

—Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Children enjoying the feel of autumn leaves
The Hermitage, Edinburgh*

Calendar of Events January to February 2008

Portobello Buddhist Priory
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— 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 Favian, Prior

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

- Weekend events at the Priory -

January 2008

Sunday 27th	Festival of Buddha's Renunciation	11am
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February

Sunday 10th	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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March

Sunday 2nd	Festival of Avalokiteshwara	11am
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Sunday 23rd	Renewal of Precepts	11am
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April

Sunday 6th	Festival of Great Master Keizan	11am
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Monday 20th	Renewal of Precepts	8pm onwards
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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 p.m.

*(Please phone beforehand, and please note when the Prior
is holding retreats elsewhere)*

— Prior's Notes —

Here at Portobello Buddhist Priory we celebrated the founding head of our Order, Reverend Master Jiyu-Kennett on Sunday 4th November. It was a festive occasion, celebrating the life and training of this remarkable woman, and also a recognition that without our individual training the whole cannot express the truth.

For those unfamiliar with her writing here's a short extract from her diary *The Wild White Goose* which includes one of her favourite poems:

Flying clouds in a flying sky,
I listen and hear the wild goose cry;
Peaceful eve but it's no use
For I am sister to the wild, white goose.

My heart knows what the wild goose knows
For my heart goes where the wild goose goes;
Wild goose, sister goose, which is best,
The flying sky or a heart at rest?

There's a sense with this poem of a dynamic direction, a pointing beyond the words and the energy of a great desire to go in that direction. It touches on something which

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I and perhaps most of us struggle with, a sort of grasping after the finger that is pointing instead of truly looking in the direction it is pointing to. We can unwittingly try measuring our 'spiritual progress' by the accumulation of concepts we've gathered, instead of the understanding toward which they point. Concepts are good and useful but we don't want to settle for a life of theory. In this regard I'm also reminded of a recent talk given by Reverend Master Daishin where he pointed to the tendency we have of getting ourselves 'mugged' down the alleyways of thinking during our meditation. I feel this is the same; a grasping and a fascination with objects of mind. The radical pointing he offers is to turn the attention back upon

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the thinker. Instead of sorting through the mind's content we are asked to gaze deeply at the source of this movement, posing this with the 'question' - what is this that sits?

As in Reverend Master Jiyu's favourite poem, to go in this direction takes courage and fortitude because the geese are flying into unknown territory, at least as far as our self-concerned mind can tell. But our motivation isn't always ruled by the little self; we have an intuition that is not satisfied with theory and is willing to risk the letting go necessary to undergo this journey, which is really a profound change of perspective from 'here to here'.

'Here to here' are not really two separate places but reflect a capacity to 'flow' in the moment from what Reverend Master calls the perspective of the little picture to that of the big picture; our self-concerned world to that of selflessness, expressing the deep connection we are with the world.

A film story that helps me with this understanding is that of the bear cub, who while exploring its world is suddenly confronted with a mountain lion. The cub stands up on its hind legs to look as intimidating as possible and lo and behold the cat turns and runs. What the cub doesn't realize and we do as the camera zooms out is that its 12 foot tall mother is standing behind it. When we are locked into the small world of self, driven by our fears and clinging, we can feel it's all down to us. We believe we are in the driving seat of our lives having to run the whole show. What we need is to ground ourselves in the deeper reality of the big picture; which is a way of simply saying we need to cultivate the mind of meditation.

Attachment and awareness

Recently what has been coming up for me in my practice is the importance of not trying to get anything out of practice. Like most of us I engaged practice to try to find some peace, make some sense out of my confusion and my life. Maybe even find Enlightenment. Like the old carrot and stick analogy this served to spur me on to practice and study the teaching, always looking for something, trying to get it right, hungry for the Dharma. Despite being patiently shown again and again that meditation and indeed life, is not something which the mind can grasp. Stubbornly unable to hear I continued.

This approach I feel has been useful in getting acquainted with both my mind and the Dharma. The problem is that it is based on attachment and the mistaken belief that it is possible to capture truth with belief. When we are attached to our beliefs, whatever they are, there can be no freedom. Put simply attachment is suffering, confusion, and separation from reality. If even for a moment we can face life without trying to conceptualise, fix, label, evaluate, grasp or resist, then it is a moment of freedom. There is nothing we can say but there is a direct knowing, an intimate connection as reality presents itself. It is not that our thinking is not useful, as long as we re-

member to treat our beliefs as arbitrary understanding, to carry them lightly. The word is never the thing. It is a hard lesson to learn and ongoing but truth is ungraspable and unknowable. It can't be held. What we can hold just simply is not real its just an idea. A useful image is to imagine clenching your fist tight. To open our hand we just have to stop clenching and our hand opens naturally without any effort. We don't have to physically do it, just stop grasping and our hand opens naturally to its open natural position. So it is with our minds. Our job is just to see there is nothing to do or work out, no special state to try to attain. Our natural

mind is with us always but it is unavailable when we try to catch it, or anything else. This is something I was told at the start of training but it is hard to hear and begin to release our conceptual grip.

