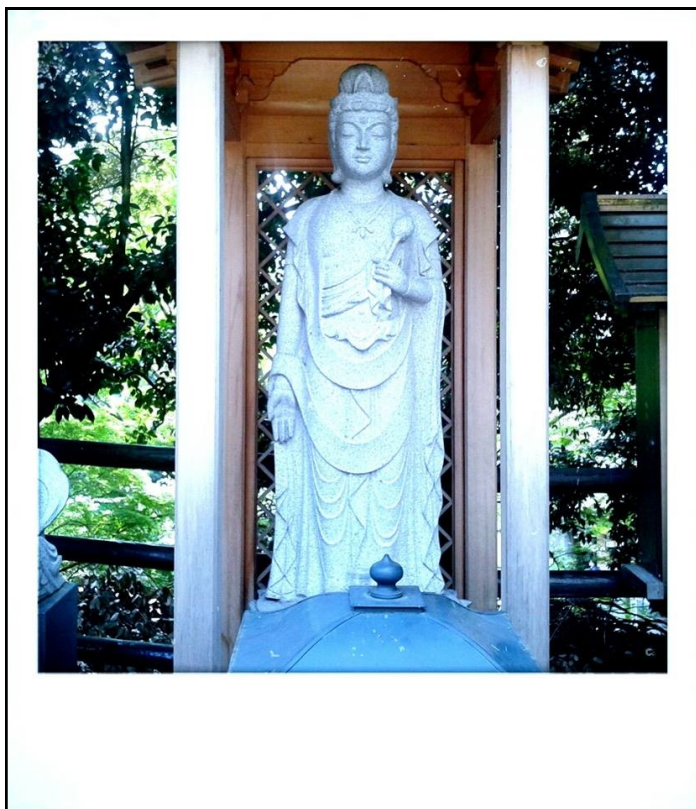


# —Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Kanzeon figure at a Rinzai Temple in Uji, Kyoto  
(with thanks to Debbie Sheringham)*

## *Calendar of Events*

September-December 2014

**Portobello Buddhist Priory**  
**27 Brighton Place, Portobello**  
**Edinburgh, EH15 1LL**  
**Telephone (0131) 669 9622**  
**email: [favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk](mailto:favian.straughan@homecall.co.uk)**  
**website: [www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk](http://www.portobellobuddhist.org.uk)**

## — Welcome to all —

**Portobello Buddhist Priory**, a ground floor flat in the Portobello district of Edinburgh, opened in 1998. It is one of a handful of temples in Britain which are affiliated to the Community of Buddhist Contemplatives. The training monastery of the Community at Throssel Hole near Hexham in Northumberland was founded in 1972 by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, an Englishwoman who trained within the Soto Zen tradition at one of its main monasteries in Japan. The resident Prior at Portobello is one of the senior monks from Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey.

The purpose of the Priory is to offer lay training within the Serene Reflection Meditation tradition (Soto Zen) to anyone who sincerely seeks to undertake it, and the prior's role is to support such training. The prior and members of the congregation are also involved in activities such as religious education, hospital and prison visiting.

All are warmly invited to join in the Priory's programme of lay practice, the purpose of which is to come to know and live from our True Nature, whose expression is our wise and compassionate living.

*With kindest wishes from Rev Master Favian, Prior*

*(For details of the day-to-day schedule at the Priory, please see back page)*

## - Weekend events at the Priory -

### September 2014

Sunday 14th	Festival of Great Master Dogen	11am
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### October

Sunday 4th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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### November

Sunday 2nd	Festival of our Founder	11am
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### December

Sunday 7th	Festival of the Buddha's Enlightenment	11am
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Wednesday 31st	New Year Festival	7-30- 10.30pm
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**The Priory is open to visitors** as well as trainees every day from  
6.45am - 9.15pm  
except Mondays, Thursday afternoons, and Sunday pm.

