Jhana Grove Is A Testament To Buddhist Generosity

Story and Photo by Mark Schneider

After six years and almost $5 million, Jhana Grove, the Buddhist Society’s “hospital for the mind” is almost ready for its first meditation group.

The idea of a purpose-built meditation centre had its genesis in 2003 when it became increasingly apparent that existing facilities just couldn’t cope with the increasing numbers of people seeking the benefits of meditation.

Ajahn Brahm and members of the BSWA had a vision of a large, well equipped facility that would meet the needs of all who wanted to use it – not just the young and fit.

With its 10 comfortable bungalows, each with en suites, it’s been carefully designed so that the elderly and sick can enjoy respite from the stresses of life and benefit from the sort of spiritual and physical re-charge that meditation brings.

Indeed, the standard of accommodation is so high it would put many hotels to shame. There’s nothing quite like it anywhere else in Australia – nothing of its size, and certainly nothing with the same standard of facilities.

The large air-conditioned meditation hall with its three adjoining halls for walking meditation will be connected to the cottages by a covered walkway.

There will also be a well equipped kitchen and dining area, as well as laundry, office, and storage facilities. A small caretaker’s residence completes the centre.

Up to 60 guests can be accommodated at a time and Ajahn Brahm expects demand to be high.

“Having a residential facility will be a huge benefit to the community and it will be well used,” Ajahn Brahm said.

“We’ve had huge interest already, the first meditation session on April 10 was quite a bun fight to get in.”

“This is a project whose time has come.”

Ajahn Brahm said it was a testament to the generosity, compassion and forward thinking of the Buddhist community here and abroad.

He said initially there were doubts over whether the funds could be raised. The initial hurdle was raising the first million. With that achieved the target grew to $3 million, but even this cost blew out with the ambition to finish Jhana Grove to the highest possible standard.

Generous donations have flooded in from locals and from many overseas members and supporters of the BSWA.

This big project has been subject to the usual delays of building projects but today all is in readiness for the grand opening, which Ajahn Brahm assures us “will be bigger than the Beijing Olympics”. Impermanence may be a central core of Buddhism, but Jhana Grove, at least, is guaranteed to be helping people find peace, happiness, good health and enlightenment through meditation for many, many years to come.

“Bigger than the Beijing Olympics”

Ajahn Brahm has promised that the opening of Jhana Grove will be bigger than the opening of the Beijing Olympics, so make sure you get there!

To avoid parking problems while minimising energy use, please share your car if possible when traveling to Jhana Grove.

To watch the parade, line Kingsbury Drive to see the procession, from 2.30 then follow it down the driveway into Jhana Grove.

You’ll find food stations along the driveway as you enter Jhana Grove, so pick up some afternoon tea and drinks to keep you going for the tours and entertainment.

You’ll need to be seated in the meditation hall or dining room by 4.00 – 4.15 for the official opening ceremony at 4.15.
My Stay At Bodhinyana Monastery

Story and Photos by Weng Ho

Telling my boss that I would be completely uncontactable during the Christmas and New Year break was one of the delights of choosing to stay at Bodhinyana monastery.

Just the thought of not having my holiday interrupted by a phone call from work brought a relaxed smile to my face.

No internet, email or mobile phone for a week – the thought was appealing, but what would actually happen? Would I suffer from withdrawal symptoms? Would my thumb develop a nervous twitch from missing my BlackBerry? How would the world keep revolving without ME?

Bodhinyana Monastery, Serpentine, can house four male guests, and three female guests, at any one time (organised via the Guest Monk). The guest huts are located deep in the forest and are constantly bathed in the sounds of the Aussie bush – cicadas, birds, wind. No high-rise apartments, telephones or door bells to disrupt your meditation here! The only doof doof sound is that of a large male kangaroo hopping by, or a large branch falling onto the tin roof.

The facilities for guests were better than I had expected – you had your own private room with bed and linen, fan and meditation mat. The ablution blocks are sparkling (cleaned with mindfulness by the monks), although I found ‘nature’s toilet’ occasionally more convenient and rather therapeutic. My neighbour was a friendly Irish backpacker, John, who gave me the sense that I was indeed away somewhere on holidays. Being able to talk, to engage in deep (and often shallow) conversations made this more enjoyable, for me personally, than a silent meditation retreat.

My daily routine consisted of getting up at around 5.30am and doing my own meditation in my room. Breakfast is at 6.30am, followed by a work meeting where both monks and laypeople are allocated chores. Chores go until 10.00am. Then shower. Then at 10.30am, we help set up the hall for lunch, which commences at 11.00am. Then clean up after lunch.

The fearless Ven. Osana working on top of the main hall.

Afternoons and evenings were free to do whatever we wanted. As laypeople, this usually consisted of a very long siesta. Having no evening meal to prepare (and eat) meant that you found yourself with significantly more free time than at home. Plenty of time to meditate, read a book from the library, or even look for that elusive wall with the ‘two bad bricks’! Taking a bushwalk to the rear of the property is recommended, where after only 10 minutes of walking, you come to the summit where you can see the sun setting over the ocean.

