

# —Portobello Buddhist Priory—



A Temple of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives



*Rev Master Daishin with Rev Favian and members of the Scottish sangha during his recent visit*

## *Calendar of Events* May-August 2011

**Portobello Buddhist Priory**  
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**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 Favian, Prior*

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

## - Weekend events at the Priory -

### May 2011

Sunday 22nd      Renewal of Precepts      11am

### June

Sunday 19th      Renewal of Precepts      11am

### July

Sunday 3rd      Renewal of Precepts      11am

### August

Sunday 14th      Festival of Avalokiteshwara      11am

**The Priory is open to visitors** as well as trainees every day from  
6.45am - 9.15pm  
except Mondays, Thursday afternoons, and Sunday pm.

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

— *Prior's Notes* —

**R**ecently I took part in a Question Time forum of faith leaders and was struck by how we tend to over-simplify the notion of 'worship'. Most typically, the word is used to separate those who believe in a god and those who don't: theists/atheists. There can be arrogance expressed on both sides as they defend their position, for instance a certain tone of intellectual superiority amongst the 'non-worshippers', where their salvation could be characterised as a freedom from superstition and dogma, a release into a rational realm of individual choice, self-development and free expression. Yet looking into my own mind I suspect what this 'salvation' leaves out is that basic movement in us, towards some idea or object that will complete/fulfil, or plain just keep me happily distracted from my own mortality. And there is a clinging for dear life to this movement, which becomes for us, I feel, a form of worship we commit to without realising it.

Our supplicatory prayer may now be for the latest technological upgrade; our ceremonial forms, an expression of consumerism, while our faith rests on some version of scientific materialism, because while not understanding its nature we nevertheless put our hope in it producing some tangible paradise in the future. While this is a caricature, I feel there is something of its seductive nature being expressed here.

For Buddhism, this form of worship may be understood as a form of self-worship. When we don't see the constructed and fluid nature of our sense of self, our 'religion' becomes an attempt to complete and make real our limited sense of 'me'. Hence Buddhism's emphasis on waking up from the dream of attempting to ground our lives in the delusion of separation. We are not wicked and bad to worship wealth, health, status, relationships, celebrity and the rest, but we are often unconscious of the distorted religious drives that condition us to chase and cling to these forms.

The resultant suffering we experience from try-

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ing to complete ourselves through externals is what Buddhism helps us to redress.

To know ourselves through meditation practice, both our individual and interconnected nature, can free us from blindly seeking fulfilment in yet another set of conditions. There is a moment-to-moment sufficiency to be realised which can ground our lives and inform the choices we make. Wealth, health and the rest can have their legitimate place but they need not be burdened with the task of liberating us, or be tagged, as I have done here, with the label of 'false idols'!

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## *Rev Master's visit — Homage to the Sangha*

**T**onight is important. Reverend Master Daishin has travelled from Throssel Hole Abbey to spend the weekend with us at our Priory in Portobello. We have been looking forward to his visit for some time and gather in quietish anticipation. A number of our Sangha are acquainted with Rev. Master, others have met him formally during retreat ceremonies, or seen him as he led the morning service at Throssel. A few know only his voice from recorded dharma talks. Tonight we welcome Rev. Master into our Sangha as a friend as well as our Abbot.

While we sit in the Dharma room chatting, Rev. Master slips in, sits down and almost inconspicuously joins in the conversation, quite a feat for such a tall man. We are immediately engaged and any shyness we might have felt with our honoured guest evaporates. Rev. Master tells us of his new dog Boz, brought to

Throssel after old Ned died and we are glad to learn that our Nicol has settled in to his new life as Throssel's most recent postulant. After meditation Rev. Master takes questions over tea, each answer is given such care and consideration that it could be a dharma talk in itself.

We have a busy Priory on Saturday. Sangha members have journeyed from Aberdeen, Dundee and Aberfeldy to be with us and we fill the zendo for a morning of sitting. Rev. Master's visit provides an added bonus with the opportunity for old friends to catch up and new acquaintances to be made. Some of our visiting friends are staying with Portobello Sangha members, a wonderful opportunity for the wider Scottish Sangha to get to know each other better.

In the afternoon, the hardy venture onto Portobello beach for a windy walk while others who live locally take



*Rev Master Daisbin in the Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh*

the chance to catch up with family matters. During afternoon tea Rev. Master again gives so generously of himself in answering our questions.

Those not needing to travel home and still fit enough, reconvene at the Prioory in the evening. It would seem that our enthusiasm and his willingness to respond to our well meaning demands have taken their toll on Rev. Master who has wisely decided to rest for the night. We have a quiet sit, vespers and disperse without fuss.