*(Visitors—please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior  
is holding retreats elsewhere: see inside back page)*

## — Prior's Notes —



**A** moment on the beach can be like this.... A delight in form – walking the tide line – the play of light on the surging waves – the squeal of children and seagulls – the constant curiosity of the trotting dogs.

And with the delight can come a shadow – the thought of the fleeting nature of all compounded things – the memory going to nostalgia – to our loved ones – the taste of anxiety – the fear of loss – our own mortality.

Delight and sadness; the weather of the mind arising as this moment. Yet still this is not all; there is the space between the thoughts and around the feelings – the silence from which the sounds arise – the open awareness that somehow

knows the fullness of it all as a felt presence that allows the delight and sadness to give texture. The alive 'I'-ness at the heart of the thinking 'me'-ness, that has no investment in light or dark, no need to grasp after any fact or judgement.

And now can come some capacity to rest as This, with attention and surrender....

As the dog, leaping out of the water, sprays you with wet sand, its prize ball between its teeth.

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## *Julia and the Garden: Tending to Sangha*



*The garden at Throssel, with Kanzeon statue in the background  
(with thanks to Rev Bernyn)*

**I**'ve been reading bits and pieces on Bright Moon over the past few months and swinging between excitement and despondency. There are all these wonderful ideas, but I always go away a bit befuddled. How do we, as individuals and as a sangha, decide what's good to do, particularly when 'sangha' is amorphous and ever-changing? How do we move from good ideas to action?

One morning recently at Throssel I got the job of helping Julia in the garden. I don't know if you've seen the garden there, but it's really beautiful. Peaceful. There's a pond with goldfish, frogs and waterboatmen. There's a sloping lawn, flowerbeds and birdsong. There's a sense of a plan, order, but also just this lovely jumble of colour and texture and shape – cultivated wildness. I kept

wanting to go and sit in it.

I was asking Julia how it had come about and she told me the way she works is to start in one place. She said she might work on one flowerbed, making decisions about that, and then be able to see more clearly what's needed in the next bit along. When she started, she said, she had no idea what the whole garden would look like. She makes these small choices and acts on each one. Each action unfolds from the last.

And this way of working – it works. If you saw the garden you'd know that. It doesn't feel bitty; it feels whole. It hangs together.

In my own life I have a tendency to want to make a grand plan, to design the whole 'garden' first before I actually do anything. But Julia and the Throssel garden got me thinking. And when it comes to thinking about what my contribution might be to the sangha, I've realised that it helps to approach it the way Julia has approached that garden. It's about weeding one bed, or putting in one plant, and trusting that the next action will get clearer in response to the last.

One difference between gardening and sangha-ing is, Julia took responsibility for the whole garden whereas, with the sangha, there are lots of different 'gardeners' coming from different points. It all feels a bit anarchic, which is great, but what will make it workable is being able to glimpse each other between the trees, being aware of each other working away - and I suppose that's why something like Bright Moon is so important.

When I emailed Julia to ask her if it was okay to borrow her ideas for this post, she wrote back:

*Another point of the design and garden metaphor, v important, is that the garden had been designed many times before and has plants, shapes and colours that I just sculpt a bit here and there and now and then. Another important thing is regular attention and keeping weeding, mowing and shifting stuff, which is the cleaning metaphor.*

This reminds me that we're not starting with an empty plot. The reason we're all here on Bright Moon in the first place is that we love and live within a garden that has been continuously cultivated for many years. I worry that suggest-

ing changes sounds like being critical of what's already here, but it's not that. The line that comes into my head is 'preserve well'. But that doesn't mean nothing should change.

From what I hear, Buddhism has always changed on meeting new cultures with their particular climates and soil qualities. And my sense is that, as soto zen has come into contact with Western culture, lay practice has already changed. As laypeople we can now participate fully in zazen and ceremonial and are supported to find ways to bring practice into daily life. It seems important to me that some of the organisational structures and habits of mind that we've inherited from Japan also change to reflect this. It matters to me because this garden is beautiful and there's nowhere else I want to be.