The highlight for me was spending time with the novice monks doing chores. Chores for guests normally consisted of sweeping leaves; however, I volunteered to clean out gutters, which I cheekily chose so that I could get a close up look at the monks’ kulis (hats), as well as quire the monks on the Dhamma, meditation techniques, and what it is really like being a monk! Although we were doing laborious chores, I found it fun chatting to these young men, who were around the same age as me, but

Weng Ho takes a breather under a Bodhi tree.

had chosen a very different lifestyle. But we talked about many common topics including music, cricket (they knew more than me about the sport!), martial arts, and modern trappings such as Facebook, YouTube and Guitar Hero! You got the sense that they are, in fact, human beings after all.

Another highlight was getting a rare glimpse inside Ajahn Brahno’s kuti. Behind the ordinary-looking door was a short rock-walled tunnel, which lead to another door. Behind this inner door was a man-made cave. I felt like I had entered some magical place straight out of one of AB’s stories. Like all caves it is refreshingly cool, especially on such a hot day. It contained all his worldly possessions – three square mats, a blanket and a pillow – indicating a person who “walks the walk” with regards to living the simple life.

However, I must admit that once the doors were closed, it had quite an eerie feeling. Sounds are muffled by the egg-carton foam on the thick doors, and the heavy natural insulation of the rocks, and you are left alone in the dark with only the sounds of your breathing and heartbeat, which for me both became more rapid at the thought of being locked away in here!

But, as in life, for every high there is a low. The ‘challenging’ aspects of living in the monastery for me were the sweltering heat and the no-food-after-lunch rule, both of which would have taken me longer to get used to than the length of my stay. However, the unexpected bonus was that for the first time in my history, I managed not to gain weight over the usually over-indulgent Christmas and New Year period!

I must also admit that I did not miss the flies, insects and Huntsman spiders when I returned home. I feel that I’ve become softened by my creature comforts, but at least it makes you appreciate them.

As a side story, a new kitten appeared at the monastery on New Year’s Eve, which I christened “Evie”. It appeared to have been abandoned at the monastery, perhaps an unwanted Christmas present. I told the Anagarikas that I would buy her a collar after my retreat. Last Saturday I went to City Farmers to fulfill my promise. When the shop assistant heard the story behind the collar, she kindly gave it to me for free! Kamma in action! I feel little Evie will be well cared for at Bodhinyana – lucky cat!

My thanks to the monks, especially Ajahn Brahno, Venerable Jhanataro and Venerable Osana, the Anagarikas and other guests, for making my stay pleasant. Thanks also to the many laypeople who brought food that us non-monks also enjoyed. (Extra good kamma to the nice lady who brought Domino’s Pizza and a bucket of KFC – comfort food indeed!)

Information about longer stays at Bodhinyana Monastery can be found at www.bswn.org. Staying at the monastery is free of charge, however, donations are encouraged as the monastery depends solely on the financial and material support of its lay disciples.
Chinese New Year got off to an auspiciously loud and fun-filled start at Dhammaloka on Friday February 6 immediately after the Dhamma talk by Ajahn Brahm.

Dhammaloka was elaborately decorated with red lanterns, Chinese good luck scrolls, dragons, giant firecrackers, balloons and running coloured lights.

We even had red flowers displayed and red candles glowing on the main shrine - a delightful sight.

Six lions entered the main hall soon after the Dhamma talk ended, to the sound of loud bangings of the drum and cymbals by six colourful uniform clad ladies.

With that and the loud banging of the firecrackers we were convinced there was enough noise to drive away any evil spirit and bring good luck - as the old Chinese tradition believes.

The lions first paid respect to Ajahn Brahm and Venerable Santutthi, then entertained the crowd with hilarious dances amid enthusiastic audience applause.

They were at the same time being fed with 'red packets' containing money, a traditional Chinese custom showing appreciation and bringing good luck. Even Ajahn Brahm was seen petting a lion. We thought he was trying to entice one lion back to the monastery to replace the kitten he recently gave away!

The entertainment went on for nearly 45 minutes and was followed by snack foods and drinks brought by Dhamma friends, outside the main hall. Chinese 'good luck' sweets were also distributed.

More than 300 attended, many in colourful Chinese costumes to add to the fun.

All enjoyed a wonderful evening. Our Buddhist party ended around 11:00 pm and no one got caught by the booze bus.

A special thank you to Quyen Luong, the leader of the Lion Dance Group, and members of his team.

They are from Chow Kwoon Yarn Yee Tong Kung Fu Academy.

They didn't charge us for the entertainment, moreover all money collected in the 'little red packets' was donated back to BSWA - nearly a thousand dollars.

Also thanks to all others who helped in one way or another to make it a very memorable night.
Dear Friends

At long last I have found some time and space to write to you with news about how things are going for me here at Santi Forest Monastery.

I became an Anagarika here at Santi in the lovely new sala, on the evening of February 7. It was an incredibly hot day and evening. We had no idea at the time about the incredible devastation that was happening at that very moment in the Victorian fires.

In the evening of the next day a cold change came through and it rained on every one of the following 10 days. It was cold and misty and I wore thermals for a week. What a contrast! Towards the end of the rainy period the mist seemed to mingle with shifting smoke hazes. I imagined it had moved up from Victoria.

