



The Anglo-Bolivian Society

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, 2006

I am pleased to present the Chairman's Report for 2006, but I begin on a sad note. As most of you will already know, Fernando Montes passed away last month. Fernando had been an active member of the Society for many years. He was a prominent member of the Bolivian community in London and his work brought the special beauty of the Bolivian altiplano and its people to the attention of many. In doing so, he played an important part in bringing Bolivia and Britain closer together, which is the goal of our Society. We shall miss him and our thoughts are with his wife, Marcela, his son, Juan Enrique, and his daughter, Sarita.

After the election of new members to the Executive Council at last year's AGM, the Council appointed new office holders as follows: Philip McLean as Vice-Chairman, Juan Enrique Montes as Treasurer, Manuel Cossio as General Secretary, Peter Corkill as Membership Secretary and yours truly as Chairman. Ana Martinez continued in the role of Social Secretary, in which she has now become indispensable. During the year, we co-opted Lucy Compton, Julio Salas and Alberth Escobar to join the other elected members, Peter Crown, Tony Morrison and Winston Moore. The Bolivian Embassy, which continues to offer us magnificent support, was also represented on the Council, usually by Patricia Rojas and occasionally (when his other duties permitted) by Pablo Ossio. And we had the special pleasure of the participation of the new Ambassador, Beatriz Sauviron, at our meeting in December. This has proved to be a dedicated and hard-working Council, reflected in the Society's intensive programme in 2006, although we lost our general secretary in the summer when Manuel Cossio returned to Bolivia.

This has been a busy year although, for various reasons, we did not hold one of our own events until April, when Gregorio Lanza gave us a presentation on the governability of Bolivia and challenges for the new government. In June, Claire McGuigan of Christian Aid challenged us to consider how the rich world had contributed to poverty in Bolivia and what we could do to change this. In July, the Bolivia Parliamentary Group on Bolivia invited us to The Houses of Parliament for a discussion on recent events in Bolivia followed by a delightful social gathering on the terrace overlooking the River Thames. In September, Dame Margaret Anstee spoke to us about her house on Lake Titicaca and regaled us with tales of her early days in Bolivia. In October, we held a joint event with the Institute for the Study of the Americas to launch Henry Stobart's book *Music and the Poetics of Production in the Bolivian Andes*. Also in October we co-hosted with Canning House a presentation by a visiting delegation from the Chamber of Commerce of the Department of Santa Cruz on Bolivian Commercial Prospects in a Global Economy. In November Diego Zavaleta spoke of the myths and realities surrounding economic and political change in Bolivia. And finally last month Brian Reynolds shared with his experiences of participating in Bolivia leg of the G4 Land Rover rally.

Attendance at events has varied. We have had some excellent turnouts at some events and disappointing ones at others, but overall the encouraging upturn experienced towards the end of 2005 has been maintained. We have no doubt been helped by events in Bolivia, which have raised its profile since the election of President Morales just over a year ago.

Last year, the AGM instructed the Council to consider whether an increase in subscriptions was needed to keep the Society's financial situation healthy. Your Council concluded that it was and subscriptions were increased from October. You will shortly hear from Juan Enrique about our current financial situation and the impact that the subscription increase has had on it.

Last year, we had 118 paid up members and membership is roughly static. Exact numbers can be difficult to judge as our rules allow a period of grace of twelve months before members can be removed from our mailing list. So far this year, we have 100 fully paid-up members. This includes several new members, although one or two have told us that they wish to discontinue their membership because they are no longer able to attend meetings. For subscriptions purposes, our year begins in October, so over 10% of our members are already six months late in paying. We shall be chasing these up. If any of those present are in arrears, we would be grateful if you would rectify the situation as soon as possible. Our Treasurer will be only too pleased to receive your payments after this meeting. We have continued to give Honorary Membership for a year to those who have been kind enough to address the Society, although some have insisted upon paying.

The Council has worked hard this year to raise the Society's profile. The website has played an important part in this. There has been a steady increase in hits each month from 65 last January to 318 this January, often from google/yahoo searches. At least one of our new members joined as a result of finding us on the web. All flyers for events are posted on our website, which allows us to inform non-members of our events much more easily and cheaply through email. We are building up our list of email contacts to whom we send notification of future events. We also email our members, and if you do not receive these, please let us have your email address and we will add you to the distribution list. Council members have also participated in numerous Bolivia-related events during the year, including events organised by Canning House, Chatham House and the Latin American Centre in Oxford. We were also the only bilateral society to be listed as a sponsor of the Latin American Film Festival, which featured the award-winning Bolivian film *American Visa*.

Since the last AGM, we have produced two more editions of our newsletter, and the next one is imminent. The newsletter has received a good response from members, who have welcomed it as a way of keeping up to date both with events in Bolivia and with Bolivia-related events in the UK. Do let us know if you want to make a contribution to it, or if you have any suggestions for improvement.

I began on a sad note and shall end on a saddish one too. We shall shortly have to elect a new Executive Council. Two long-serving members – Philip McLean (who preceded me as Chairman for three very successful years) and Tony Morrison - will not be seeking re-election and I should like to take this opportunity to thank them, on behalf of you all, for the great contributions that they have made to the Society's work over the years. We hope that they will continue to be active and enthusiastic members of the Society. But we shall miss them both on the Council. Thank you.

Graham Minter
12 February 2007