



# Our history continued ...

*In our last newsletter (Spring Summer 2004) we told of the first years of the Buddha Sāsana Association and how, after a long search for a permanent venue for retreats, the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre came to be at Medlow Bath. In this second part, we describe how commitment, generosity and hard work in the years 1993-2005 established its facilities and gave it a key role in teaching insight meditation in the Burmese tradition of Mahāsi Sayādaw in Australia.*

In 1993 BSA decided to sponsor Sayādaw U Paññāthami for permanent residence in Australia after a successful period as resident teacher at the Centre. This process was finalised over some nine months in November 1993, in time for him to return from London to lead the summer retreats at the Centre.

Another significant point was reached with Blue Mountains City Council approval of our Development Application (DA) to use the property as a meditation centre. Although approval was given on 5 May 1993 consultants still had to be employed to prepare the necessary building plans and to obtain approval from the Environmental Protection Authority to install an Envirocycle septic system. This was a long and drawn out process which continued well into 1994.

In May, we were successful in gaining an Ethnic Affairs grant of \$15,000 based on our service to and connection with several ethnic Buddhist communities, particularly the Burmese. Joan King started as manager in September and finished the next February.

### 1994

By August 1994 all the bureau-

cratic hurdles to further work at the Centre had been overcome. Though approval to install the Envirocycle was expected, in August we received a letter from Council's solicitors advising that Council had forgotten to notify neighbours of our DA. We resubmitted the DA to avoid the possibility of an action in the Land and Environment Court, and approval was finally given in November for both the DA and building, allowing us to install the new septic system, add verandahs to the meditation hall and landscape the surrounds.

With its new official status, the Centre now hosted its first retreat with Sayādaw U Paṇḍita assisted by Sayādaw U Paññāthami. A house in Medlow Bath was rented for them. Fourteen yogis stayed for the whole month and a further 12 sat for shorter periods, supported by a group of 18 volunteers who helped with cooking, cleaning and managing.

### 1995

Debra Coulson started work as the Centre's manager in February 1995 with Donald Elniff as part-time resident and cook. Rose O'Malley came to manage in October.

A decision was made to sponsor

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Sayādaw U Paññāthami's *kappiya*, Ko Ko Latt, for permanent residence, since he was on his second temporary visa. The application was lodged and residence granted in November 1995. We were now absolutely sure that he was a good *kappiya*—we had the medical certificates and references to prove so. We also knew that the Commonwealth Employment Service could find nobody else in Australia with the qualifications to do his job.

After months of delay and frustration, the work on the Envirocycle, the meditation hall and landscaping was complete by October. A Burmese food day was held at the Centre to celebrate and raise more funds, since the costs were over \$30,000 including nearly \$13,000



for the Envirocycle system.

With more people using the Centre, expenditure was beginning to exceed income and a decision was reluctantly made in September to charge people attending retreats for food and accommodation.

Up to this time, all retreats were offered on a *dāna* (donation) basis. The new fee for retreats was based on the minimum yearly income required to keep the Association solvent.

The Association had been fortunate in having free use of the vacant land next to the Centre. Apart from providing a beautiful setting and spacious walking areas, the land also had a converted garage which accommodated up to eight female yogis plus a caravan used by staff.

When the owners (the MacLachlans) found they needed to sell the land, and after much debate over whether BSA could afford to buy it, the land was bought for \$100,000 in December 1995, a purchase enabled by many generous donations and the generous terms of a loan agreement with the MacLachlans.

1996

Rose O'Malley finished her six month term as manager in February and was replaced by Donald Elniff as interim caretaker with assistance from long-term yogi David Smith, while a new manager was sought. Fundraising to repay what was still owing on the land and to further develop the property continued and by June through a remarkable effort the first \$50,000 had been raised.

Sayādaw U Paññāthami taught a number of long retreats before travelling to teach overseas. Ven Sujiva made his first of several visits, Kamala Masters and Steve Armstrong led a retreat in April and Ven Gunaratana, a weekend in August. Patrick Kearney and Ven Pannyavaro each led a number of weekend and nine-day retreats. For regulars and local meditators, full moon sittings were introduced.



