



THE FOREST HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

October
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At SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE

An ALMSGIVING in aid of the new Abbot's Kuti on the last day of Vassa Sunday, October 24th
From 10.30 a.m.

ANGULIMALA
WORKSHOPS
(mainly for Buddhist Prison Chaplains) on
Dec 11th & March 18th

MEDITATION,
A DHAMMA TALK,
a cup of tea and a READING.
Mondays & Fridays, 8 p.m.

If you are on our mailing list and/or a member of the BDF or ANGULIMALA, your name, address, phone number and membership details are on our computer files. If you object and you let us know, we'll remove you.



NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMAA-SAMBUDDHASSA

HONOUR TO THE BLESSED ONE, THE EXALTED ONE, THE FULLY-ENLIGHTENED ONE

'I've never felt so welcome, so much like I belonged and so loved', was the way one enthusiastic inmate put it after this year's annual Springhill Buddha Grove Celebration.

Members of the Thai community in the Midlands and the North worked tremendously hard with other supporters of Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy to bring off an impressive occasion on the evening of September 12th. Very fortunately the weather was kind to us and for the preparations and our brief excursion next door into Grendon Prison we even had the pleasure of some September sun. That made all the difference in Grendon where security considerations limit the number who can accompany me and where the length of our stay is restricted by the need to be back punctually in time for the main event at Springhill. As it was, after a brief Puja, guests and inmates were able to sit in the garden that surrounds the Buddhist Shrine and spend a little while quietly getting to know one another. By the time we got back to Springhill more monks had arrived, the lights were coming up, and the guests and inmates were mostly assembled. Ready to direct operations was the man whose brainchild this Buddha Grove was and who has been coming back every year to help set up and act as Master of Ceremonies - Sam Cutler. We began as usual with the offerings, the lighting of the candles and incense and then came the recitation of some important passages from Buddhist scripture. At some point, I looked up to see Martin Narey, the new Director General of the Prison Service inserting himself amongst the trees. The speeches

were by Tim Newell, Governor of Grendon and Springhill, Lord Avebury, Patron of Angulimala and me. I, of course, took the opportunity as I always do of telling the story of our illustrious namesake, Angulimala.

In the Majjhima-Nikaya it is told that one day, after his meal, the Buddha went out from the monastery where he was staying and walked towards a great forest. Seeing him going in that direction various people working in their fields called out to him to warn him that in that forest dwelt the dreaded Angulimala. Little is known for certain about Angulimala but the account of his life given in the commentaries has him the son of a well-to-do family and at one time a brilliant student at the university of Taxila, then the Oxbridge of India. At Taxila, other students were jealous of him and succeeded in poisoning the teacher's mind against him with the result that the teacher asked of him what he must have believed would be an impossible honorarium, a thousand, right hand, human, little fingers. Unbelievably, instead of giving up and slinking off home without graduating, this young man set out to collect the fingers and pay his debt. Presumably, he quickly discovered that people were reluctant to give up their little fingers and so he was forced to resort to violence and killing in order to obtain them. Then he found he had nowhere to store these fingers. He tried hanging them in a tree but the birds stole them so his solution was to string them about his neck. From this gruesome and growing garland of bloody fingers came his name. Angulimala means 'finger garland'. This was the man then who

peering out from his lair spotted the Buddha coming towards him and that day he had about his neck nine hundred and ninety-nine human, right hand, little fingers. This powerful, athletic, serial killer who had already successfully resisted several attempts to apprehend him took up his weapons and dashed out to kill the Buddha and complete his score. Hurling himself through the forest along the way the Buddha was calmly pacing he expected quickly to overtake him and finish the job but then a very strange thing happened. Although the Buddha seemed not to hurry in the slightest, Angulimala, despite his best efforts was unable to catch him. Eventually, exhausted, frustrated and bathed in sweat, Angulimala screamed at the Buddha to stop. And the Buddha turned and calmly told Angulimala that he had already stopped. He had stopped killing and harming and now it was time for him, Angulimala, to do likewise. Their confrontation ended with Angulimala disposing of his weapons and meekly following the Buddha back to the monastery. There he became a monk. Soon afterwards, King Pasenadi of Kosala, ignorant of what had happened, came by leading his troops out to arrest Angulimala. Being a very pious monarch, he popped in to pay his respects to the Buddha and to inform him of what he was up to. The Buddha asked King Pasenadi what his reaction would be were he to discover that amongst this assemblage of monks sat Angulimala. To the King it was utterly unbelievable that a foul person like that could be seated amid such pure and refined company but were it the case, he answered, he would certainly pay his respects and make offerings. Then after the Buddha had pointed out where sat Angulimala and when he'd recovered from the shock, King Pasenadi declared how amazing it was that, 'While we with force and weapons have failed, you with neither force nor weapons have prevailed!' Eventually Angulimala succeeded in abandoning all greed, hatred and delusion and attained Enlightened.

