

A Brief History of the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd

Chapter 1

09 September 1978 to 08 September 1988

There were 19 persons in attendance at the home of John David Hughes at 33 Brooking Street, Upwey, Victoria on the afternoon of Saturday the 9th of September 1978.

That day marked John's 48th birthday having been born in Melbourne on the 9th of September 1930, as a 4th generation Australian. It also marked an event that John had been patiently working towards since the mid 1950's. The event was the founding and subsequent first formal meeting of the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd (in formation).

Preparations for the company had already been underway for some time and at the meeting the draft Memorandum and Articles of Association were adopted, a committee was elected with a President (John Hughes), Vice President (Rita Jeffrey), Treasurer (Anil Somaia) and Secretary (Zana Somaia) and a Patron, Thai Buddhist Monk Tan Acharn Boonyarith, was appointed. It was agreed that the newly elected President, John Hughes, be authorized to attend to the formation of the company and report back to the committee the progress of those arrangements.

John had started teaching Buddhist meditation from the lounge room of his home some years before. He had purchased the property with his then wife Elspeth in June 1966, in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges, within reasonable commuting distance from the hustle and bustle of Melbourne, and importantly, near a suburban line railway station. It also had the street number 33 which has some significance in Buddhism in the aptly named suburb Upwey.

John's home had been the property of a retired army Colonel and his wife and was a basic 1930's weatherboard home with generally small rooms surrounded by a wide veranda on all sides, which was very typical of country houses in that era. Historically the region was semi-rural having been comprised of orchards, market gardens and small farms with sheep and cattle.

John had done some modifications internally to remove an adjoining wall between the tiny lounge and even smaller kitchen-dining room to make one room just large enough to accommodate around 20 students. Many of the students were in their twenties and early thirties and were generally happy

enough to sit on the floor, and, in some cases in other rooms, out of sight of the meditation teacher who generally sat near the fireplace.

Meditation classes were held on Friday evenings and Monday evenings on either side of the weekends which had the effect of giving four days of practice. Being in the hills the winter nights were cold, and those persons who arrived late for the evening meditations, having to sit out of line of sight of the fire, were in for a chilly night.

Practice consisted mainly of meditation practice, Dhamma Teachings, Pali chanting and of course merit making, as the weekends were often busy with Dhamma activities and the work of running and establishing the new Centre.

The incorporation of the company took some time and did not occur until the 21st of July 1980 at which time the elected office bearers were John Hughes (President), John Mahoney (Vice President), Treasurer (Anil Somaia) and Secretary (Zarna Somaia). The objects for which our Centre was established are set out in the Memorandum of Association and read as follows:

- (a) To introduce a philosophy of life based on the teachings of Buddha Dhamma.
- (b) To encourage the study, practice and realisation of Buddha Dhamma.
- (c) To promote activities associated with Buddhism and Buddhist Culture in Australia and overseas.
- (d) To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in humankind.
- (e) To promote and maintain direct or auxiliary activities for educational, social, charitable, philanthropic, benevolent and humanitarian work.
- (f) To build, construct, maintain and alter any buildings or works in accordance with the requirements of the Centre.

Object (d) was a shared objective with the Philosophical Society which had been one of the few Western organisations to encourage and propagate the teachings and practice of oriental philosophies and religions. Perhaps John included this objective to appeal to an existing audience who were already attracted to the Philosophical Society, however, the “unexplained laws of nature” were only unexplained as viewed from a Western perspective.

At that (1978) time there were only a handful of Buddhist organisations in Melbourne and all but one had formed around the same time as The Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd. This included Tara House founded in 1976, Monash University Buddhist Society, Kagyu Ewam Cho Kholing founded in 1979, the Tibetan Buddhist Society founded in 1979 and the

Buddhist Society of Victoria which was quite well established, having been founded in 1953.

The first influx of Asian refugees to Australia had commenced from the late 1970's and in 1980 the Centre paid for two busloads of Vietnamese refugees who were housed at the Wiltona Migrant Centre in Williamstown to visit the Centre in Upwey to participate in a Kwan Yin chanting ceremony. Hopefully this gave the newly arrived migrants some confidence that Australia maybe a place their own Buddhist religion could be established.

During the next few years the beginnings of regular and ongoing activities that shaped the next 40 years of the BDC (U) Ltd were put in place.

The first official publication of our Centre, the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd Newsletter was issued in November 1978. By late 1979 the first sub-committees were formed, the first extended meditation course was held, a Library Project got underway and a small group of Members attended a Japanese Sum-ie painting exhibition by former Buddhist monk, Andre Sollier.

Andre Sollier was later to become a regular Teacher at the Chan Academy, which was founded by the Buddhist Discussion Centre on the 6th of February 1986.