*The early hall, about 1994*

1997

Sayādaw U Paññāthami returned to the Centre to teach several nine-day retreats until February when he resumed his overseas teaching commitments. Although Sayādaw continued to teach regular retreats at BMIMC, by this time he had ceased to be the Centre's resident teacher.

Sayādaw U Janaka visited Australia again to lead a month-long retreat in February and March. Patrick Kearney taught the first of his Easter retreats, with several teachers leading weekend retreats including Ven Pannyavaro, Lynne Bousfield and Grahame White.

Sayādaw U Kundala taught his first Australian nine-day retreat in March. Dr Thynn Thynn taught a five-day course, and other weekends or retreats were taught by Ven Gunaratana, Ven Pannyavaro and Ven Sujiva.

The link with the Buddhist Library continued, with many teachers at the Centre also giving public talks or teaching weekends there. Fundraising continued to pay off the second \$50,000 owing on the land, and by December all but \$9,000 had been given.

A decision to build a stupa in the front of Sasana House was taken, with much of the work subsequently carried out by Roger Myint and Adrian Wain. The Burmese community strongly supported the project, arranging for relics to be placed in the stupa, and the golden orb and umbrella decorations to be made in Burma.

At the annual Burmese Food Day in November, the site of the stupa

was blessed by Ven Sayādaw U Kundala, who had taught a retreat that month. In September, Stephen and Linda Procter became the new managers of the Centre. It was a change to have a married couple as a management team, with Linda's accountancy a valuable part of the skills they brought. Donald Elniff left in December to live in Taiwan.

1998

By June 1998, all of the debt owing on the land had been repaid. The continuing level of *dāna* allowed the main building to be re-roofed and fire equipment to be installed throughout. The BSA clarified its *modus operandi*, delegating its responsibilities to a Centre management committee whose members took 'custodian' and support roles.

Committee members included Graham White and Lynne Bousfield, Chris and Tara MacLachlan, Ian Baird, Gabriel Cusack, Graham Wheeler and Danny Taylor. A House Committee was also established to support the managers.



*Building verandahs, 1995*

By 1998, Ven Pannyavaro's work in establishing BuddhaNet had made it one of the world's leading Buddhist information and directory websites. BuddhaNet had become a major source of information about BMIMC for meditation students in Australia and abroad.

In November, following his retreat, Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa presided over a ceremony to enshrine relics in the stupa, attended by members of the sangha from Sydney and overseas, as well as many supporters from the Burmese community and local residents.



By 1998, the Centre's retreats were becoming heavily booked, and plans to expand the accommodation were beginning to crystallise. Monday night had become established as a regular time for group sittings at the Centre and the Buddhist Library.



*Stupa blessing, 1999*

### 1999

A completion ceremony for the stupa was held in January and conducted by Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa and attended by several hundred people. Sayādaw was able to lead the 20-day January retreat in place of Sayādaw U Paññāthami, for whom teaching commitments at BMIMC were becoming more difficult due to his growing teaching commitments overseas and his work to establish a centre for the Burmese community in south-western Sydney.

This year marked a 'changing of the guard' in the management of the Centre as Grahame White and Lynne Bousfield stepped down after long and active service to the Association in establishing Mahāsi practice over seventeen years, particularly through their efforts to bring Burmese teachers to Australia.

Chris MacLachlan became the new president and new members were recruited to the management committee, which expanded its work through sub-committees for Building and Retreat Scheduling.

Nine-day retreats were conducted by Ven Pannyavaro, Ven Sujiva, Sayādaw U Kundala, and Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa again visited to conduct a longer 20-day retreat. Several introductory work-

shops were led by Chris MacLachlan, Lynne Bousfield and Graham White. Patrick Kearney again led the Easter retreat and Ven Visudhicara from Malaysia led his first nine-day retreat at BMIMC. A further retreat for young adults was led by Chris MacLachlan.