Helping Julia the other week, I enthusiastically removed some weeds around a plant by the gate and when I stood back to look, the plant I was 'helping' had gone all droopy and sad-looking – the weeds had been holding it up and in removing them I'd disturbed its roots. Julia said she thought it might recover in time to flower, but even so it shows me that there's vulnerability here and a responsibility to go gently.

I'm going to try to bring a gardener's attention to what I do, weeding, mowing and shifting, sculpting here and there, and maybe even putting in a new plant or two – with a gardener's eye on what's already here. And what I'm realising (and trying to say here) is that I don't have to see the whole garden. It's just this bit right here that's for me to do. It's about trusting myself, and others, and trusting the garden's underlying shape to hold.

*Sarah Whiteside*





## *Reflections on Sangha Gardening —*

**R**eadng Sarah's beautiful writing, comparing discussions about sangha to working in the garden, prompted me to reflect on my own experience. I was involved in discussions about the lay sangha as part of the work with the interim board, and I have "dabbled" in the ongoing discussions that are now taking place. I can find myself treating this as an analytical exercise, based on ideas about the how things are and where new or improved ways could be tried out. Sarah's post set me reflecting in a more personal way, so I made a list of some the memories of sangha that seemed to stand out.

I started to meditate on my own in the 1980's, based on Roshi Kapleau's book "The Three Pillars of Zen". I was drawn to Zen because to me at that time it seemed to offer a method (zazen), rather than a theory. Though outwardly successful, I was very unhappy both in my work and my marriage, and had come to the beginnings of a realisation that the deeper roots of this perhaps lay within myself. I did not realise that there were any Zen practitioners in the UK, and vaguely wondered whether it was necessary to go to Japan.

I heard of a teacher called master Hogen, and signed up for my first sesshin at Gaia House. During the sesshin I asked master Hogen "how is it possible to find the Buddha in a Multi National Oil Company". I can't remember the details of the reply, but I found myself lying on the floor sobbing. If you take a very broad view of sangha, then my question and response to the answer were, in part, about the suffering arising from my relations with those with whom I worked (my sangha), and the wish to do better.

By this time I had made my first visit to Throssel, and although suspicious of many aspects, something in me responded. I sought out meditators in Aberdeen, and began to sit with a Trungpa Rinpoche group. Soon afterwards I met Richard Potter and we became an official Throssel group, meeting at Richard's flat. During my second sesshin with master Hogen it became clear in a very direct way that my place was in the OBC and that my monastery was my family and my job. I had no conscious sense of what a sangha should be, and the only model for how lay people should be with each other came from retreats at Throssel. At that time, retreat days ended with an excruciating social tea,

with a “more tea vicar” type of interaction.

Richard left Aberdeen for a new job and I was the only person in the group who had been to Throssel. There were issues around what it meant to be a Throssel group (the OBC role in relation to groups had not yet been established). There were some who came looking for a general “New Age” experience and those who did not want a specific affiliation. I responded to these tensions by emphasising formality: sitting, listening to dharma tapes and avoiding difficult topics of conversation. There was little emphasis on getting to know each other outside of the group. Throssel had introduced lay robes in fluorescent cream (at Jukai, Kevin from Ireland summed up the look: “Oi feel like an Archbishop trussed up in this ting”). To emphasise the formality and the link with Throssel I used to wear this robe at group meetings.

Along with this was an equally formal view of the role of monks. This was before Priors and meditation group monks, so monks would visit around twice a year to give a public talk and lead an introductory retreat. A lot of tension arose in meditation on these retreats: we tried to recreate the formality and etiquette of Throssel retreats, with high expectations that the monk would exemplify Zen wisdom in

responding to contingencies and that we had to somehow do the same. This shows something about the culture of the time and implicit within that, mutual expectations of our roles together with my own more personal projections about the monastic side of the sangha.