A formal process of establishing correspondence with overseas Dhamma groups was started in 1980 which subsequently produced some extraordinary outcomes for our Centre and its Members which continue to this day.

Firstly, the fledgling Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd Newsletter began to fulfill a remarkable role in disseminating Buddha Dhamma around the world. At those times it was not easy or simple for Buddhist writers, scholars and translators to have their work published and circulated widely throughout the Buddhist world.

These authors were often Buddhist Monks and Nuns who had no means to print or disseminate their writings or research. John Hughes made the offer of free publication in our quarterly newsletter of suitable Dhamma articles or other writings. As a result, a steady stream of authentic Buddha Dhamma writings arrived from overseas by mail and were published in the newsletter. The mailing list eventually grew to around 1,000 recipients in over 35 countries, including Australia. Many of the overseas recipients were Buddhist temples, Buddhist Sangha, Buddhist educational organisations and libraries.

One eminent Buddhist Scholar, writer and educator was the Late Dr Ananda Guruge, a Sri Lanka born author of over 80 Buddha Dhamma books and former Dean of the University of the West, Los Angeles, USA wrote a testimonial letter on the occasion of John's 60th birthday in which it is written:

“But the most enduring result (of my friendship with John Hughes) is that I have been able to benefit from the enormous intellectual effort he has put into the regular newsletter of the Centre. It is really most profitable both intellectually and spiritually.”

The second indirect outcome of the overseas correspondence project was that the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd became a Regional Centre of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. It is in this capacity that since 1998 our Centre has sent a delegation of between four and 12 Members to each biannual WFB General Conference to perform the role of conference Rapporteurs on behalf of the WFB Secretariat, and performed the same role for the World Buddhist University.

For quite a long time the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd was better known in Buddhist countries overseas than it was in Australia.

Parallel with these activities, the main purposes of the new Dhamma Centre was teaching students to learn and practice Buddhism. This remained the focus of all classes and courses, and also included every other type of activity being done, as everything was treated as a vehicle to learn Buddha Dhamma, and for the students to gain realizations each for himself or herself.

The style of the teaching process was very direct and personal as many students were taught individually according to their needs and capacities, whether in a group setting or one to one. The Teacher, John Hughes, had chosen to create a teaching environment which was small enough to allow the teacher to give regular students direct personalized teachings and for those students to be guided to practice with sufficient intensity to progress on the Buddha Dhamma Path.

One student wrote at the time about his experience of being taught under such beneficial conditions:

“The aspect of John's guidance that stands out most in my mind is that he does not merely explain problems or put them into a new perspective but, he insists that the student drops his or her own confusion or misunderstandings and then, from a clear mind, the student themselves “discovers” the correct view or ‘solution’. The

student sees for himself or herself rather than merely accepting an outside solution”.

With regard to style, there were (and still are) aspects of our organisation which were not typical of most Dhamma temples and Dhamma Centre's which exist today, in either Australia or overseas.

Firstly, the BDC (U) Ltd was established as non-sectarian, meaning we did not belong to one particular tradition or lineage. We recognise that all traditions contain authentic Buddha Dhamma teachings and practices which provide methods and means for beings to progress along the Buddha path to enlightenment.

In this context the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd had the good fortune and good kamma to welcome Sangha from all traditions with respect and reverence as Members of the great Sangha community.

The teachings from each lineage were learnt and practiced with great respect and have been taught at the Centre in one form or other over the 40 years since it was founded. A wide diversity of methods and approaches were made available for students to learn and apply in their daily life so each student could find what was beneficial and suitable for their particular disposition.

Another feature of the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd which is unusual is that it was established as a Centre for laypersons. There has never been a resident monk living at our Centre except, occasionally, for short periods when individual monks have been accommodated for the rains retreat.

John Hughes observed there were already many temples in the world which are based on the monastic lifestyle and arrangements of Venerable monks and nuns and consequently many Monks and Nuns who could operate in the world with Dhamma in their hearts and minds.

However, it was his intention to provide a suitable place for laypersons to attain and realise the Dhamma without necessarily becoming a Monk or Nun. Having attained some level of awakening as a layperson the practitioner could contribute to the Buddha Sasana in many ways suited and appropriate to a laypersons lifestyle.

Another significant element of how the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd conducted its activities was that Buddha Dhamma Teachings and personal guidance was offered freely to students, without charge. Consequently, the Centre has never required any fees or payment for students to attend Dhamma classes, five-day courses or receive individual guidance during the past forty years.

One outcome of this policy is that our Centre was financed from inception either from donations by Members and friends (dana), or from fundraising activities which were developed for students to make the good kamma of funding a Buddha Dhamma Centre. The customers of these fundraising activities also benefited.

The written objective of the Fundraising Sub Committee as defined in 1986 was as follows:

“The objective of the Fund-Raising Sub-Committee is to develop all Members of the B.D.C.(U)Ltd in strategies to rationally resource the Centre as required.”

