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NEW CHAN FORUM

BUDDHIST JOURNAL OF THE WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP

SPRING 2012 NO.45 £4.00

JOHN CROOK MEMORIAL EDITION

Editor's Introduction

EVERYTHING IS AS IT IS – THIS IN ITSELF IS REMARKABLE <i>John Crook</i>	1
JOHN'S LIFE <i>Jake Lyne</i>	3
LETTER FROM DHARMA DRUM RETREAT CENTRE <i>Guo Xing</i>	10
IN MEMORY OF JOHN CROOK – A GREAT FRIEND <i>Yiu Yan Nang</i>	11
JOHN – THE EXPLORER & POET <i>James Crowden</i>	14
JOHN THE YOGIN <i>James Low</i>	19
EVERYDAY JOY <i>John Crook</i>	21
SOME OF THE BARDO RECORDS OF MASTER CHUAN DENG	
JING DI JOHN CROOK <i>Members of the Western Chan Fellowship</i>	24
JOHN CROOK: ETHOLOGIST <i>John Lazarus</i>	29
SNOWFALL <i>John Crook</i>	30
JOHN AS A LOVER OF TRUTH <i>Peter Reason</i>	32
THE BUDDHIST LEGACY OF JOHN CROOK <i>Simon Child</i>	38

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DESIGN www.robbowden.com

ISSN 2047-9514 PRINT • ISSN 2047-9522 ONLINE

© 2012 WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP LARGE COVER CALLIGRAPHY: 'FU – BUDDHA' BY MASTER SHENG-YEN

INSPIRING WORDS FROM THE TEACHER

John Crook

*No guru, no church, no dependency.
Beyond the farmyard the wind in the trees.
The fool by the signless signpost
Stands pointing out the way.*

*Here on the mountain where the path stops
You go on into the snow alone.
Hell's gate is open and Heaven shimmers in the mirage.
The Great Sky is totally devoid of cloud.*

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION BY EDDY STREET

禪

It is with a great sense of honour that I take up the role of editor of the New Chan Forum but with an equally great sense of sadness and loss that I do this following John's death. This issue is therefore a memorial for John and his life.

Included are some contributions that were made at his funeral, some remembrances and memories. But for us to truly appreciate John's contribution he needs to speak for himself, so there are some selected Teishos which had appeared on the website as well as some poems which were previously unpublished.

It is pleasing to include his words which directly point to the teaching he offered. Enjoy the words and investigate the teaching.

EDDY STREET

EVERYTHING IS AS IT IS – THIS IN ITSELF IS REMARKABLE

John Crook, 1990

If one is attempting to go into Zen deeply, to understand the relationship between one's mind and the universe, then it becomes important to turn over and over again, going backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, many times over, the same refrain, the same theme. Not with the analytical intellect, nor with the mind of one who seeks explanation, but within the context of *zazen*, wherein intuitive insight can arise.

We begin with the thought that everything is just as it is, and that this in itself is totally remarkable, completely astounding, a condition of extraordinary improbability. Spring is coming, summer follows. Just now, this morning for the first time, everyone is arriving; the black-caps, the chiff-chaffs, the willow-warblers, the cuckoo. Summer follows and the days grow shorter. Autumn comes and then the season of ice and snow. Once more with the warming of the days, everyone returns.

Think how extraordinary this is. How it depends entirely on the way the planet revolves. This spinning globe, this planet in space turning at a certain rate determines the timing of the day and night. Darkness and light, facing the sun, facing away from the sun. And each respective season, tilting sunwards and then away from the sun, so that the heat of the sun on the surface of the globe swings now north, now south, bringing the seasons. Bringing everyone north and taking everyone south, winging their way across the deserts. An extraordinary precision of spin and oscillation.

Consider how it might be different. A little faster in revolution and days would change their duration. Spring and Summer would flash past with a faster oscillation. We could have five years in one or five hundred days in one year. Who set the pattern spinning? Inappropriate question! How did it get fixed at this rate? Quite arbitrary, maybe, or according to the laws which govern the speed of spinning globes spun off from a distant far off sun in ages long past. Everything is just as it is and everything is connected. The unfolding of the universe, and the setting of speeds, the law of interdependent origination and the laws of the universe. Emptiness taking form, form congealing out of space. Timed, shaped, processing itself through time. Emerging from being. Returning once more to being. Form to emptiness, emptiness to form. The oscillation, the manifestation of the Law, Tao, the ultimate logos, whatever.

