

# News and Musings

From

## The Forest Hermitage

October 2010



As I write this we are almost at the end of this year's Vassa, the annual Rains Retreat. It began on July 26th and will end on October 23rd. The day before it commenced was Asalha Puja, the anniversary of the Buddha's first sermon and on the previous Sunday we celebrated these two occasions. Our celebration began as usual with the Refuges and Precepts and then after the alms-round and the offering and sharing of food we gathered outside to circumambulate the Buddha Rupa that sits beneath the Tree of Heaven planted in memory of Ajahn Chah. Back in the Shrine Room the requisites and funds collected that day, which came to about a thousand pounds, were offered and then I gave a talk on the meaning of Asalha Puja.

When all that was done we formally wound up the Wood Cottage (Bhavana Dhamma) appeal. This was the appeal we launched about eight years ago when we realised we had a chance of purchasing Wood Cottage, just across on the other side of Hampton Wood. At the time a lot of people thought we'd never manage it but we did. And finally in June, thanks to enormous generosity and kindness, the place was completely paid for. Hooray!!! And Anumodana to all and everyone who helped.

Still with our Asalha Puja celebration, next on the agenda and immediately following the winding up of the Wood Cottage (Bhavana Dhamma) appeal we went ahead and launched our next major project, the New Build as we are calling it. I wrote about this in the last newsletter but if you can't remember or are new to News & Musings, I'll remind you. It's a proposed extension in the form of two large Orangeries to the ground floor of our main Forest Hermitage building. If the planning application is successful, we hope that work will begin in about February or March, so by this time next year it could be a going concern. But you know, the only certainty is uncertainty! I went on to explain why we are doing this now in case anyone was thinking that really it was a bit soon to be embarking on another project and asking again when the heat of the last campaign has hardly begun to cool. What I told everyone that afternoon was that we have an opportunity to improve our building now and I don't want to wait until I'm so frail and decrepit I have to be wheeled in in a bath chair. I had a birthday the other day and some of the birthday greetings made it sound like an achievement. Yes, the sand is running out and I don't want to hang about but get on with this while I can. Let me explain: my mother and father were very frugal people and even after my father had died and she had turned ninety my mother was still saving, which

### Coming Soon:

#### **END OF VASSA**

Robe Offering ceremony  
Saturday, October 23rd. From 10a.m.

#### **TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY**

Silver Jubilee of The Forest Hermitage  
Sunday, November 21st. From 10a.m.

#### **ANGULIMALA WORKSHOPS**

At the Forest Hermitage at 10 a.m.  
On December 4th, March 5th & June 4th.  
(For Buddhist Prison Chaplains only)

#### **BHAVANA DHAMMA RETREATS**

Ven. Manapo leads one day, weekend and five and seven day retreats - details on the website.

#### **MEDITATION & A DHAMMA TALK**

at The FOREST HERMITAGE on  
Monday, Wednesday & Friday evenings.

meant that even though she had been affected by dementia and lived in a care home for the last two years of her life, when she passed away she still managed to leave a substantial sum that she willed should be held in trust for me. I've already asked that some of that money should go towards the Bhavana Dhamma appeal, while a lesser amount has paid for several hundred small Buddha Rupas for Angulimala chaplains to present to prisoners. Now it is my wish that the rest will help us to improve our building with a better kitchen, better toilets and much more space. Although the remainder of my mother's legacy won't quite meet the entire cost, it is hoped that enough can be raised fairly promptly to make the final payment by the time the work is supposed to be completed early next year. Later on the trustees would like to see that money from my mother's legacy restored just in case they do have to get me that bath chair!

On August 1st, I went as usual on the first Sunday of the month down to Khun Peter's Thai restaurant in Marylebone to eat and give a talk. Afterwards, I went to visit Lord Avebury in his home in South London where he was recovering from an operation on his aortic aneurism less than two weeks previously. So good had been his recovery that I'd hardly got in the door and sat down and he was suggesting a walk in the park. The park is only round the corner and it was such a lovely



afternoon, so off we went with Lord Avebury conscientiously stooping from time to time to pick up rubbish that littered the pavement. Once in the park we began the circuit, passing the various special areas, the quiet area for the elderly where a young couple were innocently throwing a frisby back and forth, the wild area, and so forth. We inspected the impressively golden roofed loos and then at the open air café for the first time in decades I sat in a deck chair. Just in front of us was the bandstand where a brass band began to assemble and soon struck up a few offerings from Haydn. And as the band played on we resumed our walk. It was such a lovely way to spend a summer's Sunday afternoon, utterly civilised with no unpleasant or bad

behaviour in sight! And yet, we were only a few hundred yards from an ugly and busy main road where not just bad behaviour but crime and violence are everyday occurrences. I imagine that when it was suggested that this park should have money spent on it and be renovated there were those who predicted it would soon be vandalised, but it hasn't happened. It makes you realise just how important environment is and how improving where people work, rest and play affects and improves *how* they work, rest and play.