Examples of the fundraising activities we conducted include Christmas and Mother’s Day Flower stalls, Bunnings sausage sizzles, and a weekend market stall selling donated secondhand goods at Camberwell market for over ten years.

Our Centre was Blessed and supported by many Members of the Buddhist Sangha. Even in the early years such Monks as Venerable Tan Acharn Boonyarith (Thailand), Venerable Shanti Badra (Sri Lanka), Venerable U Pannathami Thera (Burma), Venerable Geshe Loden, Phra Khantipalo and Buddhist Nun, Sister Ayya Khema, visited and gave Dhamma Teachings.

In addition, Chinese layperson Francisco So worked with John Hughes to translate many chanting and offering Puja’s from the Chinese language to English so that students could do regular Puja Ceremonies at the Centre. The first held was the Avalokiteshvara Puja, conducted at the BDC on 15 February 1981.

Some events that are reported in the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd Newsletter from this period are:

- In 1977 John Hughes commenced an Australian Schools Commission project in conjunction with the Buddhist Society of NSW to provide an introduction to Buddhism for use by secondary school teachers, and another similar project that produced a teacher’s guide on ‘Reduction of Racial Prejudice’.
- The Centre became a member of the Ethnic Community Council (ECCV) on the 10th of February 1981.

- The first Vesak Ceremony was held at the Centre on 16 May 1981 (2525), including an English reading of the Upali Suttanta (Majjhima-Nikaya No. 56) and the Mangala Sutta in Pali.
- Venerable U Pannathami Thera of Burma, offered Buddha Relics to the Centre in 1982.
- John Hughes and John Mahoney were Australian delegates at the Conference of World Buddhist Leaders and Scholars, Sri Lanka, held from 1-5 June 1982, at which 17 countries were represented. He also received an invitation to visit China from the Buddhist Association of China.
- John Hughes represented Australia at the Inauguration of the 1000th Anniversary of Atisa Dipankar Srijan in Dhaka Bangladesh on 26 February 1983.
- John Hughes visited China on an Australia-China Council (Australian Government) grant from 30 August to 11 September 1983. The twelve Monasteries visited included the Jin Shang Temple Pagoda Gold Mountain (Chen Jiang).

During the visit John was presented with several pieces of Chinese calligraphy by one of the most senior Abbots in China at the time. These calligraphies are some of the most precious items in the Buddhist Discussion Centre's collection of Buddhist artworks and artefacts.

Chinese painting classes were commenced at the Centre on 11 July 1983 with ten students. Classes were free and taught by John Hughes and Melva Fitzallen.

These classes introduced students to the meditational discipline of Chan painting and culminated on the opening of the Chan Academy at the Centre on 6 February 1986.

The side veranda of the original house was enclosed to form a small hall and library area. The hall was equipped with fold down painting desks and together with some additional painting tables classes of about ten students could be accommodated.

Ven. Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche, Founder of the Kagyu Evam Centre in Kew, presented the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd with three reproduction thangka for our Chan Academy opening. Opening attendees included the Consul of Cultural Affairs, Ven. Traleg Rinpoche, Masters Andre

Sollier and David Brown (Shakuhachi Teacher). The Chan Academy was opened by John Hughes and Dr Constant Wong, Curator of The Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne.

A Calligraphy demonstration of was given by Japanese Calligraphy Master Shigyoku and Resident Chan Painter Melba Fitzallen (Nielsen). Forty official guests were presented with a gift of an original scrolled Chan Painting. The Director of the Chan Academy was June Young.

The Chan Academy was most fortunate that the French born, former Japanese Buddhist Monk, Andre Sollier commenced teaching Japanese Sumi-e Painting at the Centre on 5 July 1987. Andre become a regular Teacher at the Chan Academy for nearly 20 years, until his passing away in 2007.

On 12 April 1988, Members and Friends attended a major Chan Painting Exhibition of paintings by Melba Fitzallen (Nielsen) in conjunction with Judge James Robinson L.L.M.

The Exhibition was opened at East-West Art Gallery in Malvern by the Hon. Gough Whitlam, former Prime Minister of Australia and included a series of Chinese fables prepared by Judge James Robinson and illustrated in the Chan style by Melba Fitzallen.

As part of Melbourne City Councils International Year of Peace Program on the 4 December, 1986, Members of our centre gathered at the Melbourne Town Hall (Victoria) to build the first Buddhist Peace Mandala available for public viewing in Australia.

The mandala was placed in the centre of the main town hall and each side was approximately seven meters in length. The Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd Newsletter 21 published in February 1987 contained an article on page 1 on the occasion. Several passages from the article read as follows:

“Building of the Mandala began at midnight on Thursday and was completed at 7am, Friday, 5 December.