Everything is as it is – and how extraordinary! Looking at the hillside as the flowers bloom, know this. There is nothing else. The hillside is It. Standing in the silent church looking at the altar, the altar and the atmosphere of the building, the silence, is It. On top of the cliff watching the swirling sea, is It. Futile to look elsewhere, God is not different from That. Buddha-nature is immediately before your eyes, there is no need to go anywhere. There is no need to go anywhere else. Everything is as it is and that is It. Do not seek elsewhere for that which is right now, before your eyes. Go very deeply into this. Penetrate the obscurities of wanting something else. So much of our dilemma lies in seeking elsewhere that which lies within the palms of our hands. So much dissatisfaction. So much wanting. So much seeking – God is

always in somebody else's garden – The Buddha-mind is always in some other state of meditation – Paradise is in the heavens which are not here. Always this quest.

It becomes necessary to STOP. To go into it to recognise everything is as it is. Extraordinary! Everything before one's eyes is It. You are in It. Sometimes when the mind is so busy, so preoccupied, when samsara is spinning with the struggle of life, relationships, fear of death, the multitude dissatisfactions of industrial society, it is difficult simply to know that everything is as it is. Very difficult to know, because everything seems to be undesirable. What is wanted is the very opposite condition from that which is right in front of one's eyes. You haven't penetrated to the quality which brings out insight. Instead there is just noise and confusion. What to do?

Begin with gratitude. Notice simple things for which you can be thankful, anything. Each person is different. Notice the small things, the smile on a friend's face, a beautiful person walking in the street, birds overhead, flowers blooming, even the energy of roaring traffic in great cities, the pulsation, the force the drive. Feel wherever it may be, the gratitude for being there. After all there might be nothing at all. Absolutely nothing. You might never have been here to witness it. The uniqueness of this moment is extraordinary. If you are not grateful, the opposites have arisen and you are lost. In the quietness of the mind's eye make gasho. Bow down in gratitude for the universe.

Homage to the Buddhas in all worlds.

Homage to the Bodhisattvas in all worlds.

Homage to the scripture of Great Wisdom.



JOHN'S LIFE

Dr Jake Lyne, Chair of the Western Chan Fellowship

John Crook was born in 1930 in Southampton into a moderately well-to-do family. He was educated at Oakmount School, a preparatory school in Southampton, and at Sherborne School, a boarding school in Dorset. At school he studied biology, physiology and physics. He frequently commented on the effect of the environment of “all male, firm discipline, a lot of sports especially Rugby football which I came to love, good academic class work and military training.”¹ He then went to University College, Southampton, where he studied zoology. His undergraduate study of gulls led to his first publication in 1953, which helped him to gain a PhD place at Jesus College, Cambridge.

As a teenager he spent the war years evacuated to the New Forest with his mother and sister and it was here that he had for him a pivotal experience.

As the war gradually went our way, I explored the beautiful forest and the moorlands around our home. I had become a small but ardent bird watcher. Since I had no binoculars, I had to move very quietly among the trees and undergrowth. I learnt solitary field craft the hard way and an ability to still the mind in focussed attention undoubtedly developed at that time. One day I saw a squirrel pop out of a hole in a great beech tree. It looked at me from a few yards away and we gazed, motionless, at each other. Suddenly I was overcome by an extraordinary joy, all my concerns seemed to disappear and I found myself fallen to the ground uttering words of thanks to Jesus, tears falling from my face. That experience became a turning moment for my whole life: I had come across something that was altogether “other”.²

His academic studies were interrupted by National Service and the Korean War. He was stationed in Hong Kong, where he was a Second Lieutenant artillery officer specialising in radar. On the sea voyage over to Hong Kong, he read Christmas Humphrey's book *Buddhism* and found that some of its themes could not be countered by the reductionist scepticism of his scientific training. His first active contact with Buddhism came in Hong Kong and is recorded in his autobiographical book *Hill Tops of the Hong Kong Moon*. He was introduced to Mr Yen Shiliang, a merchant who had ‘sat’ with the great Master Xuyun and John joined his evening classes held once a week in a traditional Chinese doctor's surgery. As a consequence of this contact John went on to explore Chinese monasteries on Lantau Island, where, on a visit to Baolin Monastery, he came across an inscription in English at the bottom of a stone arch:

To the great monk Sing Wai

There is no time:

What is memory?