An impressive feature of Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy and one of which we're justly proud is that we bring together Buddhists of different traditions and nationalities to co-operate and enable Buddhism to be available in British prisons. That evening at Springhill there were present Theravada monks from

Amaravati, Chithurst, Wat Sanghatan and Wat Pah Santidhamma; Rev. Saido Kennaway came from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey; there was a delightful Korean monk who has been studying at Oxford for several years; and a group of Western Buddhist Order members from Birmingham. I have no idea how wide the representation was amongst the other guests but I suspect it was not dissimilar. In the picture, you can see some of those mentioned as well as the indomitable Sam Cutler at the mike.

I might as well interject here that sadly for us, although happily for them I hope, Sam and his wife and family are moving house shortly. And what with one thing and another it's likely to be a bit far for Sam to come to attend another Springhill Celebration, at least in the foreseeable future. We weren't to know it that night but since then Sam's application to emigrate to Australia has been approved and so sometime in the New Year, they're off to a new life on the other side of the globe. And from Angulimala, our very warmest wishes go with them.

After the Thai feast that followed the speeches, we all returned to the Buddha Grove and processed meditatively with lighted candles and incense three times around it. Finally we recited a blessing and that was it for another year.

To everyone who contributed to the success of that evening, even if only in the slightest of ways - ANUMODANA!

The Governor at Springhill at the time of the building of the Buddha Grove was Peter Siddons. Private sector prisons have Directors not Governors and Peter who is now the Director of HMP Blakenhurst has agreed to be our guest speaker at the Angulimala Workshop on December 11th.





Lately my own round of prison visiting which normally takes me out for three or four days and into up to six establishments

a week has been rather more than usually interrupted. For instance, I had a bit of fun recently with a day's filming I did for a programme on Buddhism for schools. It was actually a bit more for the programme they began shooting here back in May at our Vesakha Puja celebration and this time involved me in various woodland locations around here telling the story of the Buddha's early life. I also had a delightful afternoon in perfect weather on the Isle of Wight back in Albany Prison where I used to visit so often but haven't been for so long. I was there to administer the Refuges and Precepts to two members of Albany's Buddhist group, one of whom I used occasionally to correspond with years ago but had never met. And there have also been a couple of meetings at Prison Service HQ.

Turning to matters here at the Forest Hermitage or Wat Pah Santidhamma as it's otherwise known, I must allow myself to comment on the recent appeal and plans for a new Abbot's Kuti. First of all, this has not been my idea but has been initiated by those who felt it was about time I had rather better facilities at my disposal than this ancient caravan which has served me so well. Having been rather reluctant at first to face the disruption, I've since warmed to the idea of a replacement and I'm now rather looking forward to it. I've capitalised 'Abbot's Kuti' in the hope of removing an ambiguity and to allay the fears or quash the hopes of those who might have thought a new abbot was poised to take over. So far as I know nothing of that kind is about to happen. What is intended though is that a new kuti should be provided for the use of the abbot whoever he is. While at the moment that's me, it won't be my kuti in the sense of being a personal possession even if it is likely that it will be me using it for some time to come. It will be offered to the Sangha, probably on November 21st.

Dum Dum, my lovely black duck has died and been succeeded by another, almost identical and as yet unnamed. The threesome of George the goose, Osric the eccentric cockerel and the black Cayuga duck is thus restored to continue parading about my garden complemented now by a pair of elegant ornamental garden cranes, left to me by John Garrie who died a year ago. I've heard that he took great pleasure in them and so do I.

UPOSATHA OBSERVANCE DAYS

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|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |
| OCT | 2 | 9 | 17 | 24 |
| The Vassa ends on Oct 24th | | | | |
| NOV | 1 | 7 | 15 | 22 |

This Newsletter is from Ven. Ajahn Khemadhammo of SANTIDHAMMA FOREST HERMITAGE and ANGULIMALA, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation

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