Sunday is a fine spring day. Following

morning service, Rev Master gives a very thoughtful dharma talk. Rev. Favian, to whom we are all grateful for organising the weekend's events, presents Rev. Master with a gift of a picture on behalf of our Sangha. Afterwards we share a buffet lunch before setting off for a trip to the Botanic Gardens.

Although we arrive separately in small groups, we find each other effortlessly, perhaps drawn by an unseen gravitational pull. The park is beautiful, the new colours vivid, and fresh. Walking in amongst the rock gardens with their

noisy gushing waterfalls we encounter a happy tartan-clad wedding party led by a piper. It seems there is something here that fits the day in a spring wedding and the taking of vows in such a wonderful open-air setting.

We meander slowly through the Gardens enjoying the smells and the sounds of springtime and end up at the Terrace Cafe where we are met by Bill and Fanny and grandchildren and Noel and his boy Liam. It is lovely sitting together in the sunshine looking over to ancient Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat.

We walk out of the Gardens and without fuss but with gratitude, bow and say goodbye to Rev. Master.

We might understand our experience of sitting together over this weekend as Zen training. We could certainly find meaning in Rev. Master Daishin's dharma talks. Both would be true and I'm sure that we each find our own truth within our experiences. For me there was a profound teaching in the simplicity of our trip to the Botanic Gardens, a lesson in how to just be together in the moment - a small band of Buddhists - monastics, lay ministers, experienced ordinates, new trainees and family sharing and enjoying a walk through the park in the spring sunshine - homage to the Sangha indeed.

*David Campbell*

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## *Rev Master's talk at Portobello Priory on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> March*

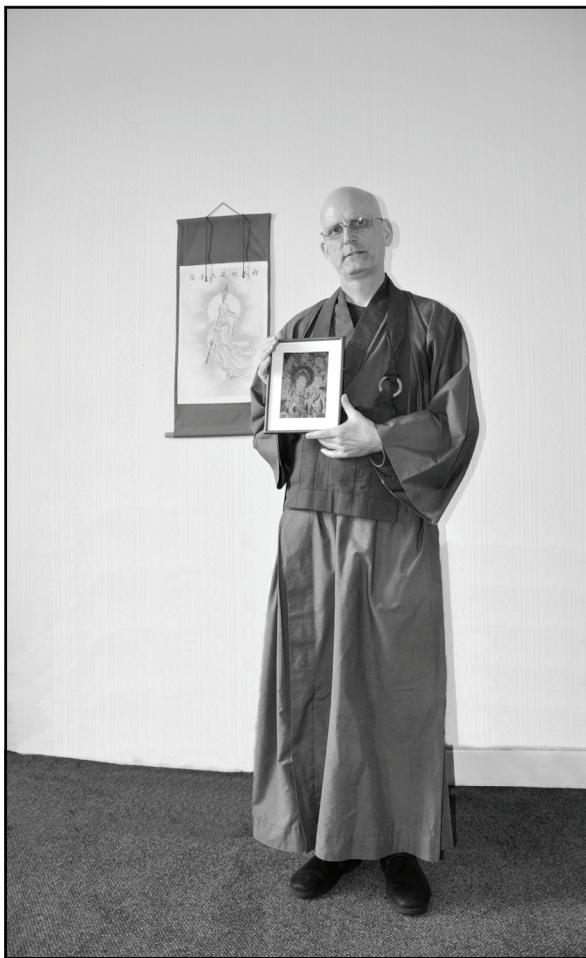
**R**ev Master Daishin began his dharma talk by quoting from the **Scripture of Great Wisdom** - 'Pure is all form'. In our western culture, he said, we often think along the lines of the soul imprisoned in the body i.e. the soul being that which is pure, and the body impure. But this is not the case, and it can be deeply helpful to be aware of our rootedness and groundedness in the body. From that position we can ask the question - what is it that sits? We are not just our thoughts and feelings, although we can often assume we are. From our grounded position we need to freshly look at what we are, rather than assuming that we know.

Looking at this from another angle, we know that when we are anticipating that something bad is going to happen and it doesn't, we can experience a 'lightening up', a release. We can experience this same feeling more often, and more easily, than we think - and this comes through accepting what and where we are. And in so doing, we can see the background within which this is taking

place. What is happening now is my life - and in turning towards that, we reconnect with the present.

Reconnection is a form of giving; of offering up. When we offer up, with that offering comes a movement; and with that movement there is the possibility of compassion. Compassion is by its nature fluid.

'Trying' to let go is a contradiction. **Letting go isn't an action: it's a recognition of a state of being.** When we recognise the emptiness, we have let go. When we have an opinion - and it would be impossible, indeed undesirable not to have opinions - and we offer up that opinion (that is, letting go of its fixity) there's a fluidity; and the possibility of compassion.