Over the next 10 years my marriage came to an amicable end, I became the term time carer for my young daughter and a lay minister. Most of my energy went into work, being a dad and the meditation group, with a core of committed people now giving a clearer identity. For me, some of the seeming separation between meditation and daily life softened. There was a sense of different parts of my life, previously held in separate boxes, coming together. I got involved in other sangha activities such as working with Iain Robinson to organise family weekends at Throssel. Looking back, it seems that I was still reluctant to allow friendships formed within the sangha to extend into other areas of my life.

Some years after my marriage ended I began to experiment with new relationships, and I can remember feeling tension around how my girlfriends would fit into my life as a Buddhist trainee. I remember my then girlfriend feeling that I was neglecting her when we took her daughter along to a family weekend. Although I did not under-



stand this at the time, I now think it shows how I had difficulty reconciling my ideals about how one should behave with the sangha, with being together with someone in a normal human relationship.

Life in Aberdeen continued; my daughter went away to Uni; I left my main career job in the early 2000's and was able to work part time. One key incident from this period was a Scottish sangha gathering at which I had a very angry confrontation with a monk (still a valued friend!) I was so blinded by my anger that I did not understand what was happening. Later I realised that we had very different ideas about what form the event should take and were both surprised that the other should have a different view. Reflecting on this I see that my reaction was like an act of inarticulate teenage rebellion: a step towards a more adult relationship and the understanding that the respect that is an essential part of lay/monastic relationships does not preclude normal human give and take.

Since 2008 I have been fully retired. In 2010 I was deeply shocked by the events at Shasta, and even more so when I read the summary FTTI report a year later. I made a submission to the interim board, and in late 2011, I formally joined when Andrew Taylor

Brown stepped down. In a note to Rev Saido, offering to get involved I made the following statement: "I am volunteering because being a Buddhist lay trainee within the OBC is the most important thing in my life. I have a deep wish to continue to train within the OBC, and to see it prosper. I have a basic confidence in the OBC sangha, and in its capacity to adapt to meet changing circumstances".

It was a joy to step into the very collegiate culture that the board had established, though it took time for me to relax and get to know the other members in a human way through working together. At times the content of the work was deeply challenging and painfully cut away any residual idealism I had about the nature of the Order. I found that it tended to provide hooks for some of the latent doubts I had about Buddhist practice and the OBC, and it was easy to construct a dark mental picture that was essentially a fantasy. This is not to say that some of the issues that came to the board are not in need of careful attention. I am very grateful to have been part of the interim board: it provided a unique opportunity for fellowship within both the monastic and lay sangha and became a catalyst to help me understand

a bit more about how I engage with doubt.

From my current perspective some of my past actions towards others in the sangha seem clumsy and I can see they were based on unrealistic projections. I can also see how I had a sense that what was happening in Aberdeen was somehow inadequate, like student days when the real party always seemed to be happening somewhere else. Arising from this was an idealistic longing based on a vague vision of the broader lay sangha that might provide something better. At the same time I can also see that I was doing my best with both inner and outer conditions, as they were at that time, and making a sincere offering.

It has been helpful to write about how my attitudes towards sangha have evolved, and it has given me more insight into how the expression of my own koan interacted with the evolving culture of the order. It has been a revelation to realise that the wish to be part of the sangha was such a strong impulse right from my first steps as a

Buddhist trainee. Right now I am finding increasingly that social fulfilment comes from the sangha and that making the effort to reach out to people on a personal basis seems to be very important.

Returning to my opening comment about how I can tend to treat discussions about the lay sangha as an analytical exercise, it now seems clearer that I need to be as honest as I can about my motivation. In order to do something new it is necessary to think and to work with what is inevitably an abstract model of how things are. However, this needs to be held lightly for, as Sarah points out, I only see my own bit of the garden. I also need to recognise that my actions may be clouded by ignorance. A perfect sangha is only to be found in the world as it is, not as I wish it to be. Recognising all of this, I still feel I that I should make an effort to take part in the discussions that are taking place.