Again and again to return to the basics, the willingness to see what is there, to be present with what is, just to see, is what I feel is important. When we become aware that we are holding a fixed view, just to come back. From there what is good to do will become clear, without being distorted by our leanings.

Elliott Forsyth

Catching Up — !

Since starting serene reflection meditation I feel that I have slowed down, that I have more time and energy to give to the things that I need to give time and energy to in order to keep my life on track (food preparation, household chores, work related tasks) — but which I may have previously resented giving time to — and that I am somewhat less judgmental of others (although I think that I have experienced the opposite as well). I am also aware of other small changes in my behaviour (for the better:) and in the response that I receive from others. To be honest though I'd say that it was a case of me catching up with the rest of the human race.

I am appreciative of the efforts of the OBC to bring buddhism to the West. It feels exciting and a little daunting to be learning about buddhism.

Here's a quote that I like:

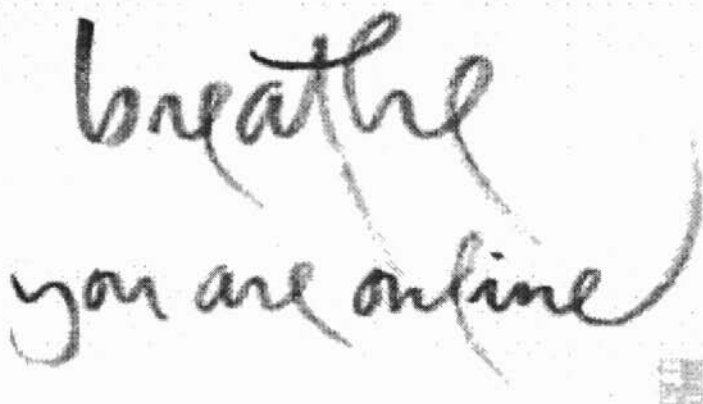
'I'd sum up briefly in the following way: Zen training is an agency of character change, one that will point the whole personality in the direction of increasing selflessness and awareness.'

James H. Austin, M.D. (author of Zen and the Brain).

Gary Thomson

Online

Sitting in the light of the laptop
I opened an email - up came



breathe
you are online

Stopped short - Breathing
Present Awake
It felt so intimate
It touched the world I was in.

The drawing is by
Thich Nhat Hanh

Lesley Scott Reid

Sunday Evening

Half six, hurry.
Cushions into bag.

Bike out, ride.
Crunch of gravel
Outside her door.

Inside, perfumed air,
A quieter place.
Brief greetings.
Always the same
Flickering tea-lights.

Buttocks meet cushion,
Eyes the white wall.
Hands on cool metal.
Sound the bowl,
Three times.
Resonant reverberation.
Always different,
The silence.

Feel breath move.
In, down, up, out.
Soft sounds,

Cat on carpet,
Perhaps a purr,
Her cleaning tongue.
The house hums.

Mind churns on.
Plans, poems,
Fears, dreams,
Bored, sleepy,
Sad, angry.
Small aches in
Various places.

Seven forty-five,
Sound the bowl
Three times,
Resonant reverberation.
Shift, and stretch.

Afterwards, few words.
Drinking tea, we agree
It's good to sit.
Always the same,
Always different.

Tessa Thomas-Pyne

Aberfeldy Serene Reflection Meditation group



Our group meets regularly every Tuesday evening for meditation. Numbers vary from about 7 max. to no visitors on cold winter evenings. After meditation we often listen to Dharma talks, by the Abbot & other monks at Throssel Hole Monastery, or we might read an article from the OBC journal or an appropriate book.

We enjoy meeting up for a chat over a cup of tea and the fellowship that has grown is an important part of taking refuge in the sangha.

We always enjoy the visits by Rev. Favian, who frequently stops over on his way to meet the other groups in Dundee & Aberdeen.

Visitors from other groups would be welcome by arrangement and overnight accommodation might be available.

Robin Baker



Devotional song from the North —

I like to try to incorporate my Buddhist practice into everything I do recreationally. Of course a song can't be appreciated by looking at a page of lyrics, but maybe there is some value in seeing how my practice bubbles out in the form of songs. I have borrowed from our Scriptures in one or two places.