We need to feel the presence of emptiness. By stepping into the emptiness, we see that that's enough.

It's not about me. And when we know that, there is a great relief. That is not to say that we are not involved. We are, and we have a role to play. But when we let go, in the true sense, we can see that I am not at the centre, and in that seeing we can see what it is that is good to do.

*Bill Grieve*



*Rev Master Daishin with the Scottish sangha's gift—*

**W**as speaking to my daughter on the phone the other night. She is in London now. Twenty-four years old. First 'proper' job. Making her mark in the world. I wanted to know how she was getting on. How her big conference was going. Pittsburgh, America, she being the Producer and a great deal of money involved. Didn't get far before she cut me off to tell me something else. Could hear the emotion, excitement? in her voice. Maybe a little anxious about what she was going to say. 'Oh mum, I saw the most moving thing on the tube today' she burst out. An old woman had come on the tube and sat down. Eighty maybe ninety



years old?? Filthy. Dirty bare feet. Greasy hair. Looked like she hardly knew where she was. A young girl sitting opposite her, about the same age as Lucy, got up and went over to her and put money in her lap. One by one other people very discreetly followed suit and gave her money before getting off the tube. Someone gave her a ten pound note. Lucy wondered if they were maybe thinking it might have been *their* gran. My daughter was very moved. All the 'cold' London people being so quietly kind. Big hearts. Nothing to gain.

*Myra Rothwell, Lay Minister*

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## *Sociology and Buddhism*

**I**n this article I'd like to air some thoughts on how I feel the discipline of sociology relates to our Buddhist tradition. Before jumping in at the deep end, however, it is perhaps useful to outline what has brought me to this particular place sitting at the keyboard right now. As I am sure a number of you can relate to, I was drawn to Buddhism by a vague understanding of the benefits that meditation could bring to everyday life, such as better concentration, reduced stress etc. I began to experience some of these effects very quickly and was thus drawn to find out a bit more about the Buddhist teachings and philosophies. These also made a great deal of sense to me and struck a chord with some sense of lack – what is the meaning of life,

why are we here, what is the purpose of things, why do we behave as we do, and such like. I had already explored other avenues in search for answers. One avenue led me to the door of sociology. It has recently struck me that there are some common elements to how sociology and Soto Zen view things.

What is sociology? I can only give my personal viewpoint but to me it defines a particular way of looking at the world, one which attempts to make the everyday appear strange and explains much of what we habitually do by focusing on social processes, culture and the like. Sociology originated, I believe, like economics, as a tool for understanding and managing the increasingly complex societies being created at about the time of the industrial revolution.

Some of the recent dharma talks on Wednesday evenings have featured the concepts of “interconnection” and “emptiness” and it has struck me that there are some similarities between what these concepts are pointing to and some of the key concerns that seem to crop up in sociological enquiry. For example, one of the key debates/themes that I understand to have arisen within the discipline of sociology is Structure vs Agency i.e. the debate between how much of human behaviour is determined by prevailing social structures/cultures and how much is determined by the free will or agency of individual human beings. It seems that much of traditional sociology locates understanding primarily in the former. The effects of social class, gender and race, for example, have been shown to have clear and measurable impacts on individuals and their life chances. Looking at this through the lens of Buddhist philosophy, one may say that we are all deeply interconnected and, through these interconnections, patterned social phenomena arise.

This is all very well but what is the role of individual free will and choice? In Rev. Master Daishin’s recent talk at the Priory he very helpfully reminded us that “it’s not about me, but we are intimately involved, and we have a role to play.” As a discipline aimed at understanding the socially created aspects of human behaviour it seems that sociology has perhaps struggled to include the effects of individual free will in its theories of how things are. One particular approach that seems to get to grips with this more than others is called Actor Network Theory (ANT). ANT states that people and/or things have no essential and fixed individual existence. People and/or things can only exist in *relation to* other people and/or things. In themselves they are empty (this theory actually helped me to get a feel for what “emptiness” is pointing to). To exercise free will, one can only do so through choices made possible by the particular

circumstances of one's life.

This is all very well and now that I have got this off my chest (!) we may be all asking, as practitioners of zazen, so what!? Well, I hope I have shown that Sociology is a useful tool for looking at the world in a slightly different way, perhaps questioning why we, or others, behave the way we do. The techniques of sociological enquiry are also widely used throughout society for the purpose of bringing about positive social changes. Nevertheless, I have to keep reminding myself they are only tools and, in the words of Great Master Dogen in *Rules For Meditation*, it is often more important to 'cease from erudition, withdraw within and reflect upon yourself.'