Participants from the B.D.C.(U) Ltd had been included in the various stages of the planning of the Mandala and had meditated intensively in previous days to ensure that each step was undertaken with the maximum amount of mindfulness. Each contributed an object of personal value to be placed within the Mandala so that a real and symbolic offering was made, a relinquishing of attachment.

The images and artefacts that were placed in the Mandala drew together

the Teachings of Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana and Ch'an Buddhism, thereby illustrating that there is only one Dharma, one Path. On Friday, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne returned to view the completed Mandala; he was accompanied by several dignitaries of the City Council. On this occasion all participants signed the Peace Register, an official record of Melbourne's involvement in the International Year of Peace Program. The Register was also signed by His Holiness the Pope, John Paul, who had been a visitor to the city during the same week.

There were many other visitors during the course of the day. All were impressed with the size and brilliance of the construction, and, indeed, it was a spectacular sight. More importantly, it was the First time most of these visitors had come into contact with Buddhism, and they evinced a great deal of interest. They learned something of the Dharma; some with more awareness than others, as their karma dictated, but all benefited from contact with the Buddhist Path to Peace”.

The 1980's was a flourishing period for the establishment of Buddhism in Melbourne as many Buddhist temples were founded. A few groups of visiting Monks, or even individual Monks, found support among their own nationals living in Melbourne to establish fledgling temples, usually in small suburban houses.

Wat Dhammarangsee, The Melbourne Thai Buddhist Temple, Wat Lao Melbourne, the United Vietnamese Congregation of Victoria and the Melbourne Sri Lankan Buddhist Vihara were all founded during this period.

The Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd was Blessed many times and in many ways through developing friendships with the Sangha and the communities of many of these newly formed Buddhist groups.

Encouraged by John Hughes our Centre's students would frequently offer dana to the Monks, help them setting up their organisations, help them with building modifications or maintenance, and as their drivers and attendants, from time to time.

The small communities of Monks were themselves enormously generous with their time. When the Buddhist Discussion Centre was conducting a Meditation Course or special event for example, it was not uncommon for there to be six or seven Venerable Monks seated in the small Upwey meditation hall, chanting Blessings for our students.

Venerable Dr. Ajahn Viriyananda, from the Melbourne Thai Buddhist Temple (Wat Thai Nakorn) in particular, provided great support to our Centre during these years and, among other things, offered a full set of the Pali Tripitaka in

English to the Centre's Library.

Quite a few students undertook short length ordinations as novice monks under his guidance at the Box Hill temple, including Jeffrey Radford, who has been a Member at that temple since then in service of the resident Monks and visiting Thai Sangha.

This first ten-year period of the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd had been both a stimulating and challenging time for students, many of whom were encountering Buddhism for the first time.

Students were encouraged and guided to apply what was being taught into every aspect of how our Centre was run, and how they interacted with each other. It was a dynamic and energetic period of Buddha Dhamma activity. Students were given opportunities and support to develop their skills and capacities in various roles and projects provided by their Teacher as vehicles for increasing their merit and learning.

By the Annual General Meeting held in August 1988 the Membership of the Centre had grown to around 58 persons, and the net assets of the company were \$97,435.

Chapter 2

9 September 1988 to 8 September 1998

In the first 10 years of operation, our Centre had achieved the position of a strong and enthusiastic Membership, a healthy financial base and a successful organisational team, which could provide a wide range of services and resources to 'help ourselves and others' through practicing the Buddhist Teachings.

The ongoing curriculum included the study of the Buddhist scriptures and commentaries, but also extended to preparing students for life in a broad sense. Students learning included English literature, business management, organizational development, skills in written and spoken English, library cataloguing, building, gardening, event management, time planning, goal setting and whatever each individual needed in their personal journey to help them become a confident, resourceful and successful adult member of society.

Students were exposed to many positive influences such as the following advice quoted in a B.D.C.(U) Ltd newsletter from the time:

‘Bearing in mind the rapidity of the Late Lama Yeshe’s Harmony-of-Purpose creating abilities, B.D.C.(U) Ltd. Members have often been guided by his advice in the following words:

“Also it is important for Directors to have great vision; they should not neglect their Centre’s growth. They should have a very broad view in order to be open to people.Therefore, you should plan ahead with great vision and have everything ready to show people how you want to expand and improve your facilities”.

The meditation course of five days run in September 1988 had a theme to consider the feasibility of establishing higher studies in Buddhist education, to be created by the B.D.C.(U) Ltd at some future time. A key principle was to characterize Buddhist education from other types of education through identifying that the purpose of Buddhist education was to learn and practice the Ten Perfections.

The Ten Perfections are: 1. Generosity, 2. Morality, 3. Renunciation, 4. Wisdom, 5. Energy, 6. Patience, 7. Truthfulness, 8. Determination, 9. Loving Kindness, 10. Equanimity.

