

Members and Guests of the British Friends of Vanuatu,

I have pleasure in presenting the 21st Chairman's report to the membership.

The year 2006 was the first year of operation for the new charity and things have gone as well as we could have hoped, with generous donations from the ORR-Macintosh Foundation (1K) and two donations of £2750 received from Mr Derrick Butterfield for the VITE-BFOV Committee development projects in the years 2006 and 2007. I will be reporting in more detail on the charity under Agenda item 7, but I wish to report our thanks in this report for the very generous response shown by those UK tax-paying members who replied to our newsletter appeal for Gift Aid Donations to the charity as an alternative to paying subscriptions to the main organisation. We are grateful, in particular, to the many members who paid not only their subscription amount but paid a generous donation to the charity as well.

The year 2006 was significant also for being the first full year in which Britain's diplomatic representation in Vanuatu has been managed at arms length from the reorganised British High Commission in Suva, Fiji. I was grateful to be given the opportunity to meet with the new High Commissioner, Roger Sykes, before he left London to take up his post early in 2006, and also to receive just a few weeks ago a very detailed and helpful report on his first year in post. We will be publishing the High Commissioner's letter in full in the next issue of the newsletter, and members will be reassured to learn that there is every chance of a quality Vanuatu nomination being considered for a Chevening Scholarship in the next selection cycle provided those responsible for nominations act in good time for the next nomination cycle which begins in October, 2007.

Richard Dorman's News from Vanuatu Project, that was reported to the membership in the January newsletter is moving ahead slowly. You may remember that this involves plans for a publication based on Richard's quarterly newsletter reports and analysis in the period from 1986 to 1998. I have received an encouraging response to my appeal for assistance. I now have three volunteers for proof-reading and have already started to receive photographic images of the key players, both ni-Vanuatu and expatriate, who featured in Richard's reports during that period.

At the end of 2006 we commenced a review of procedures and systems following the setting up of the Charitable Trust and the introduction of the Gift Aid scheme, both of which involve a great deal of additional work for the Membership Secretary and myself in particular. The workload will increase even more if and when we gain approval from the Department of Revenue & Customs for the refund of taxes paid on donations to the charity under the Gift Aid Scheme.

For some months now, Mrs Pat Dickinson, who was a professional programmer until her recent retirement, has been reviewing our systems and procedures and has created an Access Database which will automate many of the systems we operate at present and which will remove, at a stroke, many of the repetitive and time consuming activities which we are involved with at present. I recently spent some time looking at the database as it is at present and have to say that I am most impressed with what I saw. I have every confidence that, once the forthcoming trials

are complete, we will have robust and secure systems and procedures for the association and the charity that will serve us well for many years to come.

In November 2006, Committee members and Charity Trustees Roger & Judy Craddock made a long visit to Vanuatu and Australia. In the course of their stay they devoted much time to dealing with the business of the Friends of Vanuatu. Indeed they spent so much time visiting VITE, Malapoa, Vureas and many other places and institutions with which we have links, it is difficult to believe they found much time for anything else. I would like to record the association's thanks for all that they did on our behalf – not only in Vanuatu but in Australia where they took the first steps in signing up new members from the recently disbanded Australian Friends of Vanuatu. We shall be continuing Roger's discussions to that end with Andrew Thomas in the course of this weekend.

Finally, it was pleasing to see Vanuatu getting a good press during the past year:

Members may remember the flurry of world media interest a few months ago when Vanuatu was voted the happiest place on the planet. This accolade was based on the findings of some obscure survey or index balancing human happiness with environmental impact and, which placed Vanuatu first and the United Kingdom 108th. At the time the news was announced I received many telephone calls and emails from, quite literally, all over the world, including calls from radio and television researchers in Canada, the USA and even South Korea. If nothing else comes from Vanuatu's success in the survey, it certainly helped to put the BFOV website on the map.

As a result of the survey, a British film company, Keo Films Ltd, took an interest in Vanuatu from an anthropological standpoint using what is known as the 'reverse anthropology' concept. What would people from Vanuatu think if they were to visit a country like Britain, which came 108th in a survey that placed Vanuatu first? Keo Films will produce two, one-hour documentaries for later showing on Channel 4 television. The programmes will explore the reverse anthropology concept by showing the United Kingdom through the eyes of visitors from a vastly different culture. The visitors from Vanuatu used for the project came from the Joahnanen village on the island of Tanna, a community that has had strong if somewhat puzzling links with the Duke of Edinburgh since the late 1970s. Many of you will be aware from press coverage that the Tanna visitors were received by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at Windsor Castle on March 19th, just before they left London to return to Vanuatu. My only regret about this later development is that, because of time constraints, the albeit tiny slot that I personally had in the film sequence shot at Heathrow Airport may well now have to be eased out of the documentary to make room for the Duke. This is all very sad, and may mean that my aspirations for a second career in Hollywood may now simply end in disappointment.

We will be reporting under the main agenda items the various activities and projects that we have been involved with throughout our first year as a charity. The record shows that the new charity (BFOV-CT) received more than £11,000 in its first year of operation. At a time when British development aid to Vanuatu is all but finished, I think we can be very satisfied at the modest success we have achieved in softening the effect of the withdrawal of British High Commission funding to Vanuatu under the HC's Small Grants Scheme.

I would like now, as we do at this stage of the proceedings every year, to thank on behalf of the membership, all of the committee for their contributions and support since the last annual general meeting. I would also like to add my own personal thanks to those committee members who take on specific areas of responsibility:

Richard Dorman, for his unfailing commitment to the association in so many areas of activity; Roger Craddock, for his work on membership matters, VSO links, Australian Friends of Vanuatu links and his duties as a trustee. Judy Craddock for her work as Secretary to the association as well as being a charity trustee; Gordon Dickinson, a new committee member but one who has brought a clarity of thought and wisdom to our meetings and exchanges that I have personally found most helpful; to Pamela Clunies-Ross for hosting the committee and trustee meetings throughout the year, her work as a trustee and for her valued contributions to the newsletter; and to Tony Williams for his contribution in the post of our new Treasurer. In thanking Tony for taking on the role of treasurer I would also like to say thank you to Martin Sibley who resigned the post on health grounds early on in the reporting year. Despite resigning the post, Martin continues to provide help and advice to both Tony and me whenever we need assistance and for this we have been very grateful during the year.

Finally, I know that you would wish me to thank the many unsung heroes in Vanuatu without whose help we simply could not function as an effective organisation. In particular during 2006 we received enormous help and commitment from Ms Fiona Willans at Vureas High School and Mr Charlie Pierce and the VITE-VITE committee of the Vanuatu Teacher Training College.

That completes my report to the 2007 Annual General Meeting.

Norman Shackley
Chairman