*Michael O'Hara*

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## *Embodiment* —

**T**owards the end of a long summer cycling trip in the West Country (in south-west England) I bought my first newspaper.

The next day, while cycling along, the article which kept coming to mind was the sad story of an old lady who had filled her house – virtually literally – with the results of obsessive shopping. She had admitted she had a problem to a friend, but declined the offer of help. When she hadn't been seen for a while, the Police were called.

She had died. But on their first visit they were unable to find her due to the quantity of 'stuff' in the house. Only after it had been partially emptied were they able to discover her body beneath

a pile of possessions which had collapsed on her.

There were many deeply saddening aspects in this story – the sense of loneliness, and of compulsion; of her awareness of her plight but a disinclination to accept help; of the substitution of things, 'stuff', for other richer possibilities in life; of being physically as well as psychologically suffocated by what had come to dominate her.

I idly contrasted the relative simplicity of our cycling trip, where all that can be taken is what fits into two panniers. It brought to mind Bruce Chatwin's book *The Songlines*, a study of the invisible pathways all over Australia which the Aboriginal peoples ritually walk. In the book, Chatwin includes many quotes he has gathered from the earliest Sumerian texts onwards about



*Exmoor*

the spiritual merits of the nomadic, wandering life which might be crudely summarised as limiting the accrual of possessions and also mitigating against the formation of fixed and impenetrable ideas, habits, opinions, attitudes.

Detecting in myself a certain degree of smugness about the simplicity of my lifestyle at that moment, I ruefully reflected that the simplicity was more apparent than real. I was in many ways richer than a Chinese emperor on tour of his dominions. While he might have a small orchestra to play to him while he reclined in his silk tent in the eve-

nings, I could summon up a bewildering range of music, orchestras and performers from across the world, grace of my iPod. Of course, he was able to despatch mounted messengers to gallop in relays through the night with messages to the corners of his kingdom. But I could speak to whoever I wanted, immediately, by means of my mobile phone. Similarly, while he might be accompanied by one or two philosophers or wise men, I could choose from an extensive library of talks given by many people to nourish my mind and heart, again thanks to my iPod. And my small radio enabled me

to keep up with what was happening in the world, to an extent unimaginable by the emperor.

And, within reason, whatever needs arose for me – a sudden medical problem, food, shelter, a sense of safety in going wherever I wanted to – were able to be met from the visible and invisible networks of support services, laws and cultural conventions which were interwoven throughout the landscape I was passing through.

Rich, indeed – and is it possible, in a society like ours, to have any pretensions of leading a simple life? Reliant as we are on the services we have come to expect, and wishing as most of us do to play our part in the life of our complex society rather than be reclusive, it seems unlikely that we can - or should - entirely insulate ourselves from those complexities.

But the wish for inner stillness is a different matter, and what I noticed on this trip was that my electronic gadgetry, wondrous as it was, seemed to gradually migrate to the foot of one of my panniers where it lay undisturbed. On a trip like this, life does at least on one level become simpler, less cluttered, and a meditative quality can come into the long days of drifting through countryside. The mind clears and empties, and a simple, unanalytical appreciation of what is being passed

through predominates, whether the minutiae of a hedgerow while inching up an improbably steep Cornish lane or the long vistas from the ridges of Exmoor stretching down to farmland and to the sea.

What stays in memory is the feel of wind in the face, sudden bursts of rain, a ray of sun piercing through dark clouds, a keen appreciation of changing landscapes and weather. A comment in Rev Master Daishin's recent talk about being grounded or rooted in the body brought this back to me - reflecting the fact that we *are* a body, rather than that we *have* a body, the latter seeming to imply that its main function is to be a beast of burden for the real 'me', perched on top of my neck.

And while through our practice we know that physical activity is not the principal means to ending suffering, embodiment – in Rev Master's sense – can be of powerful assistance in what the poet Thomas A. Clark refers to in one of his poems, In Praise of Walking, as 'the dislocation of a persistent self interest'.

*Bill Grieve*



*Thank you to all the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter.  
Deadline for next issue is mid-August 2011.*





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

### **May 2011**

Friday 27th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 28th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 29th	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-4pm

### **June**

Fri 10th-Sun 12th	Scottish sangha retreat	
Friday 24th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 25th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm

### **August**

Friday 19th	Aberfeldy group evening	7.30-9pm
Saturday 20th	Dundee group morning	10am-1pm
Sunday 21st	Aberdeen Day Retreat	10am-2pm

### ***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

# — 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 about Buddhist practice and the Serene Reflection Meditation (Soto Zen) tradition. Meditation instruction and discussion.

2.30-4pm

*Saturday 14th May, 18th June (i.e. 3rd Saturday), 9th July, 13th August.*

## **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 Favian Straughan*