This first confrontation with a *koan* created a sense of shock and a stopping of the mind: “A sudden silence was filled with the sound of the light wind and below the mists parted, to give a momentary

glimpse of a small junk heading out to sea". The question touched him deeply and became one of the foundations for a life-long love of Buddhism and especially for Chan.

After National Service, his early explorations took him to the Indian teacher Krishnamurti who was living in Poona. He went on to attend retreats at Samyeling Tibetan Centre in Scotland founded by Chogyam Trungpa Rimpoche and at Throssel Hole Priory, where he met the Revd. Jiyu Kennett. He commented:

In an interview she remarked on the erratic nature of my practice. "One two three four five," she said "Not one eight three two five!" There was something so total about the way she prostrated before the Buddha that it brought tears to my eyes. I began to understand that wordless teaching could be the most profound.³

The early teacher that he came to regard the most highly was Lama Thubten Yeshe. John had attended many Tibetan retreats and taken a number of higher initiations. On one retreat he was fascinated by the lama going into meditation in front of a audience and felt drawn "deeply into a most profound silence". From Lama Yeshe and other Tibetans he learnt the power of mantra and other Tantric practices that remained of profound personal significance throughout his life.

In parallel with these early explorations in Buddhism, John, a student of Robert Hinde at Cambridge, was one of a second generation of ethologists, and after early research on weaver birds in West Africa, became a leading expert in primatology and animal behaviour. He was a pioneer in the fields known then as social ethology and socio-ecology, disciplines that later flourished as behavioural ecology. Following his PhD John took up a lectureship in the Psychology Department at Bristol University, later being promoted to a Readership in Ethology. He was the first scientist to try to tell the story of the Evolution of Human Consciousness in a groundbreaking book of that title published in 1980, at a time when, somewhat paradoxically, the academic discipline of psychology avoided the issue of consciousness almost entirely. He co-led two major Himalayan expeditions. In 1977 an anthropological research project into village life in Zangkar, resulted in the publication of *Himalayan Buddhist Villages: Environment, Resources, Society and Religious Life in Zangkar, Ladakh*, co-authored with Henry Osmaston.

In 1968-69 he spent a year as Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University in California and it was here that he was introduced to the 'Encounter Movement' and the techniques of humanistic psychotherapy. On returning to Bristol he established the Bristol Encounter Centre where he passed on approaches that he had learned in California. He had also attended 'Enlightenment Intensives' in the US and these were to have a significant influence in his life. The enlightenment intensive process was invented by an American teacher, Charles Berner. It was based on 'Zen principles' but adapted to an entirely secular non-Buddhist context. John's career as a Buddhist teacher can be said to begin in 1975 when he 're-consecrated' the Enlightenment Intensive approach by integrating it into a traditional Sesshin format thereby creating a new type of Buddhist retreat, the five-day Western Zen Retreat. He offered these retreats at Maenllwyd (Standing Stone) an old farm house in central Wales, a place which to this day does not have electricity and is in a magnificent and beautiful setting. They were very effective retreats and soon a small group of retreatants began returning to the



Maenllwyd with it becoming a spiritual home for many. John's approach was direct and non-theoretical, his aim being to guide people towards having a taste of the heart of what the Buddha "was on about". John saw the importance of continuing his own training and here is another story of his encounters with teachers that relates to this time:

Layman John went up to London to see the nun Myokyo-ni. As they sat together he told her of his new retreat centre, the retreats he was running and his hopes for its development. He had come to ask for any advice she might have. As time went on Layman John found that Myokyo-ni was saying very little. She made no comment nor did she give any advice. So he spoke some more – and then, somewhat hurriedly, again some more. Still no comment. So he stopped and said, "I am wondering what response you have to what I am telling you". Myokyo-ni looked at Layman John and said, "I have no response."⁴

This was a significant encounter that John mentioned many times: it taught him the importance of self-reliance and not seeking approval, a lesson that was to become vital in the years to come.