In January 1989, John Hughes and approximately thirty Members and friends had the good fortune to meet the Most Venerable Visuddhananda Mahathera, Chief Patriarch of the Buddhists of Bangladesh, President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists Bangladesh Regional Centre, and President of the World Sangha Council. The Most Venerable stayed at our Centre on the Saturday evening before his return to Bangladesh on the Sunday.

He was accompanied by the Venerable Suddhananda Mahathero, Secretary General of the Dharmarajika Orphanage in Bangladesh, and six Members of the Bangladesh Buddhist lay community. They included P.K Barua, Secretary General of the Bangladesh Bouddha Kristi Prachar Sangha; and Professor Dr. Bikiran Prasad Barua of Bangladesh.

The Most Venerable Mahathera was in Melbourne to address the World Conference of Religion and Peace which was held at Monash University from the 23 – 27 January 1989.

In September of the year prior, a letter from Venerable Suddhananda was received appealing for immediate assistance, following the disaster experienced by the Dharmarajika Orphanage and its community from recent floods in Bangladesh. The orphanage residents suffered a further disaster on the 30 November with a fierce cyclone.

To lend a helping hand in aid of the Dharmarajika Orphanage our Members undertook a fundraising project within our local community. The Centre has continued to support the Dharmarajika Orphanage in Bangladesh since that time through raising funds on their behalf in Australia.

The visit to Australia of the Bangladesh delegation led by one of the World's most senior monks was followed soon after in March 1989 when our Centre and the Chan Academy was honoured with the visit of Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn Sunim, 78th Patriarch of the Chogye (Jogye) Order of Korean Buddhism. The Master gave several Dhamma talks, as well as conducting Zen Meditation, Zen interviews and a calligraphy workshop. Master Seung Sahn also offered two examples of his calligraphy painted at the time which are on permanent display in our Dhamma Hall.

Teacher John Hughes expressed at the time that

“the true resources of the Chan Academy are more than buildings and artifacts; they are people. They are people who are increasing their level of enlightenment by their practice. Their profundity of their level of enlightenment is increasing their capacity for understanding the Buddha Dhamma”.

‘For these reasons we know that the “Way of the Brush” is firmly established in an Australian setting and that these people accept the responsibility for the survival of the Buddha Dharma in this Dharma Ending Age.’

He concluded saying:

‘I feel sure that you agree with me that our goals are worthy of your support and our training in morality and tolerance is worthy of praise because we see our education values as a key to the development of harmonized community relationships through understanding’.

Around that time it was proposed that a new meditation hall was to be built, behind the Western Gates, in harmony with the garden. A traditional

Buddhist Foundation Stone laying ceremony was attended by several Chief Monks from Thailand and many monks who gave many blessings on that day.

John Hughes wrote at the time,

“As the Late Venerable Narada Maha Thera pointed out: we are neither absolutely the servants nor the masters of our kamma, however, it is evident that the fruition of kamma is influenced to some extent by external circumstances, surroundings, personality, individual striving, and so forth.

Individual striving must be directed against ignorance by applying the Buddha Teaching, the Buddha Dhamma”.

As it eventuated the meditation hall was not able to be built until many years later as a permit could not be granted under the local government planning laws in force at the time.

In the paper ‘The Way of the Brush and The Way of the Garden’ which John Hughes presented at the Ch’an Academy Long Life Day on 4 February 1990, declaring the day open to preserve the vital life of this training Centre and its surrounds. He wrote:

“To assist persons who wish to conquer their ignorance, the Chan Academy creates causes for Chan Teachings (The Way of the Brush). As part of this Practice, our Members take care of the Buddhist artifacts, library and surroundings of this place”.

“The Way of the Garden is difficult to understand and may be compared to bringing one hundred brooks under one bridge. The bridge is the wisdom minds, so it can be seen that this garden recreation process is not just a mere folly or ornament; but this process is used as an active training ground to develop the needed human qualities of loving kindness, compassion, patience, generosity and trust minds”.

In 1990 two students of the Chan Academy, Melva Fitzallen and June Young (B.A.) and of Sho-Do (Japanese Calligraphy) with Shigyoku Sensei at Japanese Seminar House, were among five of sensei’s students to win a place in the 17th Annual Zen Nitten Contest (all Japan).

With between six and two years training, four of the students were accepted in the Su – Saku – Sho Section (Good Piece).

Usually it takes some years ten years of presenting work before it is accepted into the Nitten Awards. It was with great respect that Zen Sho-Do Teacher Shigyoku Sensei was thanked by the Chan Academy for her patience and endurance in transmitting her knowledge of the great poets and calligraphers of the past and the Way of the Brush to her students.

The transformative benefits of the new information technologies were being seen at the Centre for the first time and considerable effort was made in 1991 to introduce computer information systems into our library.