It was especially smoky last week, on the National Day Of Mourning for the bushfire victims. Having had some limited experience of bushfires it was difficult not to feel intense horror and sadness for the families of the people who lost their lives and the people who lost their homes and other treasures in the fires.

I don’t have a camera here so my photography has been severely curtailed. I capture things only moment to moment in my mind’s eye - so to speak. The twice or three times daily walk from my little Kutis (hut) to the house and back is always a great source of joy and inspiration for me.

Everything is always changing - the weather, the sky, the plants, the ground, insects, spiders, birds and the spectacular scenery, the sounds of the birds and wind and water. The walk is about 1km and involves a steep descent through the forest, at the bottom of which I am close to a waterfall, and then a more gradual ascent.

The kuti is perched atop a little cliff which plunges to a creek fringed with rainforest ferns. It’s quite exquisite. I could easily spend all of my waking hours in this place.

Alas, there are many duties to perform and lessons to learn. I have become the monastery gardener, unofficial bread and yoghurt maker, and consultant on various environmental matters.

Recently I directed the relocation of the monastery library from storage to a whole lot of new shelves that had been installed in our main community area. I also share cooking and cleaning duties and I look after the composting. I have established a flourishing herb garden and last week planted the ‘entry statement’ circular garden with local indigenous plants – with waratahs and a Wollemi pine as the central features. The next big project is a rather large expanse of lawn out the back. Keeping the bunnies away is the greatest challenge to this venture.

Apart from all of these tasks, we are in the middle of a pretty intense training period with classes in the afternoon for four days every week. We are doing vinaya studies, sutta classes, Buddhist and related history and rules of training for Buddhist monastics. Luckily there is no homework and the subject matter is very interesting and the teacher, Bhante Sujato, is incredibly knowledgeable and engaging. On Wednesday night we have a Dhamma talk and group meditations on Saturday nights. So, we’re all kept quite busy.

The monastery is relatively young and growing very quickly so there’s a lot of work to do. It’s good to be involved in this development work and everyone - visitors, monastics and long term residents - attend morning work meetings at 7.30am weekdays and are all expected to contribute.

Venerable Seri from Dhammasara Monastery in Perth has been here for the past few weeks. It has been delightful to have her here to confide in and to catch up with news from WA. With a community of 20 or so lay men and women and monastics from various countries and age groups sharing the facilities at Santi, there are inevitably a few tensions and niggles every now and then. To be honest some source of tension or other is an almost constant feature of community life, but I still find that the rewards gained far outweigh the inevitable dukkha. The men’s and women’s living areas are quite separate thank goodness.

I’m very happy - although, as usual, I could do with some more meditation time. I hope you are well and happy. If ever you are in the area please drop in to see me at Santi.

With much loving kindness, Annie
Santi Forest Monastery, 100 Coalmines Road Bundanoon NSW
**President's Report**  
by Dennis Sheppard

It feels very good, if not a little daunting, taking on the role of President of the BSWA following Rachel Green's tenure. It is very clear that she has left a structure that is well oiled and well considered. Rachel and the outgoing committee are to be congratulated on years of wonderful work that has left the BSWA ready to reap many benefits and blessings from their endeavors.

We have a great new committee in place, and they are ready to follow through and build on the work that has been started. The Jhana Grove Retreat Centre will be opening its doors at about the time this edition is in your hands. The monasteries are both working well, with the Dhamma being lived and taught in all sorts of ways including through the society's fantastic website. All the committee members have their individual responsibilities and are keen and ready to serve. You can read all their personal stories on the website.

I look forward to meeting with you and talking to the wider membership over the coming year. I would love to hear any feedback you may wish to give.

Over the past couple of years I have started to learn a little about poetry from a friend who has been sharing his knowledge with me. Given that the deadline for this publication is the day after the AGM and I am still very much in a learning mode, I would like to offer the following poem that I have just written. I hope you enjoy it.

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**Wisdom**

Conditioned is our view of the world,  
A state that keeps us in continual swirl.  
From day to day, from year to year,  
Lifetime to lifetime, we live in ignorance and fear.

When fear takes hold, and energies unfold  
Nature takes over, creating lives untold.  
Karma will continue, to dance and grow,  
Forming all told stories, in minds that do not know.

Left unchecked, our future is rife,  
Samsara goes round, creating the circle of life.  
On and on thinking, ignorance is bliss,  
Unaware of our fate, as we dice with abyss.

We reap what we sow,  
And live life in the dark.  
Our identity seems fixed,  
As we diligently make our mark.

Hungry for life, fearful of death.  
The past and the future, dead in our breath.  
Lives of distraction, with presence unknown,  
Unwilling to notice, the truth that we’re shown.

There comes a time, when we have had our fill,  
When we see life unnoticed, is making us ill.  
A life lived distracted from present to past,  
Clutching and grasping, trying to make all things last.

Then all of a sudden, the present moment we see,  
With a glimpse of riches in store, if we let our life be.  
The truth of all things, begins to show us its face  
As we uncover the moment and bask in its grace.