In the 1980s John revisited Mr Yen in Hong Kong. After some years of exploration of Tibetan Buddhism in the Himalayas, he wanted to renew his acquaintance with Chan, but Mr Yen was now an old man, with very poor hearing and John realised he would need to find another teacher. In Hong Kong he came across a book by Chan Master Sheng Yen and decided to go on retreat with him in New York. This was the most significant encounter in his Buddhist life. After a number of retreats, John asked Master Sheng Yen about experiences he had had and Master Sheng Yen confirmed that these were 'seeing the nature'

and gave John authority to offer Chan Retreats in addition to the Western Zen Retreats already being offered. In writing about his relationship with Shifu John said:

I have sat many retreats with Master Sheng-yen and I have written up my retreat reports into an article “Working with a Master” published in the journal *New Chan Forum* in 1999 (No 20). Shifu has become what the Tibetans call my “root teacher”. It is difficult to describe what I owe to him. “Everything”, I might say, but perhaps the most important thing has been the growth of Dharma Confidence. Without his faith in me, which I feel I can never justify, I could not now do the work of Dharma that I do.⁵

Some of John’s regular retreat participants took the initiative for forming the Bristol Chan Group in 1991, the forerunner of almost 20 groups in the country, and the first edition of *The New Chan Forum* was published in the same year. Then, in May 1993, to his great surprise John was given transmission as Master Sheng Yen’s first Lay Dharma Heir, with a responsibility to take the teachings back to Britain and Europe. John asked Master Sheng Yen for advice on how he should carry out this responsibility. Master Sheng Yen’s response was that he was Chinese, John was European; it was up to John to work out how to translate the tradition of Chan into a Western context so as to make it accessible to Western students.

The Western Chan Fellowship was formed in 1997 and over the years a range of Chan retreats have been developed founded on the *Linji (Rinzai)* and *Caodong (Soto)* traditions of Chan, in addition to a Tibetan *Mahamudra* retreat offered annually following an empowerment John was given by a Ladakhi Yogin. Most of John’s teaching was at the Maenllwyd in Wales, but he also led retreats in Norway, Poland, Germany, Russia, Croatia, and USA and Sanghas in these countries have various degrees of affiliation with the Western Chan Fellowship. John clearly understood that the WCF is an unusual Chan Buddhist organisation in that whilst it is associated with Dharma Drum Mountain and has a friendly relationship with Throssel Hole Monastery in the UK, it is an authentic lay Chan Buddhist Sangha. John fully saw and took on the responsibility of the organisation he founded having a rather special and important role in translating a tradition that has been centred on monasticism into a form that can be adapted into western culture.

Over the years John led numerous Buddhist trips and pilgrimages to the areas he had been involved in academically particularly visiting Buddhist yogins who lived in caves and small temples in Ladakh. These meetings are recounted in *The Yogins of Ladakh: A Pilgrimage Among the Hermits of the Buddhist Himalayas*, co-authored with his travelling companion, James Low. John describes one of these encounters in *The Koans of Layman John*:

Layman John and Yogin James were drinking chang with the yogins Nochung Tse and Gompo up at the little, tree shaded monastery of the Tigress on the Hill in Zangskar...James said. “John and I have been talking about the mind and the yogins’ path to understanding. We want to ask you what you understand by the mind.” The two old yogin friends seemed to freeze in shock. Nochung Tse picked up his prayer-wheel and begun intoning “Om mani padme hum” in a loud voice without pausing. Gonpo looked most uncomfortable, rocking from side to side as if trying to make up his mind. Then he said, “Since the two of you have had the benefits of training in meditation, why don’t you go and do it? Then you would have no need to ask such a stupid question!”⁶

John's endeavour to synthesise ancient Buddhist insights and contemporary scientific and philosophical thought, culminated in his final work, *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism* (2009). This book restates the Buddhist insight that there is a Middle Way between fundamentalism and materialism in modern terms. This makes a different type of world view possible, one that can inform the creativity and energy of the many people who seek cooperative solutions to global challenges that are on a scale not present during the Buddha's lifetime. The book places emphasis on the need for a fundamental change in the way we educate children and young people, as well as giving pointers as to how each person can discover for themselves what a 'Middle Way' approach to living really means.