With minor alterations having been completed along with installation of some new bookcases, the actual functional setting up of the new library systems provided an excellent opportunity to continue the ongoing process of providing, managing, maintaining and preserving the Library's resources.

The prime consideration for the enhancement of our Centre's Library is to increase refuge in the Dhamma.

The Centre was an early adopter of IT technologies which were seen as an invaluable and powerful means to support the learning, practice and dissemination of Buddha Dhamma. The many superior outcomes which were experienced within the following ten years included a networked Dhamma warehouse which boasted document retrieval times which would seem inconceivable only a few years before, an internal email system and a powerful search engine that could pull up multiple search subjects within a few seconds.

In John Hughes's speech 'Image and Style' on the day of his 60th Birth Anniversary Celebration on 9 September 1990, he wrote:

"It seems to me worthwhile to teach persons to be compassionate on the one hand and to teach practical skills of a business nature on the other hand. With two hands all things become possible, provided both hands are of equal strength. A balanced view is needed to see this truth."

I find inspiration in the Buddha, whose compassion is beyond measure and whose "skills of business" were vast.' 'Let us consider for a moment or two the "skills of business" of the Buddha. Starting as a penniless beggar, he built a "self-help" system which could feed, house and instruct something like half a million Monks and Nuns in suitable environments within a time span of half a century. The charity of the Buddha is praiseworthy. The Buddha and his Sangha, driven by their accumulated merit from many past world cycles, was the basis for the fruition of such business skills."

Alongside learning and practicing Buddha Dharma it was recognised that for our Centre's organisation to remain stable and consistent over a long period of time it needed to be governed through the cultivation of specific factors of style and image which would mean the same thing from one decade to another.

These style elements would be in keeping with the wholesome methods and understandings of Buddha Dhamma and also would be suitable and appropriate for our developed culture of modern times.

These Five Style elements were defined as –

1. Friendliness
2. Professionalism in conducting all our activities of the company
3. Scholarship - The Buddha Dhamma texts and commentaries comprise a vast literature.
4. Culturally adaptable. Australia is a diverse multicultural society, and our organisation and Dhamma Centre has many contacts with Buddhist organisations overseas.
5. Practicality. Being practical means being able to help ourselves and lending a helping hand to others by helping them solve their own problems.

All projects and planned activities for the Centre were reviewed prior to implementation to identify that each of the 5 styles was present in both the planning and action stages. If a proposed project was missing any of the styles it would need to be reformulated so as to include the beneficial influence of the missing factor.

It was observed at the time that “the B.D.C.(U) Ltd. can untangle complex and well-disguised new stresses that appear in society, in a cost-effective way, funded by active participation of our Members. It is unlikely that there is any need to change our image and style within the next few decades.”

Students were also instructed to consider four valuable methods.

The four valuable methods (Skt. Catvara Rddhipadah) are:

1. Satisfaction and joy in the things concerned.
2. Attending wholeheartedly to the things concerned without laxing.
3. Diligent effort in doing the things concerned.
4. Diligently think about and investigate the reasons in things.

The maturity of Buddhist practice in Australia was becoming more evident as each year passed. The occurrence of a number of Kathina ceremonies in Melbourne in 1990 illustrates this observation.

The Annual Robes Presentation (Kathina) is considered to be a great offering to the Monks (Sangha) because it must be organised by the lay practitioner, occurring once a year at a chosen day, during the month following the Rains Retreat during the October-November period. The Kathina Robes presentation is the most significant merit making opportunity of the Buddhist calendar for the lay devotees since it is bound by time, and the benefits are equally shared by both the benefactors and recipients.

On two occasions in October 1990 ten of our Members attended Kathina Ceremonies. First, of the Sri Lankan Buddhist Vihara Springvale, which was held at the Carnegie Football Club Hall. The second, held on the following weekend was the Kathina Ceremony of the Melbourne Thai Buddhist Temple in Box Hill. It was presided over by the Most Venerable Dr. Viriyananda Mahathera M.A., Ph.D. and joined by four Buddhist Monks, three of whom were Abbots of other Melbourne Buddhist Temples, joined with some 350 Buddhist lay people, at Box Hill Town Hall.

At the 13th Annual General Meeting of the Centre on 9 September 1991, the President's speech heralded the past year, marking our Centre becoming a Regional Centre of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, at the time, one of three WFB Regional Centres in Australia and the only one located in Victoria.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists which had been founded in Sri Lanka in 1950 was the only international Buddhist organisation which had a world-wide membership comprised of Buddhist organisations from all Buddhist traditions (non-sectarian). Essentially the WFB functioned as a networked international community and its office bearers were elected from its member Regional Centre's based in many different countries.

Membership of the WFB gave the Buddhist Discussion Centre (Upwey) Ltd many opportunities to build and expand friendships with Buddhist Sangha and executive layperson who were representing Buddhist organisations from many traditional Buddhist countries.