Then wisdom develops, conditioning goodness and giving,  
Allowing deep concentration, and a mind full, and living.  
A happiness mine, with riches untold,  
To plunder and savour, as wisdom takes hold.

Its wisdom that reduces, our ego and shadow.  
That allows mind freedom, to fly like a sparrow.  
Our view becomes clear, and intention unbounded,  
With truth now the goal, and life bright and unfounded.

The beautiful breath, going in and then out,  
We notice the space, and the stillness about.  
Sinking our selves deeper, into this moment of rhyme,  
Knowing the truth that is there, beyond space and time.

When beauty is peaking, with the mind fully rapt,  
We are pulled in much closer, where bliss is a fact.  
Moving into the light, down the tunnel of love,  
We leave ourselves empty, as mind comes to one.

The universe of unity, is a guarantee,  
And there for the taking, for those who would see.  
But with perfection so close, is it really for me?  
A doubt seed once sown can stop us to be.

Reinforcing our worthiness, with morals perfect and sane  
Contentment and energy, balanced sharp and urbane.  
We seek once again beauty, in this moment of time.  
And fall through the barriers, that keep the universe in line.

Having left our bodies, with only mind we can see.  
Compelled to go on, to see who we may be.  
With mind full of moment, the conditions break down,  
Even space that contains us, is shaky and unsound.

So what does one find in this moment of time?  
Beyond all conditions that include space and time.  
The view is now, something that never can be.  
No thing or self, a mystery and paradox, so let it be.

What a wonderful thing to see, the truth of all things.  
Delusions with grandeur masking who we may be.  
A universe so pregnant with potential unbounded,  
Ends up in the eye, a possession unfounded.

So who are these people, who claim that they know?  
Beings of peace, who let there strong presence grow.  
Buddhas and beings, that are entering the Stream,  
An end to delusion, on a path so serene.

So let’s hear it for wisdom, and peace everlasting,  
With practice the virtues, are there for the asking.  
An end to all suffering, is promised in noise.  
Peace unconditioned, gives presence, infinite poise.

*By Dennis Sheppard*
Buddhism Brings Harmony To Eddie’s Life

Story and Photo by Mark Schneider

Eddie Khoo may have been born into Buddhism but he’s the first to admit that he never really understood it and made a commitment to living a Buddhist life until well into his adult life.

With a university degree in commerce and administration, Eddie had all the trappings of the good life back in Malaysia. He had a good job as a General Manager, a big house and was doing well materially, but he knew something wasn’t right, something was missing.

A turning point of his life came when he took his mother to the local temple and picked up some Buddhist pamphlets. Gradually he became aware of the problems of over-indulgence in the pleasures of life, and through studying Buddhism he was able to “come back to his normal self” as he puts it.

Eddie initially had trouble with the concept of past life kamma and was never one to take things on face value, but with time and increased knowledge and a great deal of thinking, he came to accept it.

He doesn’t meditate as much as he used to, but he does a lot of thinking and a lot of reading, sometimes late into the night. His is an intense intellectual interest in Buddhism with a strong commitment to practising the teachings and pursuing the middle way between the spiritual and the material.

So what has Buddhism done for him? It’s made him happy, as anyone who’s heard his infectious laughter ringing out around Dhammaloka and elsewhere can testify.

It’s also given him patience, tolerance and understanding, and he now feels he can cope with whatever life throws at him, qualities that have helped in his daily life as he looks after his elderly mother.

“Understanding and practice is the best medication for the problems of life and the Four Noble Truths are extremely positive and helpful,” he said.

He’s interested in all religions and the commonality of their beliefs.

“Kamma and God are the same thing. In Buddhism if you do the wrong thing, kamma catches up with you, with other religions God punishes you,” he said.

“The problem comes with magnifying small points of difference and fundamentalism,” he said.

“If you want others to respect your religion, it’s important to respect theirs.”

He’s a staunch believer in kamma, which he believes “follows you around like a shadow”.

Eddie moved to Perth permanently in 1988 after living here previously as a student at UWA and Curtin University and became active in the BSWA soon after arriving. He served on the committee from 1989 to 1994 doing fundraising and Public Relations.

Today he’s on the organising committee for the Jhana Grove opening day celebrations while volunteering for pretty well anything else that needs doing as well.

He’s seen the BSWA grow significantly over the years. When he first arrived there were typically only 20-30 people at Dhammaloka on a Friday night. Today there are as many as 10 times that number. In the early days he used to bring biscuits along to encourage socialising.

In fact Eddie’s been energetically helping to organise social events ever since. He’s helped organise many Food Fairs and organised the spectacular Lion Dance for Chinese New Year for the last five years.

He’s even given Santa and “Mrs Claus” a helping hand around Christmas.

Music plays a big part in his life. He’s a self-taught musician who’s so far mastered didgeridoo, harmonica, keyboards, flute, steel drums, xylophone, pan flute and djembe drums. He’s frequently put it to good use, too, busking at Food Fairs and twice raised an amazing $1,000 in three-to-four hours, once for the Tsunami appeal and once for the building fund.