### 2000

By 2000 the Centre had established a pattern of short workshops and longer retreats led by Burmese masters and Western lay and ordained teachers. Sayādaw U Paññāthami returned to lead the month-long January retreat and Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa came again to conduct a 20 day retreat in November. Ven Pannyavaro taught both nine-day retreats and introductory workshops. Venerable Ariya Nāṇi, a nun from Sayādaw U Janaka's Rangoon centre, conducted her first retreat at BMIMC in November.

The year was one of pronounced change. Chris and Tara MacLachlan, foundation members of the Association, decided to take up counselling and community work in Broome, WA for an extended period. After nearly three years as co-managers, Linda and Stephen Procter announced plans to take leave for long-term practice in Burma from June. Leah Nicholls then managed the Centre, assisted by Jill Shepherd.

Jill worked with architect Ross Young to finalise the building plans and DA for the new student accommodation. The revised DA was submitted before Christmas.

In July 2000, the BMIMC community invited Patrick Kearney to take up the position of resident teacher and his teaching commitments increased accordingly.

Minor improvements were made, such as a new carpark to reduce impact on the neighbourhood. An offer to work from Richard and Guenter, from the USA, saw the stupa surrounds landscaped, under the custodial hand of Ian Baird who organised dry-stone walling

and planting.

### 2001

Steve and Linda Procter returned from Burma and managed the January one-month retreat, but decided not to continue as Centre managers.

Leah Nicolls had left at the end of 2000 and Jill Shepherd decided to stay on as manager, partly to assist with seeing through approval of the Centre's new master plan and help get building underway. Approval by Council was protracted due to neighbourhood opposition and the application went to a full meeting of the Blue Mountains City Council for decision: approval with many conditions. Dave Smith joined Jill as assistant manager.

Ian Bett and Mary-Ann Sharrock from Victoria came to be co-managers for six months, arriving the day after the events of September 11. One week later, the Centre



*U Lakkhaṇa and Patrick Kearney*

organised a moving candle-light commemoration to be held in conjunction with other Buddhist groups and peace organisations around the world.

Several community work-days were held and more improvements were made to the existing buildings. The sunroom ceiling was lined, a new timber floor put in and rotten windows replaced to make the room weather-tight and suitable for use as an interview room and

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[www.meditation.asn.au](http://www.meditation.asn.au)

## FROM THE MANAGER

Chris MacLachlan Manager

Winter has finally set in at Medlow Bath with mostly clear, crisp days and chilly nights. The deciduous trees now stand like skeletons in piles of leaves. The heating in the Dhamma hall is a blessing and the colder weather is further encouragement to get a heating system installed in the new rooms and (one day) in Sāsana House. Hopefully, this year's Vesak appeal will help to realize this.

This week the second accommodation building was made ready for occupation. It's been 17 years since the Centre began and we are finally realizing our intention to provide single rooms for everybody who comes here to practise. Patience is certainly rewarded. Of course this could not have been possible without the generosity of all of you who have participated in meditation retreats and contributed to the ongoing development of this very special Dhamma centre.



Now we also have a more spacious and better located dining-room—the old dorm. This is situated further from the kitchen and opens on to the front verandah. The old dining-room has become a reception/library and staff eating area. These changes are another watershed in the development of BMIMC, creating even more suitable conditions for practising the Buddha Dhamma.

Some other good news is the return to the Centre of two highly respected and skilful teachers. This year, in October, Steven Smith,



from Hawaii, will come to teach a 9-day retreat. This retreat will be co-led with Lynne Bousfield who regularly teaches abroad with Steven. The retreat now has only a few places left for men and interested women are being put on a wait-list. It is hoped that Steven can come back next year, so please keep in touch with us about this.

The other teacher whom we are really pleased to have teaching here again is Venerable Sujiva, from Malaysia, whom many will remember for his warmth and straight-forward style. Ven. Sujiva has been teaching for a number of years now in Europe and USA, and will be conducting a 9-day retreat in July 2006.

As you know we are limited to small numbers and most of our retreats fill up, some quite early, so it is advisable to book when you know that you want to participate in a particular retreat.