*Bob McGraw*



## *Swimming is a life skill*



As some of you may know, the Buddhist training seems to always bring me back to the experience of ‘buoyancy’ as illustrated by this Sufi poem:

*‘I do not cease swimming in the seas of love  
Rising with the wave, then descending,  
Now the wave sustains me, and then  
I sink beneath it, love bears me away  
where there is no longer any shore’*

Al-Hallaj

When I look deeply at the inner clinging, the resistance sometime generated through the thinking process reminds me of what I observed in a past role as a swimming teacher. When we fear in water, we may want to cling at what is solid, we resist the fluid around, at best kicking and pulling hard, at worse thrashing about, we may want to stay vertical when swimming calls for horizontality, for surrender to the capacity of water to carry us. When swimming, the more we surrender and lean with all our weight against the fluid texture, the greater the buoyancy, the more streamline we become, the least resistance we offer, the least drag we produce, the greater we glide through, the more effortless we evolve, the more joyful the experience, in sync with the element, no

bubbles, nothing much is added to the existing flow. Look at Olympic swimmers from underwater. Although they move at great speed, underneath the surface, no trace of disturbance, a peaceful relationship with the fluid environment.

I can see that capacity or not to glide with the present moment, moment by moment. It takes great trust in the buoyancy of that moment, to allow myself to go with the flow of impermanence. I may still be a swimming teacher after all.

*Christele Geuffroy*

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### *Indra's Net*

The land encased in fallen cloud,  
cleansed by vaporous white,  
yellow gold of whin shines  
embroidered with silk webs,  
betrayed by morning dew, reflecting  
the world in every pearl drop.

I see my image involved here,  
but closer and sharply focused,  
each perfect tear expands  
until only brilliant nothing remains.

Coming down from the hill  
the bass drone of distant traffic  
hums in the pibroch of birdsong.

*David Campbell*

# Beginner's Mind

*This is an adapted extract from an article written for the Yoga Scotland Magazine.*

**W**e can connect with beginner's mind by letting go of all we think we know about a situation and approaching it with fresh eyes. We see this in children, who have a natural sense of wonder. Why is this helpful? The late Zen Buddhist teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, said, "in the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few". Often, when we approach a situation, we bring to it our knowledge of similar past situations. Each moment is unique, and if we rely too heavily on that knowledge, it acts like a filter of the direct experience of now. It is a bit like wearing a pair of sunglasses – everything we see is coloured by this past knowledge. By being willing to let go of this expertise, we can discard limitations and be open to all possibilities in this fresh moment.

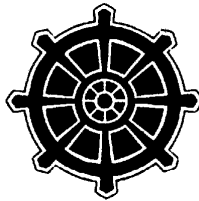
This is not to deny that we – and all things – have a history. Our past has shaped us and made us who we are. In fact, the present moment exists as it is because of the infinite actions and

conditions of the past. The past, then, shapes the present moment, but it does not determine how we respond to it. We have free will, and can change the future by how we act right now.

The purpose is also not to reject the importance of expertise. We rely on experts in all manner of situations and know ourselves the importance of

learning and experience in developing new skills. After all, children are naturally "in the moment" partly because they have not fully developed the wonderful mature adult brain that enables us to plan new

projects and solve complex problems. It is because our intellect is so valuable that we tend to use it in situations that it was not designed for. So the same brain that can visualise a better future can also obsessively fantasise about negative outcomes i.e. worry. And we know from experience that worried-about outcomes rarely happen. Similarly, we sometimes use our conceptual mind to filter, and therefore limit, our immediate experience. This is often based on a lack of



trust of our ability to respond spontaneously to a situation. Knowledge will arise as and when we need it, if we allow ourselves to be open. We can allow experience and expertise to function naturally rather than trying to grab on to them.

Beginner's mind is very practical, and can inform our actions in everyday situations. One area where it is useful is in relationships. One of the reasons we can feel close to another person is because of a shared history. Yet sometimes, aspects of that history can be problematic. For example feelings of hurt, disappointment or boredom can colour our view of another person. We then tend to see what we already know

when interacting with them. If we want to make changes in a relationship, it is helpful to look at the person as though we were seeing them for the first time. This is actually true, in that we are all changing moment by moment. Doing this means looking at a person with fresh eyes, and we may notice aspects of them we had previously overlooked. Or maybe we will see aspects of our own mind we can let go of.