Eddie’s always helping out around the Buddhist Society in one way or other and is frequently the last to leave when there’s work to be done, so we’ll be sure to be seeing his smiling face and hear his laughter for many years to come.

BSWA Membership

The Difference Between Associate And Full Membership

Associate Membership is our regular membership, open to anyone, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, who wishes to support the aims and values of BSWA. Many new members start with Associate Membership as they first begin to learn and practise Buddhism.

Full Membership is open to practising Buddhists who have taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha and who undertake the Five Precepts. It is subject to endorsement by the Spiritual Director (Ajahn Brahm) or the Assistant Spiritual Director (Ajahn Vayama) or their representatives (please approach them personally for their signature).

For those not in WA a letter written by an ordained member of the Sangha stating when and where you have taken the Three Refuges and the Five (or more) Precepts is sufficient.

Full members are given priority for places at some meditation retreats. Only Full members have voting rights and are eligible to be office bearers of the Society.

The same annual fee of $33 applies to both Associate and Full membership, with Associate membership able to be upgraded to Full membership at any time at no extra cost.

Priority places for Full members on retreats. Please note that all new memberships are subject to endorsement by the Committee of the BSWA, which usually meets once a month. Therefore if you are intending to apply for a priority place on a retreat, and you are not already a Full member, it’s best to allow at least six weeks to get your application processed and approved before you apply for the retreat.

For any queries about membership please contact the Assistant Secretary, Michael Dove, asec@bswa.org.au
Thalata’s Buddhist Path Started In Sri Lanka

Story and Photo by Mark Schneider

Born and raised in Matale, in central Sri Lanka, Thalatha Karunaratna grew up in a society and a culture that was steeped in Buddhism.

As a child she studied Buddhism as a subject at school, learning the biography and life of the Buddha, the suttas and about kamma.

At home the food was grown on the family’s two acres of garden, with the first of the harvest reserved for the local temple, for dana.

As a child Thalatha said she never really understood the significance of the gesture, just as she learnt the Buddhist teachings from school by heart, without ever really understanding their meaning.

She would go to the temple with her grandmother each Poya day dressed in white, and though she never understood its meaning, she certainly enjoyed the breakfast of pancakes following full moon night, fondly remembering it as a special treat for taking eight precepts.

Later, Thalatha went to the nearby city of Kandy to study for a degree in languages, and while there her inquiring mind came to question the Buddhism she’d learnt earlier – kamma, cause and effect and the four noble truths.

In fact she didn’t come to really understand Buddhism until she married her husband, Karu, who many older members of the BSWA would remember fondly. He helped her see things more clearly.

Later Ajahn Brahm and Ajahn Vayama, too, would help to deepen her understanding, particularly kamma.

Thalatha and Karu moved to Perth in 1989 to give their children better educational opportunities and immediately became involved with the BSWA.

One of their contributions was helping to organise a Sri Lankan stall at the Food Fair, adding some Sri Lankan spice, flair and flavour to the event. “People really liked the decorations and atmosphere,” Thalatha said. The decorations also provided an opportunity to learn some Buddhist teachings first hand.

Lengths of cut bamboo were used to make traditional Vesak lanterns, with Karu using it to demonstrate Buddhist virtues of unity, harmony, teamwork and patience.

“We had one nice, big lantern that we wanted to hang in the community hall, but as we were putting it up, it fell and broke – it was very fragile,” Thalatha said.

“It was hard work making that lantern – one day’s work gone in an instant. Now I understand impermanence.”

A more profound illustration of impermanence came with the sudden and untimely death of her beloved Karu in 1996. After 20 years of happy marriage it came as a very deep shock and she was left to raise her two boys and twin girls on her own.

“Ajahn Brahm helped to settle my mind and observing the five precepts helped me bring up my children.”

The five precepts had always played a guiding role in the family’s life. The usual family tradition was to chant the five precepts after dinner each night. Karu would ask the children how their day went and they never hid anything. If any of the precepts were broken it would be discussed.

Thalatha’s selfless dedication to her children’s education has paid off, with all of them now pursuing professional careers. These days they repay that gift by helping her.

Her contribution to the BSWA is greatly valued. As well as her work on the Food Fairs, she’s recently served on the committee organising the opening of Jhana Grove.

She says she is very happy being a Buddhist and her children, too, feel lucky to be Buddhists and they use its teachings in everyday life.

While she found meditation very difficult to begin with, today she values it greatly, particularly breathing meditation.

“I also use metta if someone has done something to hurt me – I use metta for them.”

Meditation has helped her with mindfulness and has taught her right thinking and right speech. It’s made her life calmer and easier to cope with, and she loves going on retreats.

She also loves her Dhamma friends who are essential for keeping her on the right path, a Buddhist path she’ll be happily following for the rest of this life.
Dhammasara Report
By Sister Seri

In summer our main activity is working to reduce the bushfire hazard on the property. We’ve been diligently raking and clearing dried leaves, fallen branches and debris around the buildings and monastery compound as well as the exit roads in the monastery.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Trevor, Merry, Joe and Hugh who regularly help us with the clearing work.

In January a group of 35 volunteers offered their time and energy as part of a good kamma making, Busy Bee. We managed to clear the main emergency exit road of the monastery.