These international relationships were further nourished when the Centre launched a new Buddha Dhyana Dana Review which, as "flagship" for the organisation, was circulated quarterly free of charge to 33 countries and reflected the non-sectarian and multicultural approach of the organisation.

At the time it was written in an organizational report that:

“of the thousands of contacts that had been built up over the past 15 years, approximately 70% are Buddhist Centres, organisations and individuals throughout Australia and overseas.

Our Company’s prime strength arises from the demonstrable fact that we have followed a consistent policy of establishing and communicating with other Buddhist Organisations at a Statewide, Interstate and International level”.

By this method, our Members experience, and are encouraged to exhibit non- sectarianism, and are blessed by tasting the many, but one, flavour of the authentic Buddha Dhamma”

Our Directors and Committee Members make the effort to create opportunities to assist Monks, regardless of nationalities. For example, this rainy season we were fortunate to have a Chief Monk from Sri Lanka resident at the Centre. As a mark of respect, during Bhante’s visit, we flew the Sri Lankan flag alongside our Australian flag, together with the Buddhist flag.

It would be an organizational flaw were future B.D.C. (U) Ltd. Members to lose the present advantages and opportunities for fellowship our traditional networks provide.”

On 14 December 1991, on the occasion of the Official Opening of the newly established Kagyu E-Vam Buddhist Institute’s new premises at 673-691 Lygon Street, North Carlton, seven Members of our Centre accompanied the Most Venerable Dr. Viriyananda, and with 150 guests and visitors, were greeted with warmth and friendliness by Venerable Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche. The evening also celebrated Rinpoche’s 10th year in Australia.

Each month the organisation’s functioning saw Members reporting Sub Committee activities, plans and budget and funding considerations, all operating within the Centre’s lemma of *Lifetimes of Learning*, the holding of five precepts, the five styles and the direction and focus maintained by our Teacher John Hughes, and his vow that the Buddha Dhamma be taught.

Sub-Committee’s operating in 1992 and their areas of responsibility included: Centre Maintenance, Publishing, Library, Forest Retreat, Chan Academy, Social Activities, and for each Members developed a two-year plan. The Company Administration Sub-Committee two-year plan included the objective to have computerized business administration systems in operation by 1994.

In 1992 in our Heavenly Dhamma Garden a new pond was built for the Deva of Australia.

In that year, the complete set of the Tripitaka in Pali and English was donated by Dr. Ven. Ajarn Viriyananda, acquired from the Pali Text Society in the United Kingdom England, and entered into our Library collection.

On Monday 25th May of 1992, following John Hughes having declared his intention to Teach the Prajna Paramitta in 100,000 lines for a period of three years and three moons (one session per week), introductory preparatory classes for Prajna Paramitta commenced, between 10 and 11pm. The weekly Meditation Classes held on Monday Friday nights and taught by John Hughes continued through the year.

The Moomba ceremony is an annual Melbourne Cultural Festival, viewed by an estimate 100,000 people and on 8 March 1993, our Members, all dressed in white, joined the opening in the form of a Grand Parade on the Yarra River. A celebration barge was made available, from which our Members and others placed some 750 lighted candles into the waters of the Yarra River as an offering for the wellbeing of the citizens of Melbourne.

The barge was highly illuminated, and decorated with the word Buddha in Chinese Calligraphy on the barge mast, Buddhist Flags and the Dhamma Chakra Logo of our Centre. The ceremony opened with John Hughes sounding a Tibetan thigh bone Tantric Trumpet and then sounding of several gongs and a woodblock which had been presented to the Centre by the Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn. There was also the playing of a unique instrumental recording of a theme of Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa and Ti Saranam (Triple Gem Refuge) over the loud speaker system.

The theme of our five-day Meditation Course from 1 to 5 April 1994 that same was 'How to Find and Test a Correct "Habitat" for Cultivation.' On the first day of the course, Members established the correct habitat at our Brooking Street Centre by chanting the "Habitat Blessing".

VANDAMI CETIYAM SABBAM
SABBA THANESU PATITTHITAM
SARIRIKA DHATU – MAHA BODHIM
BUDDHA – RUPAM SAKALAM – SADA.

I SALUE EVERY CHETIYA (pagoda or shrine)
THAT MAY STAND IN ANY PLACE,
THE BODILY RELICS, THE GREAT BODHI, (tree)
AND ALL IMAGES OF THE BUDDHA.

Our Members learnt that these three main objects of veneration on the site, at 33 Brooking Street Upwey, are the factors giving past and continuing

stability to this Centre's suitable location. These three artifacts are "markers of performance" which verify a centre as being suitable for teaching Buddha Dhamma.

When persons walked through the front door at 33 Brooking St, they walked under a sign which stated the 5 groups of people which are the prime audience of our Buddha Dhamma Centre.