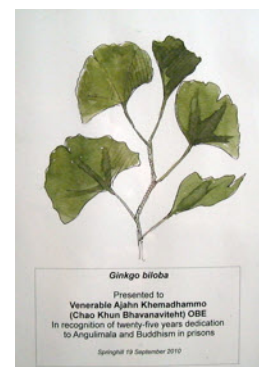
This photo was taken in the Chief Scout's office at Gilwell Park, the Headquarters of Scouting. The portrait is of Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of the Scouts, and the Buddha Rupa was a gift from Thailand to Gilwell Park in 1966. It came from a monk in Saraburi and the marble platform on which it sits was given by the scouts of Saraburi. It used to sit outside in

a purpose-built Thai style sala but three years ago in time for the centenary of the Scout movement another larger Buddha Rupa was donated by the Scouts of Thailand. The new one was too big and heavy for the old sala which by then had become a bit dilapidated. So the sala was restored and enlarged and then there was nowhere for this older Buddha Rupa. That is until it came to take pride of place next to the founder's portrait in the Chief Scout's office. And I must say, I'm rather pleased to see it there. On August 6th, the day we were at Gilwell Park, a Faith Trail was being inaugurated and I was asked to conduct a blessing for the new sala. I began by explaining that we would be chanting some passages from the Buddhist scriptures, particularly the Buddha's discourses on Blessings and Loving-Kindness, qualities that I suggested a good scout should develop and then we recited some of the Parittas including the Mangala Sutta and the Karaniya Metta Sutta. I'm pleased to say that we have had reports that they were very impressed by our efforts. Mind you, since they'd never witnessed anything like it before they didn't have much to compare it with.

On September 19th we were back again at Spring Hill Prison for the annual Buddha Grove celebration. It's eighteen years since the Buddha Grove at Spring Hill Open Prison was built and on a freezing October evening opened and inaugurated before a worthy crowd of prisoners and officials that included the then Director General of the Prison Service and the Patron of Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy Organisation, Lord Avebury. I remember it was so cold that some of the prisoners very thoughtfully made some hot soup but I'm not sure it was very nice because afterwards some of the Thais who were present came to me and asked if they could do the food next year. And so began a tradition that every year the Thai community cooks for the whole prison and guests and for the Buddhist inmates in the adjacent Grendon Prison, and at the Buddha Grove we conduct some very beautiful ceremonies. We commence with chanting by the monks from various temples who have assembled for the occasion and that is followed by speeches from Lord Avebury, Peter Bennett, the Governor of Grendon & Spring Hill and Tim Newell, the former Governor. I usually finish up by explaining how the Buddha Grove came to be built and then tell the story of Angulimala, that great and unusual disciple of the Buddha, after whom we named our Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy. There's a recording available at the Forest Hermitage website of what I said this year if you're interested. Then later, after everyone except the monks have eaten, we all come back to the Buddha Grove to join in processing three times round it with candles, flowers and incense.



By then it's dark and the spectacle of this candle-lit procession is both beautiful and impressive. As we finish the candles, flowers and incense are offered at the foot of the Shrine. Then to conclude some presentations are made, to Lord Avebury for all the help and support he gives us, to the Governors and some staff members for their support, and of course we don't forget the prisoners and to represent them at least one is asked to come forward to receive a presentation. This year, just as I thought it was all over, there was a sudden flurry of activity, I was stopped from making the usual concluding remarks and Lord Avebury came forward to say some very wonderful and kind words about me and then first one prisoner and then another presented me with first a picture of a tree that would be arriving at the Forest Hermitage the following day and then a plaque to go in front of it when it's planted, in honour of my twenty-five years with Angulimala. That was quite a shock and I was very moved. Now just let me say a very big thank you to everyone who worked so hard and gave so generously to once again make this amazing evening at Spring Hill happen. Anumodana!



The tree presented to me at the Spring Hill Buddha Grove Celebration on September 19th, a Ginkgo Biloba, has been planted at The Forest Hermitage behind the Ajahn Chah Memorial Tree.

When at the very beginning of May, 1977, Ajahn Chah came to England, accompanying him were Ajahn Sumedho and myself. It was supposed to have been a two month visit but within two weeks of our arrival Luangpor Chah told us that of course he would have to return to Thailand before the Vassa in July but we were to stay. Ever since I've thought of the day when I might go back to live in Thailand for good but for me, so far, it hasn't come and I think will never come. But Ajahn Sumedho, who is just ten days short of ten years older than me, at the end of last year decided that for him the time had come. Next month he leaves England and goes back to Thailand. He will be succeeded at Amaravati by Ajahn Amaro and recently they both called to see me. It was hardly a farewell since we seldom meet but when we're in Thailand and I imagine that will continue to be the case for some years to come but in some ways I suppose it marks the end of a chapter and one that we began together all those years ago. Of course I wish him well in his deserved retirement. Incidentally he told me that he'd just found out that his great-grandfather came from Godshill on the Isle of Wight - and so did mine, they must have known each other but would they ever have imagined their descendants Buddhist monks!

This year not only is it the twenty-fifth anniversary of Angulimala, the Buddhist Prison Chaplaincy but in November it will be twenty-five years since the grand opening of The Forest Hermitage.

**This Newsletter is from Ven. Chao Khun Bhavanaviteht (Luangpor Khemadhammo) OBE of  
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