Thank you everyone for your generous effort and support. We especially would like to thank Bianca, Miri and Michelle for their extra work after dana on the Busy Bee to help the nuns complete the job.

We had another good kamma making and fun Busy Bee on March 22, starting at 8.00am.

Regular supporters of Dhammasara will remember Venerable Chi Kwan Sunim, the senior Australian nun in the Korean tradition, who stayed at the monastery during the Rainas of 2008.

Her monastery in Victoria is at Kingslake, and she was directly affected by the bushfires there. She had to flee from the fire after trying to protect her property.

Fortunately she reached safety without injury, and her monastery survived, thanks to a shift in the wind. She said that her spiritual practice helped her to raise the mental and physical stamina to face the danger, even though she was alone at the property when the fire came.

She is heading a fund to receive financial donations to purchase goods that she is aware are needed immediately by her area, such as shovels and boots. If you’d like to contribute you may contact Dhammasara.

Community
Sister Seri has been away from the monastery to participate in the Vinaya study program at Santi Forest Monastery outside Sydney from February 10 to March 7.

Sister Hasapan will be visiting her family in Malaysia for three weeks in March. She will be returning to the monastery on March 22.

Two nuns will be attending the inaugural nine day retreat at Jhana Grove Meditation Centre in April.

Currently, we are having female lay supporters from Perth and overseas come to spend some time in the monastery. Our regular supporter, Sally Lee, is staying for six months until June. If you are interested in experiencing life in the nuns’ monastery, please contact us directly.

Jhana Grove Opening Ceremony
The nuns will be attending the Opening Ceremony on April 10. We send our best wishes to the organising committee and all the volunteers for the event.

Minnawarra Festival is a Chance To Spread the Dhamma
Story by Mark Schneider

Members of the Armadale group were very happy to see Christiena back in action at the Tuesday night meditation sessions.

Christiena’s had some trying times lately with health problems and the sad death of her mother, which had her flying back to the Netherlands, so it’s been very good to see her smiling face in front of the group again introducing the monks.

We all owe Doug a big vote of thanks for keeping things running so smoothly in Christiena’s absence.

One big event that’s coming up for the Armadale group is the Minnavarra Festival, at Minnavarra Park, Armadale over April 4 and 5. This will be the group’s third year at the festival.

The festival attracts thousands of people over the weekend who enjoy the day out, a leisurely stroll and the opportunity to chat to people from a range of community groups.

For the Armadale group it’s a great opportunity to talk to people about the benefits of meditation and the Tuesday night meditation sessions at the Armadale Hospital annexe.

It’s also a great opportunity to tell interested people a little about Buddhism and hand out some free literature and meditation CDs.

There’s no doubt that for some people it can be the start of a life-changing experience. It certainly was for me.

I’d practised meditation a bit during yoga sessions and elsewhere, so I was open to the idea of a meditation group when I came upon the Armadale Group’s stall at the Minnavarra Festival two years ago.

I stopped for a chat about Buddhism and meditation and decided to go along to my first meditation group at the Armadale Hospital, where I felt immediately welcome.

After that I just kept going, and it was only natural that my curiosity with Buddhism, which I’d had for a while, should develop into a commitment to treading a Buddhist path through life.

I’ve no doubt the Armadale group’s stall at the Minnavarra festival can be the stimulus for a big change in other people’s lives as well, certainly the number of meditators increases each year after the festival.
Ajahn Brahm’s Travels

In December Ajahn taught a nine day meditation retreat in Malaysia, before embarking on a series of travels that has grown his ‘local’ following even more. He abandoned his long hair and oh-so-fashionable green velvet trousers many years ago, but even so, he has still attained ‘rock-star’ status.

He travelled first to Sri Lanka in January, where as well as TV interviews and a private breakfast with the President of Sri Lanka, he was greeted by crowds of 2000 or more at each venue, some of whom seemed keen to take home a piece of Ajahn Brahm (or at least his robe) as a memento of the event.

In February he travelled to Thailand and Indonesia, where once again many people were very interested in hearing the Dhamma.

In Indonesia Ajahn visited a number of cities, with audiences ranging from 1500 to 3100 people.

The people of Singapore did not miss out either. Its status as the local transit hub ensured that Ajahn was able to give several talks on the way to, and coming home from, his destination.

Community

Ajahn Subin, a senior monk from Wat Nong Pah Pong and an old friend of Ajahn Brahm’s, visited Bodhinyana Monastery for two weeks, and a further week in Sydney and Melbourne.

He was accompanied by Ajahn Jarat, who is staying on for a two month visit, much to the delight of his local following.

Ajahn Visarado, one of the very earliest Bodhinyana ordinees, returned from Malaysia to stay at Bodhinyana due to his father being very ill with cancer. His father having now passed away, Ajahn Visarado has returned to Malaysia.

Due to the happy event of his parents’ 70th birthdays, Ajahn Brahmili spent time with his family in Malaysia and also Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

Monastery Buildings

The concrete surfacing of a fire break road on our Southern boundary is ongoing and the extension to the boundary wall on the Eastern boundary has been completed.