Beginner's mind can be summarised as: let go of the past, look with fresh eyes, and see what the possibilities are.

*Neil Rothwell*



# Meditation after the Festival of Avalokiteswara, July 20<sup>th</sup>



We had a splendid Avalokiteshwara ceremony, surrounding ourselves with images and statues of compassion. I was struck at how in gathering together we become part of this compassionate expression, our faces and the ceremonial forms we express with body, speech and mind ‘speak’ of something greater than the sum of our parts. Compassion as the activity at the heart of existence cannot be limited to the human form, yet we play our part and the faith with which we bear witness to this during our ceremony is a real offering to the world.

*Rev Master Favian*



## *The Teaching from a Rainbow —*

'A rainbow is defined as an optical and meteorological phenomenon that is caused by both reflection and refraction of light in water droplets resulting in a spectrum of light appearing in the sky. It takes the form of a multicoloured arc.'

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Where is the teaching in that? Why can't I see a rainbow anytime I want?

Well, the atmosphere has to be damp, it needs to be daytime, it occurs outside, the sun has to be present behind the observer, and the observer (you or me) has to be PRESENT. Sounds like a meditation instruction - keep the eyes open and find the koan which appears in daily life. Let the truth appear naturally.

Quoting from The Most Excellent Mirror - Samadhi - 'It calmly, clearly shows when all conditions ripen'.

I read something similar to this years ago in an OBC journal and I never forgot it..

By the way, I saw a wonderful , beautiful arched rainbow last evening when walking the dogs.

*Gordon Edwards*



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.  
Deadline for next issue is mid-December 2014*





## **- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -**

### **September 2014**

Saturday 20th-Monday  
22nd

Harris retreat

### **October**

Friday 24th	Aberfeldy	7.30-9pm
Saturday 25th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 26th	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

### **November**

Friday 21st	Aberfeldy	7.30-9pm
Saturday 22nd	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 23rd	Aberdeen morning retreat	10am-1pm

### ***For further details please phone :***

<b>Aberdeen -</b>	Bob McGraw or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01330) 824339 (01467) 681525
<b>Aberfeldy -</b>	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
<b>Dundee -</b>	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788
<b>Highland -</b>	Calum Finlay	(01463) 870331

# — Day-to-day schedule at Portobello Buddhist Priory —

## **Daily** (*Every day except Mondays, Thursday afternoons & Sunday p.m.*)

### MORNING

- 7.00 Meditation
- 7.40 Morning service

### EVENING

- 7.30 Meditation
- 7.55 Walking meditation
- 8.00 Meditation
- 8.30 Evening office

## **Early morning practice**

You can come for early morning meditation, followed by short morning service.

*7.00am –  
8.15am*

## **Evening practice**

Meditation, walking meditation, meditation, evening office.  
You are welcome to stay on for tea.

*7.30pm –  
8.45pm*

## **Introductory afternoons**

- are usually held on the second Saturday of each month. A short talk will be given about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition, with meditation instruction and discussion.

*2.30-4pm*

***Saturday 13th September, 11th October, 8th November, 13th December***

## **Wednesday and Friday evenings**

Midday service and meditation, followed by tea and a Dharma talk /discussion, evening office.

*7.30pm–9.30pm*

## **Sunday mornings**

**Meditation** from 9.30am onwards, followed either by a Ceremony, Dharma discussion or Festival at 11am. It is fine to arrive or leave at 10.45am

*9.30am–  
12.30pm*

## **Festival mornings**

Priory open for meditation from 9.30am, or come at 10.45am for the ceremony.

*Portobello Buddhist Priory is Scottish Charity no. SCO31788  
Prior: Reverend Master Favian Straughan*