Even at 80 John was very active and had many plans for the future for developments at his home in Winterhead and for the WCF. He died unexpectedly at home when alone and his body remained undisturbed for several days before being found on July 15th 2011. When a Great Teacher dies it is a sad moment, but over the last ten years, John and others have done a great deal of work that leaves us well prepared, so that whilst he is deeply missed and his particular approach can never be repeated, nevertheless we are able to move forward. John planned carefully and thoughtfully for continuity in the tradition he inherited from Master Sheng Yen and there is every sign that his work will continue to bear fruit, even though John's bright spirit and luminosity of mind will be sorely missed.

NOTES

1. Crook, J. H (2001). *The Circling Birds – Opening Insights on the Path of Chan*.
2. Crook, J. H (2001). *The Circling Birds – Opening Insights on the Path of Chan*.
3. Crook, J. H (2001). *The Circling Birds – Opening Insights on the Path of Chan*.
4. Crook, J. H. (2009). *The Koans of Layman John*. Available from the Western Chan Fellowship www.westernchanfellowship.org.
5. Crook, J. H (2001). *The Circling Birds – Opening Insights on the Path of Chan*.
6. Crook, J. H. (2009). *The Koans of Layman John*.



JOHN CROOK (TOP RIGHT) AND SIMON CHILD (TOP LEFT) WITH MASTER SHENG-YEN IN TAIWAN

YES

John Crook

*I simply want to say "Yes!"
wordlessly
tonguing the flute
where words could go on
endlessly
into the deep woods.*

*Such warm silences of the heart
this unison in joy
and the sea-bird's weeping.*

*Now this tangible absence –
looking for the caress
of lips with pain blossoming.*

Let be to let be

LETTER FROM DHARMA DRUM RETREAT CENTRE, NY, USA

Venerable Guo Xing

Dear members of the Western Chan Fellowship,

On behalf of the Abbot President and sangha members of Dharma Drum Mountain, we would like to express our sincere condolences on the recent passing of Dr. John Crook. We also send our thoughts and prayers to you and John's family at this difficult time. It is impossible to adequately express our sincere sympathy at this most difficult time.

Impermanence is the one truth that the Buddha himself awakened to 2500 years ago. Though we may be in fine health today, and may even be wealthy and without complaints, sooner or later we too will pass away. Every living thing eventually must perish.

Though this truth sounds harsh and depressing, the Buddha taught us that only when we accept impermanence and not fight it, can we then discover the true beauty and wonderful gift that life provides. Thus, we are encouraged to be grateful for the time, however brief, that we were able to spend with John. The truth of impermanence also reminds us that we should live our own lives to the fullest. John worked tirelessly in bringing Buddhadharma to the West. He had made Buddhism accessible to Westerners through presenting it from a Western mind. John had published several books focusing on consciousness and Chan practice. His latest work was *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism*. For decades, John was helping communities in both Europe and Dharma Drum Retreat Center at New York and made many contributions to Buddhism in these places.

John was someone who was not only enthusiastic about Buddhism, but was passionate in helping his students learn. I think his sense of caring was evident to everyone who ever met him. A great teacher has been lost, and we mourn him deeply. But we may find some consolation in the fact that his humanity and dedication is still a source of inspiration to us fortunate enough to have known him. He was an outstanding individual and will be greatly missed.

Please pass our deepest sympathies on to you and John's family.

Yours sincerely,

Venerable Guo Xing

Abbot of CMC and DDRC, USA

For the Abbot President

July 17, 2011

IN MEMORY OF JOHN CROOK – A GREAT FRIEND

Yiu Yan Nang

THE STORY OF A SCHOOL BOY'S ESSAY

1953 was the year that marked the ending of the Korean War and the fourth year of the founding of Communist China. The Cold War continued in intensity. Hong Kong people were struggling for survival and I was one them. At the same time I was struggling to learn English at school as a young student. One day in November I received a letter in English with free hand writing. It was the first English letter I had received. I was not used to such hand writing and my knowledge of English was very limited. It took me some time to decipher the spellings and I had to look up the dictionary for some difficult words.

The letter was signed “John H. Crook, 2/Lt. R.A.”, dated 21st November 1953. He introduced himself as a university graduate on national service with the British Army. That he was “a zoologist with interests in philosophy, writing, poetry and literature – as well as exploring new places, new ideas and discovering fresh faces and friends.” He had read with interest my essay, *Fire at Night* in the *Post Herald* and would like to know me. This letter started our great friendship of nearly sixty years.