A kuti has been given a new concrete ceiling and renovated, and electricity has been provided to a kuti close to the central area to serve in the long-term as a sick monk’s kuti.

Venerable Santutchi, our able workshop master and woodworker, has also contributed several original pieces of woodwork to the kitchen, a guest room and our new boundary wall extension.

Jhana Grove Retreat Centre

The Retreat Centre is really taking shape now, all of the walkways have been erected, and all walkways and buildings now have their roof-sheeting.

The paving for the pathways is nearly completed and all cottages have bamboo flooring installed.

Installation of the ceiling to the Meditation Hall is underway, and tiling of the kitchen will shortly begin.

The two Borobudur stupas so generously donated from Indonesia are being constructed under the experienced guidance of Ajahn Brahmili.

These will add to the spiritual ambience of the gardens being landscaped by Eiji Morozumi, father of Venerable Osuna.

In mid-February we received a cost estimate from the builder which indicated that our accumulated funds were around $200,000 short.

However, since then many generous donations have been coming in, and if this continues we should be able to cover all costs. The final cost looks to be just under $5 million.

The Opening Ceremony is to be on April 10. This is being organized by our hard-working events co-ordinator, Anne, with able assistance from many other BSWA members.

Some inspirational performances have been created especially for this occasion and, of course, there will be the usual roasting speech from Ajahn Brahm, as well as from local dignitaries and our Jhana Grove Meditation Retreat Centre patron, Geoff Gallop, will attend even though his wife has recently passed away due to cancer.

A Great Blessing

By Jake Mitra (BSWA representative)

At a multi-faith event held in St George’s Cathedral to mark Commonwealth Day on March 9, Ajahn Brahm recited the well-known Discourse of the Highest Blessings (The Mahā-Mangala Sutta) to an attentive audience.

In just the second line of the sutta, it reads as “To live in a suitable country, to have done good deeds in the past and to possess self-discipline, this is a great blessing.”

The sutta lists all in about 34 true blessings but the one I’d like to focus on here is the great blessing of living in our great country.

The Buddhist community has a role to ensure that Australia remains a peaceful country based on noble principles.

We are in turbulent times, one in which the great theistic religions of the world are once again, battling it out. In such an environment I feel it is a great opportunity for all practicing Buddhists to make a difference — doing so would be a great blessing for all sentient beings.

It’s in this spirit that I am happy to share with you the news that the Speaker of the House, Harry Jenkins MP, is delighted to accept the Dhammasattha to be placed in the despatch boxes in the House of Representatives.

This means it will be placed together with the Bible, the Torah and the Koran at a date to be announced. This will be another milestone for Buddhism in Australia. This happened following a written request by the president of the FABC, Mr Brian Ashen.

On the home front, I am also pleased to say that the WA Minister of Multicultural Affairs and Local Government Mr John Castrilli will be meeting the Buddhist Council of WA (BCWA) on March 26. We will put to the Minister all our concerns.

We also hope to be able to interview Mr Castrilli for a future edition of the Enlightened Times.

Victorian bushfires

In addition to the fund-raising activities carried out by various Buddhist organisations and Buddhist individuals, as well as the formal expressions of support by the FABC, the Buddhist community was represented by the Buddhist nunit Chi Kuan Sunim, who was herself, almost a victim of the fires, during the Memorial Service broadcast on TV on February 22.

Quoting from the Canberra Times: Victorian premier John Brumby also spoke with great dignity and compassion, as did the Venerable Chi Kwang Sunim – a Buddhist community leader based at Kinglake.

“Here there are events that seal our consciousness, lacerate our hearts, and imprint our souls. These are the events and the memories that we carry with us for the rest of our lives,” she said.

“The fires that took hold just over two weeks ago not only devastated Victoria, but burnt themselves into our collective being. And in their wake we sense only the grief and tears, the almost inexpressible sadness of lost friends, lost homes, lost communities, lost bird and animal life.”
Pauline's Long and Winding Road To Buddhism
Story and Photo by Mark Schneider

One of the highlights of the meditation sessions during the Rains Retreat at the Armadale Group on a Tuesday night is Pauline Shield's wonderful metta meditation.

Pauline has a real affinity for metta meditation and great skill at guiding meditators. Most of us come away from one of Pauline's sessions having experienced something very special.

Like many of us, Pauline's decision to tread the Buddhist path was the result of a slow, considered conviction, rather than a sudden conversion.

She first encountered Buddhism as a 12 year old in her local library at Birmingham, England, when the librarian, recognising an enquiring young mind, gave her an adult library ticket.

She used it well, borrowing books on politics, religion and philosophy and becoming impressed by their teachings.

"I was surprised to find that most religions had that basis of being kind and caring," she said.

That early interest in religion was rekindled when her daughter, Katie, died soon after Pauline immigrated to Perth in 1973.

"It was absolute despair and it's then that you go back to the drawing board and start looking for reasons and meaning," she said.

She read the New Testament and the Bhagavad Gita, but it was The Compassionate Buddha and the Parable Of The Mustard Seed with its gentle teachings on impermanence that really touched her.

Her work as a nurse had taught her that bad things happen to good people without apparent rhyme or reason.

