p. 603). Evidence of this is the fact that only four former pupils of Ludlow were listed in the 1938 and 1949 editions of *Who's Who in Tibet*, and none merits more than one star on a scale of zero to three to indicate the degree of power or influence he exerted.¹⁸

Although the Gyantse school was the first English school in Tibet, it was not quite the last. A similar school to Ludlow's opened in Lhasa in 1944 at the request of the Tibetan authorities, but it lasted only a few months, falling victim to "vocal opposition" from the abbots of the Tibetan capital's two biggest monasteries.¹⁹

The Lhasa school was opened when Ludlow was head of the British mission there. He did not enjoy this posting, and was frustrated in his main task of persuading the Tibetans to allow their country to be used as a route for supplying the Nationalist Chinese government over "the Hump". He finally returned to Britain in 1949, at the age of 64, and worked in the botany department of the Natural History Museum in London until his retirement. 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* (1972) but he shunned publicity and has been largely forgotten since then.

But the Tibetans still remembered him—as did the Chinese. A report by a Tibetan exile group praises "an intrepid Englishman, Frank Ludlow" for his efforts at Gyantse, and adds: "Had the school flourished from 1924 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" (TYBA, 1990).

The very different official Chinese view can be seen from a book by a Western supporter of the Chinese Communist government published in Beijing in the 1980s. It says that before the "liberation" of Tibet only the sons of wealthy families went to school, adding that some "were sent to a school maintained by the British in Gyangzê [Gyantse], [but] ... 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" (Epstein, 1983, p. 335).

Despite his deep suspicion of the Chinese, Ludlow would surely have agreed with the last sentence.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Hugh Leach for his research into Ludlow's membership of the Society. He was a member in the 1930s (on and off between 1932 and 1938). I would also like to express my appreciation to Joyce Hill, Richard Mildon, Joan Jordan, Steph Cousins and Ruth Whall for shedding light on Ludlow's early life, and to the late Michael Aris, Hugh Richardson, William Stearn and Sir George Taylor for their personal reminiscences.²⁰

NOTES

1. British Library, Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC), L/PS/11/208, C. A. Bell to Secretary of Government of India in the Foreign and Political Affairs Dept, Simla, 3 September 1921.
2. L/PS/11/208, note, 1922.
3. L/PS/11/208, from H. Sharp, 17 April 1922.
4. Letter from Laden La, 21 October, 1921, L/P&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. As noted below he was apparently involved in a coup attempt in Lhasa in 1924, see McKay, A. C. (1997(a)). For an excellent general study of the political background see McKay, A. C. (1997(b)), as well as Goldstein, Melvyn C. (1989) *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913–1951: the Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley, University of California, Press) and Meyer, Karl and Brysac, Shareen (2001) *Tournament of Shadows* (London, Little, Brown).
5. On Ludlow's botanical and ornithological achievements, see Fletcher (1975) and Vaurie (1972), which is dedicated to Ludlow. The former focuses on Ludlow's celebrated Himalayan botanical expeditions with George Sherriff, but George Taylor's introduction includes some useful biographical information. On the Ludlow and Sherriff expeditions, see also the BBC Scotland documentary (1980), *A Dream of Poppies*, directed by David Martin.
6. See Fletcher (1975), Vaurie (1972), Stearn (1974) and OIOC, V/12/306, History of Services, Bombay 1920–1.
7. L/PS/11/208 4835, Ludlow to E. B. Howell, Secretariat, Delhi, 27 November 1922.
8. 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 Swinson, A. (1971) *Beyond the Frontier: the Biography of Colonel F. M. Bailey, Explorer & Secret Agent* (London, Hutchinson) and for a much more critical appraisal, Cocker, Mark (1992) *Loneliness and Time: British Travel Writing in the Twentieth Century* (London, Secker & Warburg), chapter 2.
9. E. Bailey to B. Howell, 11 January 1923, L/PS/208, 4835. Bailey epitomized 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 (1992), p. 409).
10. L/PS/208, 4835, Brief Notes to E. B. Howell, undated.
11. Ludlow's photograph albums, including pictures from his Gyantse days, are in the OIOC (Photo 743).
12. Or Khenchung: Ludlow's spelling of Tibetan words is sometimes inconsistent.
13. Mrs Joyce Hill, letter to author, July 13, 2001. The botanist W. T. Stearn, in his obituary of Ludlow, speaks of him in similar warm terms: Stearn (1974).
14. Letter to author, July 19, 1995.
15. Kingdon-Ward turned out to be the son of Ludlow's professor at Cambridge, Harry Marshall Ward. See also Lyte, Charles (1989) *Frank Kingdon-Ward: the Last of the Great Plant Hunters* (London, Murray), p. 70, which quotes from the diary of Kingdon-Ward's friend Lord Cawdor, 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".
16. Apart from Ludlow's fairly lengthy entry on David-Néel, see Foster, Barbara M. and Foster, Michael (1987) *Forbidden Journey, the Life of Alexandra David-Néel* (San Francisco, Harper & Row), 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 Borin, F. (1979) *Le Tibet d'Alexandra David-Néel*, "album conçu et réalisé par Françoise Borin" (Paris, Plon), p. 195.
17. 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, A. (1971) *Beyond the Frontier* (London), pp. 199–200.
18. *Who's Who in Tibet* (1938, 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".
19. Sherriff, Lhasa to P. O. Sikkim, 11 December, 1944. L/P & S/12/4216, file 44.
20. For more information about Frank Ludlow contact the author on email: rank@mailbox.w.uk.

REFERENCES

- Epstein, Israel (1983) *Tibet Transformed* (Beijing, New World Press).
- Fletcher, Harold R. (1975) *A Quest of Flowers* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press).
- Lamb, Alastair (1966) *The McMahon Line* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul).
- Ludlow diary (1923–1946) British Library, Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC), Mss 979.
- McKay, A. C. (1992) 'The Establishment of British Trade Agencies in Tibet: a Survey', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 2, 3 (1992).
- McKay, A. C. (1997(a)) 'Tibet 1924: A Very British Coup Attempt', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 7, 3 (1997), pp. 411–424.
- McKay, A. C. (1997(b)) *Tibet and the British Raj* (Richmond, Curzen).
- Stearn, W. T. (1974) 'Frank Ludlow (obituary)', *Ibis*, 116, p. 234.
- The Times* (1972) Obituary, *The Times*, March 27.
- TYBA (1990) *Tibet the Facts*, 2nd revised edn (Dharamsala, Tibetan Young Buddhist Association), n. 408, p. 382.
- Vaurie, C. (1972) *Tibet and Its Birds* (London, H. F. Witherby).