Finally, I would like to highlight the coming Dhamma Service weekend, October 14-16, when we will give Sāsana House a new coat of paint. For those who prefer there will also be gardening projects and meals to cook. There will also be regular meditation sessions over the weekend and a Dhamma talk and discussion on Saturday night. This could be an excellent opportunity to be part of the BMIMC Dhamma community for a couple of days and contribute to the improvement of the Centre for the benefit of all.

Looking forward to seeing you in Medlow Bath.

From Donald Elniff  
Staff member

Greetings Dharma Friends!

As a long time member of the sangha, I am delighted by all the improvements I've seen at BMIMC.

For the last eight years I've been working overseas. Finally, last August 2004 I sold most of my belongings and fled to India for yoga training. From India I went overland to Panditarama in Lumbini for four months of intensive meditation practice.

When my hips and knees told me enough was enough I came back to the tranquillity and beauty of Medlow Bath.

It's been heart-warming to see that through the generosity of others this Centre has flourished. It's especially nice to see that all the individual rooms for both male and female yogis are almost complete, as well as the continuing landscaping and tree planting projects.



I am very happy to see that the main house has been so well maintained with the up-grading of the sunroom, the new windows in the kitchen and the state-of-the art stove and the new carpet in the dining room. Not to mention the new roof!

This August I will return to Nepal for an indefinite period of time. After that I hope to return to the mountains and help out at the Centre in whatever capacity I am needed while I build my home nearby in St Alban's Road, Medlow Bath.



# This is not a travelogue . . .

Ian Baird

Management Committee member

After ten years living in the Blue Mountains and being closely involved with BMIMC as well as several environmental groups, I have recently moved to Adelaide.

Separating myself from this strong community network and leaving behind my home, with its native garden and population of resident wildlife (including blue-tongued lizards and copperhead snakes) was not easy.

I also had to give up (at least temporarily) an absorbing research project that I had begun, studying the ancient and enigmatic giant dragonfly in the upper Blue Mountains.



Giant Dragonfly (*Petalura gigantea*)

However, when a job as a river recovery project officer was advertised in Adelaide a couple of months ago, I was drawn to respond to it, seeing it as an opportunity to explore new professional challenges as well as the powerful natural landscapes of South Australia.

*It has been fascinating to see the mind's ceaseless conditioned tendency to identify ...*

I was fortunate enough to get the job, and have jumped into a new work situation and a new city

*During a time of intense change and insecurity, the mind's tendency to solidify the sense of self seems to get stronger, and so can be seen more clearly.*

where I don't know anyone—definitely a case of abandoning the comfort zone!

From the start, I resolved to use this period of upheaval as an opportunity to practise letting go. During this time of intense change and insecurity, the mind's tendency to solidify the sense of self seemed to get stronger, and so could be seen more clearly. I made a conscious effort to pay close attention to the process of identification, trying to notice the stories as they were created, without getting too stuck in them.

It has been fascinating to see the mind's ceaseless conditioned tendency to identify, to grasp on to memory and other mind objects to create the self, something solid as defence against the inherent instability and emptiness of all our experience.

But I found that when I was able to open to those moments of grasping or contraction by simply being fully present to them before the story consolidated, there was an opportunity to rest in the awareness of their inherent emptiness – if only briefly.

It has also been a powerfully transformative experience to see how I impose limits on myself, through identifying with fear and contraction – compared to the unconditional qualities of mind that are revealed when there is the faith to let go more fully into being present.

This has been brought home to me quite strongly in the way I relate



Hanging swamp—home of the dragonfly

to my new work role. By practising mindfulness, by getting less frequently hooked by and constrained by old views of self, there is the opportunity to bring a more expansive quality to the role that has been quite liberating.

My motivation in sharing this experience is to simply reaffirm that our life is our practice and that there is nothing separate from that, just the present moment, and the unfolding opportunity and challenge to be present to it, whatever it contains.

