



This year has marked twenty years of Angulimala and twenty years of the Forest Hermitage. Early in 1985 at Magha Puja we launched Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy, and later that same year at the end of the Vassa I moved over to the Forest Hermitage and into the old caravan at the bottom of the garden. Earlier this year at one of our regular quarterly workshops for Buddhist prison chaplains we celebrated Angulimala's anniversary and then in October, after Vassa, we arranged an event to celebrate twenty years of the Forest Hermitage.

But before then, in September, we revived our annual celebratory event at the Buddha Grove in Springhill Prison. Last year we didn't do it but that was the only year we've missed since opening the Buddha Grove in November 1992. Once again, a team of expert Thai cooks that included staff from some of the best Thai restaurants and highflying students from Warwick University took over the kitchen at Springhill Open Prison near Bicester and cooked for all the inmates and a number of invited guests. While they were putting the finishing touches to the banquet we began the evening at the Buddha Grove with chanting and speeches from the Governor, the Minister from the Thai Embassy, Lord Avebury and myself. Later, when the meal was over we completed the evening with a candle-lit circumambulation of the Buddha Grove. It was great to be doing it again and I am so grateful to all the good people who gave the food and donated their time to decorate the Shrine, drive stuff there, cook and do so much to make this evening a success.

A week later, we had a surprise visit from an old friend who years ago lived here and took care of the cooking and driving. After almost a lifetime in this country, Shelton retired to Sri Lanka some years ago but this year he forced himself to return to see England win the Ashes so that he might die content. I shall never forget Shelton's description of how he'd understood equanimity while he was watching England and Sri Lanka play - and couldn't make up his mind which to cheer! He's nearly eighty now but still brimming with life and energy.

In case some of you have been wondering why one of the old Buddha Rupas in the Shrine Room is snugly wrapped in

white silk, the story is this. One evening towards the end of September, I went up to Garth Prison near Preston to give a talk on Buddhism to a group of inmates of various backgrounds and religions. Afterwards as we made our way back onto the M6 I had a call from a hospital in Nuneaton asking if I would go there to give a blessing for a Nepalese couple who had lost a baby at twenty weeks gestation. The husband was serving with the Gurkhas and stationed nearby at Bramscote. We drove there directly and then a fortnight later went over again to take the funeral at the local crematorium. It was my first contact with the Gurkhas and my first Nepalese funeral. I was well aware that in Nepal most are Hindu but I have heard that an increasing number are turning to Buddhism and I knew that some follow Theravada like us while others follow a Tibetan style of Buddhism. These were Tibetan Buddhists. In the short time allotted we managed a meaningful and moving ceremony that blended Nepalese customs, including the lighting of 108 lamps, with chanting familiar to us and a short discourse in which I retold the story of Kisagotami's frantic search for medicine for her child who in fact was already beyond help and the bitter medicine the Buddha gave her, the knowledge that death is common to us all with the comfort that can be drawn from that that at such times we are not the only ones, we are not alone.

The day after, the family came here to light another 108 lamps, make some offerings and perform more rituals and it was then that they paid their respects by placing white silk scarves around the neck of the Buddha Rupa. It looks so nice that I've kept it as they left it.

I must say that although the hospital was very considerate and caring of this family yet the irony was not lost on me that presumably this same hospital that cared so much for the loss of an unborn child of just twenty weeks is aborting children, as the law allows, at up to 24 weeks gestation.

It doesn't seem just over twenty years since I first came to view this property, but there it is. All that time has passed and now is gone forever. So we thought we had better mark our survival thus far and celebrate the many good things that have happened in those years with a big occasion. We won't say too

much now about the mistakes we've made other than to acknowledge that they have also been a part of our progress. What I hope is that all of us who have been involved with the Forest Hermitage over the years are the richer and the wiser for the experience. And all of you who have helped, even in the smallest way, must take credit for having created and done something special.

In 1985 when the annual Rains retreat came around, I was still at Banner Hill and so there I had to remain until the end of October, by which time the purchase of the Forest Hermitage had been completed. I moved as soon as I could and on November 2nd we held our Grand Opening. Although it was a little early, we decided to combine the celebration of our twenty years with the festival that would normally mark the end of the Vassa. So on October 23rd the sun came out to shine for us on another brilliant occasion. A gathering that brought together old and young, and old and new, some faces not seen here for a long time as well as newer and more regular supporters and a coach crammed with an international brigade of young students from Warwick University.