1. For the Sangha
2. For persons wishing to develop confidence and faith this human life
3. For the Devotees
4. For persons faithful by nature
5. For those of faithful temperament

In 1995 it was recorded that the current library holds about 2,500 books, 500 Journals and 3,200 newsletters on about 50 metres of shelving. About 140 computer files of our BDDR and BSB articles are available on disk. Also available: 5 megabytes of USA computer files, 150 videos and 400 audio tapes of Buddhist Teachings. Last year (1994) 300% more computer files of new internally generated information was added.

Over many years our Centre assisted many Buddhist Temples, here and overseas, in many ways, including with the listing of Current Appeals in our Buddha Dhyana Dana Review, distributed in Australia and to Buddhist Centres around the world.

In Vol 6. No1. (1996) our Current Appeals list invited assistance for eight organisations: Dharmangkur Bihar, Cox's Bazaar Bangladesh; International Meditation Association, Assam, India; Baraigaon Ashram (Orphanage) Comilla, Bangladesh; Mithapukar Buddhist Monastery Complex, Dhakha, Bangladesh; International Brotherhood Mission, Assam India; Rangunia Harihor Forest Meditation Center, Chittagong, Bangladesh; Bodhgaya Development Fund, Bodhgaya India; and Asoka Vihara Appeal, Chittagong Bangladesh.

The BDDR Vol 6. No 2 published in 1996 detailed 48 unique Buddhist organisation and groups under the heading List of Melbourne Buddhist Centres (included one country Centre).

The 1997 Chinese (Lunar) New Year Celebrations saw our Centre honoured with the visits of many Buddhist groups during their annual New Year Pilgrimages to Victorian Buddhist Temples and Centres. Members looked forward to this opportunity each year to meet with Dhamma friends, share in Chinese and Vietnamese cultures and particularly to offer Dana to Members of the Sangha and their students.

Eight Centres totaling some 1,000 persons visited our Centre at 33 Brooking Street over two weekends. They were: Phap An Buddhist Center, Chinese Women's Association in the Western Suburbs, Chua Thien Duc, Chua Hoa Nghiem, Chua Phat Quang, Nhu-Lai Thien Vien, Quang Duc Tu, and Linh Son Temple. We were honoured with the presence of many Buddhist Monks and Nuns as well as Dhamma Teachers during this time, including Ven. Thich Chan Kim, Ven. Thich Dong Chuan, Ven. Tich Tam Phuong, Ven. Thich Thien Tam, Ven. Thich Tinh Dao, Ven Thich Tinh Minh, and Master Ngoc Long.

In October 1997 the organisation launched the Centre's first website - www.bdcu.org.au, as a new arm of our publishing strategy with the intention of supplementing our existing information distribution methods.

Over a few short years several other websites were added to our online presence as it was decided that rather than having a single website to present many different faces of our organisation it would be more effective to have many sites. Amongst the new websites were a Chan Academy website, and a website for our Buddha Dhyana Dana Review journal. Eventually the number of websites grew to seven.

Whilst seven websites were a lot to maintain these websites were all built by Centre Members. Some had undertaken studies to learn how to write HTML code and upload digital content. Also, the rate at which new content was generated meant the websites were being updated with new content on almost a daily basis.

The Buddha Dhyana Dana Review had become gradually more expensive to print and post around the world each quarter, so much so that it would soon present too much of a financial burden on the company to continue this method of distribution. Therefore, by making this publication 100% digital the costs of operating a half a dozen websites were by comparison relatively inexpensive.

As new articles were written they could be immediately uploaded. Rather than operating a quarterly rate of publication, online publishing could now be daily.

Along with the BDDR, starting in 1998 the BDC broadcast Buddha Dhamma on local FM radio every week through our Buddhist Hour Radio program. Scripts for this program were written weekly by a team of up to six authors who had trained in the skill of writing well researched Dhamma at a tertiary education standard or better.

In addition, the Centres frequent events and activities were also being documented, photographed and uploaded as a Members newsletter under

the name Brooking Street Bulletin which also had its own website. Consequently, Members were kept busy uploading all this output, often within a few hours of it being written.

Developing local know-how and practical skills had been an underlying policy of our Centre from its inception. Students were encouraged to learn skills themselves to develop and run the Centre, rather than employ professionals.

As well as the websites, every new building that was constructed was built by Members, the BDDR publication was printed by Members using an offset printing press, the local area network (LAN) was cabled and installed on site by Members and all types of I.T equipment were upgraded and maintained by Members.

In certain non-critical tasks, the standard of work required could be lower than commercial professional standards, as the objective was for students to have many opportunities to build their practical and vocational skills and generate the merit of building a Dhamma Centre as fuel for their learning and practice of Buddha Dhamma.