The first song, *Lord of the House* written in India in February of this year is about being *willing* to follow and *trust*. I guess just about everyone has to follow someone or something. Fortunate are those who have a Master to follow, some real live figure of authority who can both bark instructions to a laggard, or offer kind words of encouragement. Whatever the instructions, they can be plainly heard and seen. The rest of us have to try to follow our hearts as best we can, though hearing the advice of our hearts, (that wee, still voice) can be so difficult when our desires and angry minds clamour incessantly for attention. We are fortunate in having the tramlines of the Precepts to run on.

Thankfully when our noisy minds stop for a breather, our hearts are there, where they have always been, ready to offer advice and gently point the way forward. When we wake up to the fact that we have been indulging in the same old unskilled mind games and actions, we can place on the 'altar' of Buddha all our selfish shortcomings and mistakes, and renew our determination to - one day - put an end to them.

Lord of the House

Thoughts and things arise in me, come crashing like a wave
Washing me through misery, into an early grave

I try and try and try again; it's all that I can do
The same old mistakes re-enact, till my thoughts
turn back to you

Chorus:
And then I offer up all my shortcomings, offer my mistakes
And I'm willing to see things a better way
I offer up all my shortcomings, offer my mistakes
And I'm listening to every word you say

I had my share of troubles, just like any boy or girl
They just teach me not to cling onto this floating world

You were always calling me; I would often feel your hand
I could hear you whisper, when the surf crashed on the sand

Chorus:

One day blessed, you stole on me, in meditation's silent gasp
Then I could understand what my - imagination failed to grasp

Now I sit in love, divine patience, - unconditional forgiveness
And I thank you Lord, with all my heart, and know that I am truly blessed

Chorus:
And then I...

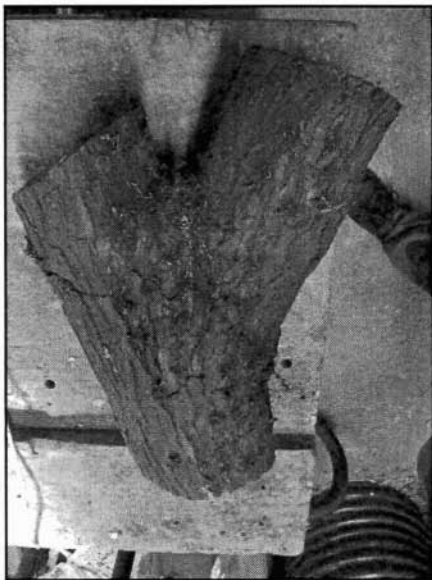
Eddie Shields

We hope to include two more of Eddie's songs in a future edition —

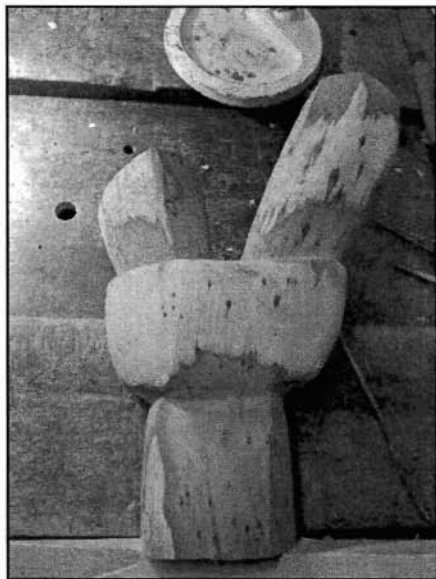
Wood sculpture – Dana for the Priory

Ian McPhail is generously offering the proceeds from a wooden sculpture he has made to the Priory.

The sculpture has taken many hours of Ian's time to make, and stands approximately 40 cms (16 inches) high. Would any sangha member willing to make an offer for the sculpture please contact the Priory -



Before —



— and after!



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.
The deadline for the next issue is the end of March 2008.*





- Events elsewhere in Scotland with the Prior -

February 2008

Friday 22nd	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 23rd	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 24th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

March

Friday 28th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 29th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 30th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

April

Friday 25th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 26th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 27th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

For further details please phone :

Aberdeen -	Bob McGraw	(01330) 824339
	or Joyce & Gordon Edward	(01467) 681525
Aberfeldy -	Robin Baker	(01887) 820339
Dundee -	Elliott Forsyth	(01333) 451788
Peebles -	Julian Goodacre	(01721) 722539

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

Daily (Every day except Mondays, Thursday afternoons & Sunday evenings)

MORNING

- 7.00 Meditation
7.40 Morning service
8.15 Breakfast

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. You are welcome to stay on for breakfast.

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 evenings

Will be held on the second Friday of each month. A short talk about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition. Meditation instruction and discussion.

7.00pm–8.30pm

January 11th, February 8th, March 14th, April 11th

Wednesday 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 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 Favian Straughan*