"I never asked 'why me'?" she said.

She liked Buddhism's questioning attitude and the fact that Buddhist beliefs fit in with science, that it doesn't contradict Darwin, for example.

"I felt that he (the Buddha) actually answered questions without miracles, with plain speaking that made sense – life is suffering, there's no two ways about it – you can't argue with it, can you?" she said.

Pauline had already encountered meditation through yoga and was "gobsmacked" to discover a Buddhist meditation group had been operating for years at Armadale hospital, where she'd also been working for years.

Listening to Ajahn Brahm, she realised that Buddhism held the answers to all the questions she'd been asking and became a committed Buddhist after being drawn strongly to it for years.

Politically she's quite left wing and finds Buddhism's anti-materialist core in perfect harmony with her egalitarian beliefs.

As a committed Buddhist, she "tries very hard to keep the five precepts and fails most of them occasionally," she said with a warm laugh.

The concept of impermanence is central to her beliefs. It helped her come to terms with her divorce as she realised that all things are impermanent – even relationships.

Pauline has three surviving children – two sons and a daughter, a granddaughter and a grandson.

She's enormously grateful for the teaching of Ajahn Vayama, who's been a great guide and help on her spiritual path, and she's a strong supporter of Dhammasara, which is close to her Jane Brook home.

"Ajahn Vayama's been very helpful, so kind and patient," she said.

Pauline is also very grateful for her nursing experience which has given her the opportunity to learn so much about life and people.

She meditates every day, usually at about 8.00am, and finds metta meditation particularly valuable and helpful. Her talks and guidances are also on metta. But she also practices breath meditation and sees all meditation as a means to an end, a way of reaching deeper states.

Anyone who's had the pleasure of hearing her might be surprised to learn that she was once scared of public speaking.

"Please throw me to the lions, but don't ask me to speak," was her attitude.

Meditation has given her the calm confidence to overcome that fear and today she talks about meditation with the confidence and assurance of one who knows.

Giving guided meditation is not her only contribution to the BSWA. At Christmas she pulls on the traditional red attire and some not so traditional flashing earrings and becomes "Mrs Claus".

Now, considering her mother lived to 89 and her father to the grand old age of 93 it's a fair bet that we'll be enjoying "Mrs Claus" contribution to our Christmas celebrations, and Pauline's wonderful metta meditations for many years to come.
Introducing the new BSWA Committee Members for 2009. Each role is a voluntary position to enable the Buddhist Society to function well and efficiently and to serve the Buddhist and wider communities.

Throughout the year there will be calls for extra volunteers to assist with ongoing activities as well as special events and functions. If you would like to contribute your time or skills, please contact the relevant General Committee Member or Non-Committee Support Volunteer with your details.

If you’re unsure, please direct your enquiries to the Assistant Secretary
AGM An Opportunity To Celebrate Our Achievements

Story and Photo by Mark Schneider

The 2009 AGM was an impressive testament to the influence of the Buddhist Society of WA and to the talent, dedication and hard work of those who helped make it so successful over the last 12 months.

This year’s crowning achievement has undoubtedly been the construction of Jhiana Grove, made possible by the hard work of many and the generous donations of our supporters at home and overseas. At the time of the AGM the $5 million Centre was nearing completion for the grand opening on April 10.

Ajahn Brahm has once again had a busy year representing the BSWA internationally, a task that has taken him from Phnom Penh to New Zealand and all points in between, where he’s addressed psychotherapists, Presidents, Prime Ministers, TV journalists and many more.

Locally he’s taught meditation and sutta classes, attended interfaith events and given many Friday night talks at Dhammasara, among a host of other things.

If Ajahn Brahm was heading to the world, then the world was heading to Ajahn Vayama and her sister nuns at Dhammasara. Three bhikkunis from America as well as Ayya Jutima from New Zealand and Chi Kwan Sunim from Melbourne stayed at Dhammasara during the year.

Ajahn Vayama suffered ill health from June and spent the Rain season in silent retreat at Bodhiyana. In her absence Dhammasara was left in the capable hands of Sister Nirodha and the other nuns.

Ajahn Vayama was very grateful for the support of the community.

Rachel, our outgoing President, presented a report which really highlighted what an amazing organisation the BSWA has become and the extraordinary work of the big team of volunteers who make it work so smoothly.

She spoke of the Society’s work in the community such as prison visits, meditation classes and Food Fairs and its success in spreading the Dhamma.

Her report on the website showed the BSWA’s extraordinary global reach.

More than 307,000 people have visited the site which has 4,472 active website members. An amazing 433, 734 videos have been downloaded along with 143, 158 talks.

The “Where is Ajahn Brahm?” section of the site has been accessed 34,000 times, causing one wit to question “How many times was that Ajahn Brahm reading it to find out where he was?”

“On a global scale bswa.org is the premier site for modern Theravada Buddhism on the web,” Rachel said.

“The web has helped give Ajahn Brahm ‘rock star’ status in many countries.”

The new committee was warmly welcomed to a new year of activity that promises so much, including the new Jhiana Grove Meditation Centre, a new youth social group and Monastery tours.