*By practising mindfulness ... we get less frequently hooked by and constrained by old views of self ...*

Seeing the empty nature of things is the great gift of insight meditation, and I'm grateful for the unanticipated practice benefits that moving to Adelaide has provided.

## Retreat fees

For the first seven years at BMIMC, retreats were offered on dāna. Since we began charging to meet costs, there has only been one price increase, in 1999.

Now it is necessary to raise fees slightly again, beginning in 2006.

The teachers and teachings have always been and will remain to be offered freely. Everybody coming to BMIMC is invited and encouraged to help the teachers to continue to provide their valuable Dhamma service, and to help the Centre develop and grow.

## Our history continued . . .

teacher reception. Gas-fired central-heating was installed in the meditation hall to replace the inadequate electric radiators.

Following Sayādaw U Paññāthami's January retreat, Patrick Kearney conducted several weekend workshops and the first of several nine-day retreats during the year. Weekend retreats were taught by local teachers Graham White, Lynne Bousfield and Michael Dash. Steve and Rosemary Weissman,



*Blessing the building site*

visiting teachers from Wat Kow Tahn, Thailand, held their first retreat at BMIMC in April. Bikkhuni Kusuma, a fully-ordained nun from Sri Lanka, made a welcome visit to the Centre, giving a public talk and leading a well-attended metta workshop.

Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa and Ariya Ñāṇi again visited to lead their usual end-of-year retreats. The Centre registered the domain name meditation.asn.au. and John McIntyre began to develop its website (linked to BuddhaNet) in August.

### 2002

Thanks to the great generosity of many who had donated to the building fund over years, a start was made on the new accommodation buildings. Sayādaw U Paññāthami led a site-blessing ceremony followed by the Burmese community serving spicy *mohinga* soup to all. A yearly Vesak appeal was inaugurated to support the building program.

Ross Young and Jill Shepherd prepared contract documents and

invited local builders to tender. Harald of Next Level Building was chosen and worked sympathetically to minimise noise and distractions during the busy retreat schedule. By spring, both units were finished to lock-up stage.

Ian and Mary-Ann left in May to travel extensively in Asia. A month long mid-winter 'self-retreat' was held in July. Lucy Adcock came onto staff in the midst of the building program, spending many hours painting the new accommodation blocks, as did many volunteers.

### 2003

Patrick taught the January one month retreat for the first time. In May, Bikkhuni Kusuma made a return visit to the Centre, leading a weekend workshop and Lucy Adcock returned to Thailand.

After three years as resident teacher, Patrick Kearney resigned and returned to Canberra to live, while continuing to teach regularly at BMIMC and other centres.

Martina Palombi and Nipako came to the Centre as temporary managers for several months so that Jill could spend more time supervising the new building work.

Jill left the Centre in September to attend the three-month retreat at IMS in Massachusetts, USA, supported by funds donated to the staff scholarship fund. Committee member Ian Baird took over supervision of the last stages of the building fit-out, and it was completed the day before Sayādaw U Lakkhaṇa's November retreat. Sayādaw performed a blessing ceremony on the new building before it was used for the first time.

Kris Baird was appointed as the Centre's new manager and was joined by her partner Shan several months later. Long-term BMIMC supporters Robyn Howell and Theresa Baw were appointed to the Management Committee.



*The frame of the new buildings*

### 2004

Kris and Shan finished their time as managers and in May, Jill Shepherd returned as temporary office manager until Chris and Tara MacLachlan 'came home' with Chris becoming centre manager in September with Tara as volunteer assistant.

As current managers, they have overseen many changes and refurbishments, the purchase of new grounds maintenance equipment funded by a grant and steady progress on the completion of the second building. Dave Smith spent another six months on staff in 2004-2005 and in March 2005 Donald Elniff returned as a residential staff member. Several lay teachers joined the regular teachers at BMIMC to lead retreats, which were usually full and yogis needed to book in early to get a place.

With the MacLachlans managing the Centre in 2005, the story of the BMIMC has come full circle—a good place to let it rest—for now.

## Can you help?

We hope that you have enjoyed the images illustrating the history of the Association.