I always have a wonderful feeling that my little piece of school work by a young Chinese student could cause two persons from different parts of the world to forge a great friendship for life. It later found its way to John's book, *Hilltops of the Hong Kong Moon*, and was used in the GCSE English Examination Paper in 2001 as a means to assess the quality of writing and comprehension of a story from a foreign land.

I believe John and I have *Yuan Feng* which is a Chinese Buddhist term meaning ‘predestined affinity.’ When we first met we had no difficulty in understanding each other in spite of my meagre English. It was somewhat like the Chan expression of directly reaching the heart without the use of language. We had a wonderful time together during the remaining year of his service in Hong Kong. We visited Buddhist monasteries, Daoist temples, old villages, Chinese traditional festivities, Chinese tea houses... He showed great interests and curiosity in what he saw. I became his guide and interpreter. Though my English vocabulary was limited and my knowledge of things Chinese was superficial he seemed to understand me quite well. I thought he must have a good deal of knowledge from indirect sources and wanted to experience the real Hong Kong with a local friend.

FUN WITH TRANSLATION

All together I participated in four retreats at Maenllwyd. After each retreat John and I stayed behind for a few days to enjoy the Chan atmosphere of Maenllwyd and the Welsh countryside. I was the cook and he the driver. Our conversations touched mainly on Chinese Buddhism which is familiar to me. We discussed problems in translation of some Buddhist terms from Chinese into English. For example, in the *Heart Sutra* there is one line like this: “He perceived that all five skandhas are empty”. I explained that the word “perceive” does not give the exact meaning of the two Chinese words *Zhao Jiang* which mean more than “perceive”. They literally mean to throw light on something and see. To look into a

mirror is “to *Zhao* the mirror”, It is direct seeing without going through the mental process. Imagine a person standing in front of a mirror in the dark with deep concentration of the mind. Suddenly the mirror is lit up. What he sees is *Zhao Jiang* in this text of the *Heart Sutra*.

The same Chinese word “*Zhao*” also appears in the Chinese title of a Chan training method “Illuminating Silence”. Here “*Zhao*” is translated as “illuminating” in English. To me this does not give the exact meaning but I cannot find a better translation.

Another translation problem we had discussed was the book of *koans* – *The Gateless Gate*. This is more complicated. To translate the Chinese word “*Guan*” as “Gate” is not entirely satisfactory. “*Guan*” has many meanings but in the particular context it means barrier. A typical example is an opening in the Great Wall of China at a strategic point. It has a very strong door. It can also mean a customs point for checking goods and persons passing through. More complication is involved when one realizes that the name of the monk who compiled this book of *koans* was Wu Mem Wui Kai which word by word means “no door wisdom open”. This fact would certainly stimulate the imagination of the translator. A *koan* can mean a “barrier” (*Guan*) that a practitioner has to pass through on the way to enlightenment. So the book *Gateless Gate* can also mean “*A Book of Koans*” or “*Wu Mem’s (‘Doorless’) Book of Koans*”. After such intriguing discussions John once said he regretted that he had not learnt Chinese.

BUDDHISM IN DIFFERENT CULTURES

One day we were discussing how Indian Buddhism had blended with Chinese culture to become Chinese Buddhism as we have today. Similarly when Chinese Chan is introduced to the West it would have to be blended with Western culture to be more acceptable to Westerners and so that it can develop and sustain itself. Our discussion grew lively as I explained how certain contents of Confucianism and Daoism were incorporated into Buddhism. Finally, John said smilingly, “I think you are basically a Daoist”. I replied also with a smile, “I think you are basically a Christian.” We both laughed aloud. We knew what we meant was that we were carrying our own cultures in our DNA. In recalling this memory I realize that John must have been aware of such reality which is reflected in the name Western Chan Fellowship. I think Shifu who gave John a free hand to teach Chan in Europe must have paid special importance to the cultural difference.