Afterwards we had scheduled the Annual General Meeting of the Buddha-Dhamma Fellowship, the organisation that supports and maintains the Forest Hermitage but AGMs are not usually a great draw and so no one minded the short delay while another important ceremony took place. Earlier this year you may remember me writing of the death of our Bill Gates, former Secretary and Treasurer of Angulimala and a tower of strength in times past. Lynn, Bill's widow, when she read about the Twentieth Anniversary celebration immediately felt that was the day to bring Bill's ashes to be scattered at the Forest Hermitage. We had obtained a beech tree in memory of Bill and we had it all ready for Lynn to complete the planting while we chanted and I scattered the ashes around and over the tree. There is a picture of the ceremony above and Bill's beech tree appears as the background to the Buddha Rupa for the second half of the year on our next year's Buddhist calendar.

The calendars are ready by the way and if you want one, let us know. There are two versions, Angulimala and The Forest Hermitage with some Thai.



There is another new tree in our garden, planted not so very far from Bill's. This is an unusual tree for a very unusual person, Andrew Kent who for so many years used to come and sit here and in the final year of his life drove me with great dedication on my prison visits and was such great company. It's a Golden Indian Bean tree and into the base of this a portion of Andrew's ashes have been interred.

Another milestone in my life, a new rose bush in my garden and another loss has been the passing of a friend who for 27 years sat in the corner of my room and occupied an important corner of my life. No more when you ring me to tell me your troubles will I have to excuse the chuckling or well-timed shrieks of hysterical laughter in the background. After a hard fought battle with the ravages of old age, Perky, the Amazon parrot with whom I have shared many ups and downs over the years, has finally died.

When we first came to the Forest Hermitage, we used to put on short retreats from time to time. Gradually with the difficulty of finding anyone to organise and run them, they faded and disappeared. From time to time we've thought to revive them but my increasing involvement with Buddhism in the prisons hasn't helped and so for some time we've settled for allowing people to come and do their own retreat, joining in with us as best they can. This term the Warwick University Buddhist Society has been particularly lively and well attended and towards the end of term eleven of them on one of the coldest weekends of the year squeezed into our Wood Cottage for two nights and a day and a half of meditation from Friday to Sunday. On both mornings in the cold and the dark, they walked over for the early morning puja and sitting. Their practice included some morning chores and cooking and the rest of the time was spent meditating, walking and sitting. On the Saturday morning some who couldn't come combined with members of the Thai Society to offer alms and we were driven over to the University to receive pindapata at Lakeside and then walk across campus to another residential area where more were waiting for us. It was a great weekend and I look forward to more of this.

As we're already in December, I must take this opportunity of wishing you all a Very Happy and Prosperous New Year.

THE DIARY

ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS

These are for Buddhist Prison Chaplains, attendance otherwise is by invitation and for Angulimala members only.

At the Forest Hermitage at 10 a.m. on **Dec. 10th** (includes an EGM to represent the annual accounts) and then on March 11th next year.

SOCIAL EVENING & POT- LUCK SUPPER at WOOD COTTAGE December 17th at 6 p.m.

SEE THE NEW YEAR IN WITH US at the FOREST HERMITAGE on December 31st, from 8 p.m.

MEDITATION, A DHAMMA TALK& a cup of tea at the FOREST HERMITAGE. Mondays & Fridays, 8 p.m.

THIS NEWSLETTER IS FROM VEN. CHAO KHUN BHAVANAVITAYT (AJAHN KHEMADHAMMO) OBE OF THE FOREST HERMITAGE & ANGULIMALA, THE BUDDHIST PRISON CHAPLAINCY ORGANISATION

The Forest Hermitage Lower Fulbrook nr Sherbourne Warwickshire CV35 8AS United Kingdom
For Ven. Ajahn Khemadhammo & ANGULIMALA - direct telephone: 01926 624385 mobile: 07941 013319 facsimile: 08700 467283
Email address: prakhem@foresthermitage.org.uk Websites: www.foresthermitage.org.uk & www.angulimala.org.uk
THE BUDDHA-DHAMMA FELLOWSHIP, Reg. Charity No 289913 ANGULIMALA, Reg. Charity No 294939