It is an ongoing project of the Centre to document our history. A vital part of the process is assembling an archive of images.

We would like to make copies of any old photographs you may have of retreats and events, work around the Centre, teachers and friends especially from the early days. If you can help, please ring the Centre on 02 4788 1024.



# An appeal for heating

John McIntyre  
Management Committee member

Supporters will have received in May a letter about BMIMC's annual Vesak building appeal, this year in advance of the newsletter.

This Vesak we have cause to celebrate, with the news that the second student accommodation block is now completed—it was first used on the June long weekend. This is a goal that we have had in sight for more than a year, since the first block was finished.

So this Vesak, we would like to express our gratitude for the many donations to the Building Fund over the years. Since early 2002, the amount given has been nearly \$100,000 from over 700 donations.

The direct result of this generosity is that all the yogis who come to BMIMC will now have the privacy of their own room.

One final step needs to be taken to ensure a new standard of accommodation for yogis — to properly heat the buildings so that they can be used comfortably year-round in Medlow Bath.

Heating the buildings is an achievable goal for our Vesak appeal this year. We have talked with local heating experts about a gas-fired



system similar to that used for the meditation hall. Gas-fired central heating using hot-water radiators in each room is healthier, because it does not depend on re-circulated air like convection heating does. It is also quieter and more cost-effective, since the one system can also heat both buildings from a common boiler.

The boilers and other supplies will cost under \$10,000, with additional costs for installation of about \$3,000.

If supporters can make the same kind of donations they have in the past, it is quite possible that we can go ahead and have the heating system installed.

So this Vesak, we again offer you the opportunity to donate to the Building Fund and ensure that the new accommodation is welcoming, especially to new yogis. All donations are tax-deductible and a special receipt will be issued.

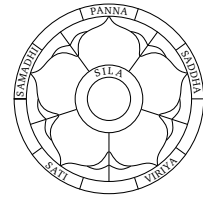
If you haven't yet replied to our Vesak appeal letter, it is easy now to complete the form at right and mail it back to us. If you wish to discuss a donation, please contact the manager on 02 4788 1024.

*Thanks to all those who have helped to bring the new buildings to their completion. Your generosity is much appreciated.*

*Sāddhu, sāddhu, sāddhu!*



The unseen boiler that warms the hall



## 2005 Building Appeal

I would like to donate -

- \$20
- \$50
- \$100
- \$200
- \$500
- \$.....

to the BMIMC Building Fund.

*All donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible. A special receipt will be issued.*

- A. Please find enclosed my cheque payable to BMIMC Building Fund, or
- B. Authorisation to debit my credit card for the amount of \$ .....

Credit Card No:

.....

Cardholder Name .....

Expiry date .... / .....

Signature .....

Thank you!

Please post to:

25 Rutland Road  
Medlow Bath NSW 2780

*Thank you.*



INFORMATION REQUEST AND DONATION FORM

If you would like to receive the newsletter or make a donation to the Centre, complete this form and send to BMIMC, 25 Rutland Road, Medlow Bath, NSW 2780.

Name .....

Address .....

I would like to make a donation of \$ ..... to the Building Fund  General fund 
Donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible

Authorisation to debit my credit card:

Bankcard  Visa  M'card  Card No .....

Cardholder Name ..... Expiry date /

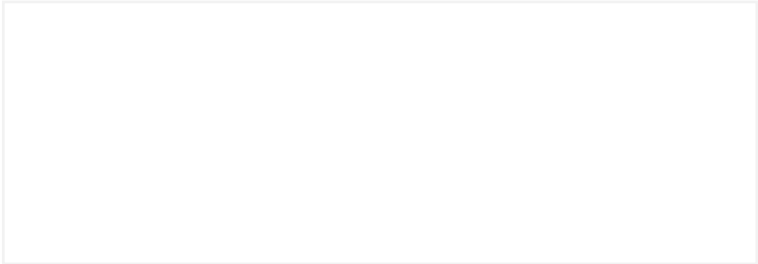
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