When I last visited John at Winterhead Farm John was writing his last major book – *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism*. The summer weather was warm and sunny. We made a number of excursions to some famous historical sites in the region such as Forde Abbey, Sherborne Castle, The Peto Garden, Wells Cathedral and other classic gardens. I was overwhelmed by the beauty and the history of those places. Each evening he gave me a chapter or two of the draft of his new book. I read it before going to bed. The next morning after breakfast I made some observations on the draft. In spite of my amateurism in this field he listened carefully and after some discussions he went to his office and clicked fast on the computer keyboard with two index fingers. In a matter of minutes he showed me the revised passages. I marvelled at his speed and his organised mind which is a contrast to his rather messy kitchen and office.

THE LAST DAYS

Whenever John visited Hong Kong he always wanted to visit Yan Wai Fa Si who was his first Chan teacher whom he had met when he was on national service in Hong Kong. I remember accompanying John to visit him at least three times – once in hospital, once at his home and the last time in his monastery. On his last visit to Hong Kong John want to visit him again but the highly respected old master had died.

A few weeks before John's death he asked me to get a photo of Yan Wai Fa Si for his friend and one for himself. He explained in the email like this: "I am looking for a photo of Yen Wai Fa Si for two reasons: firstly as a personal record that I can print in the WCF , our journal, and keep as a source of remembrance and blessing for the first teacher of Chan that I ever knew. And of course because he is a first generation descendent of Master Hsu Yun. As a Dharma Heir of Shifu I should also recall my earlier teacher in Hong Kong who was so very kind to me."

I was waiting for his response to my email when I heard his sudden death. It shocked me profoundly. I have lost a great friend absolutely unprepared. Chinese Buddhists describe a master who devotes his life to spread the Dharma and neglecting his health as "forgetting the body for the Dharma." John had done the same.

JOHN – THE EXPLORER & POET

James Crowden (based on his talk at John's funeral 29th July 2011)

Whether on a Buddhist retreat or in the mountains one of John's favourite sayings was "Where is your mind?" it was a serious question and it required a serious answer. Where indeed was John's own mind? And where is it now?

All I know is that John had a remarkable mind and I would like to focus a little on his activity as an explorer and a poet. He was a man who loved mountains and the silence of the mountains and he spent a lot of time exploring the stark uncompromising silences of Ladakh, Zangskar and Tibet, where, amongst other things, he pondered life's great mysteries. I myself know those silences very well indeed, having spent a whole winter there, 35 years ago and those early journeys down the frozen river I think inspired John to choose Zangskar as a place of research, and in some senses a place of refuge. John was fascinated by the Tibetan Buddhist world with all its colourful shamanic undertones and overtones. He felt very much at home there with friends such as the Ladakhi philosopher Tashi Rabgyas. John was what they called a *Nangpa*, an insider. He liked seclusion but he knew full well what was going on in the world. He had a foot in each camp.

John the explorer loved crossing remote passes usually in bad weather, visiting strange, remote mountain monasteries and seeking out eccentric yogins who lived in caves. He also took Buddhist groups, not just to Ladakh and Zangskar but to Tibet, Sikkim, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bodh Gaya, Bihar, Ajanta and even China. As his No 2 and Batman on many of these trips I often shared a tent and a room with John. One of my many jobs was to ration out the malt whisky: Laphroaig or Jamesons every evening by using the screw top as a measure. Eeking out our two bottles for a month or more. No easy task in a tent in the dark with a torch. And if the whisky did run out we reverted to Nyingma Lama Rum – Old Monk Rum.

There were many wonderful times to be had in the mountains. Once at Sani a small ancient monastery in the heart of Zangskar It was late afternoon and John was looking at the mountain opposite and he suddenly grabbed his binoculars and pointed high up like an ornithologist who has just spotted a rare bird of passage. And sure enough there were two small dots moving slowly across a steep scree slope. Villagers carrying supplies up to two yogins who were living in a remote cave several thousand feet above the valley floor. This cave even had a name. The Hermitage of Nyima Ozer. It was a rare moment. A visible human link between the villagers and the yogins. John regarded these meditators as the SAS of Buddhist world, the wild men of the mountains with unkempt dreadlocks who sometimes stayed up their eagles' nests for years on end.

Then at the other end of the spectrum are the John Cleese stories which include 'a silly walk at high altitude' and 'the shower incident in Chandigarh...' Four weeks in the Himalayas with both John Cleese and John Crook was illuminating and humorous – the two Johns... John Cleese of course brought his psychiatrist Robyn Skinner. The silly walk occurred at the top of the TanglangLa, at 17,500 ft . John



Cleese lost his balance, fell over and sprained his ankle. His excuse was that it was “rather a long way down from his command centre to ground floor. Must be the rarefied atmosphere.”

The shower incident was more serious and occurred not in the mountains but in a smart hotel, still under construction with bare wires coming out of the walls. Chandigarh – capital of Punjab. John and I had just gone to our room when after about 10 minutes there was a knock on the door from one of the hotel staff looking very worried “One of your group Sir the Tall one, he is causing trouble.”

So we both went through the foyer to the outside reception desk where the taxis pulled up. What greeted us was one of the strangest sights we have ever seen. There in the balmy night air stood an almost completely naked 6ft 4 inches of one John Cleese of Weston-super-Mare, berating the majordomo, a fine looking Sikh with turban, handle bar moustache, red and blue uniform. Cleese – naked apart from a small hotel towel that did not exactly fit round his waist.

“The plumbing did not work, the shower did not work, the light did not work, and he wanted a shower, he wanted to flush without a bucket. He wanted it all fixed right now!”

And in the back ground there were endless cars disgorging wealthy Sikh wedding guests, men dressed with immaculate turbans, the women dripping with jewellery and silk saris. The guests smiled politely and walked sedately by as if this happened every Thursday.

John Crook the diplomat came to the rescue. He walked up to John Cleese and without a word, quietly led him away by the elbow. John Crook nodded to the majordomo who bowed with both hands together in a gesture of deep gratitude. John Crook suggested it might be an idea if the hotel got a very good plumber, very quickly. Fawltly Towers only the roles were reversed. Where was John Cleese's mind one wonders? Never a dull moment.

To end I want to take you from the wedding party right back up into the mountains, into the heart of Zangskar, where serious meditation is undertaken and present two of John Crook's poems. The first, written upon his first arrival in Zangskar in August 1977 when he crossed the Umasi La and first visited Dzonghul Monastery:

In the wilderness

Suddenly – butterflies

And among the barren rocks

Flowers, willow herb and daisies

And, yes, water making

This dry waste green.

So it is sometimes in the mind

When unannounced tranquillity sets in

And a curious beauty

Blooms.

The other at Phugtal a monastery set in a steep valley right inside a vast cave poised on the edge of a cliff above a fast flowing river.

One evening as the cold of the dusk was descending

two monks blew the long horns

from the high terrace of the gompa.

The sounds went echoing down the valley

in a strange melancholy;

a gust of raw loneliness seizing the heart.

Human beings seem so small

in the vastness of the mountains,

insignificant before the powers

of rock, river and snow.

In a moment life is gone

and only the stars remain.

POEM

John Crook

*Only as nobody can I make the start
walking the street, merely the street's images*

*Only as nobody can I respond
to the face suddenly before me*

*Only as nobody am I free
from the chains that forge me*

*Only as nobody can I reach the bottom
of the sea without ropes*

Only as nobody do I die happy.

*Only as nobody can I truly live
with you – and you – and you.*

POEM

John Crook

*The man in the park
stabbing bits of paper
with a pointed stick
on behalf of the UDC
has the freedom to let
his mind
go.*

*Envyng him
I would like to spend my day
among waste papers.
Watching him
my own bilge
swirls away.
he doesn't know
somebody is grateful*

TAPPING ON STONES
ABOVE PYLLAU CLAIS

John Crook 1999 (revised January 2003)

*Tapping on a fence post with a hillside stone –
suddenly she came
invisible presence
sunbeam through cloud.*

*Look about you now
maybe you'll catch a glimpse
flitting behind grey rocks
or among the grouse chuckling in the heather.*

*Never far away about she roams.
Listen and she'll come to you
Turn suddenly
catch her silhouette upon the crest.*

*Sleeping in the heather
she caresses your cheek with flying mist.
The old Welsh certainly knew her name,
no one hereabouts can say it anymore.*

*Tap tap, stone on wood,
accidentally discovering the secret sign,
knocking on the door of the old king's cave.
Wordless presences, manifestations*

MAENLLWYD

John Crook, 1975

*Arriving in the yard
I switch off the engine
and gaze at the view,
evening sun on the rolling hills
yellow fields, dark woods.
In the sudden silence
a buzzard mews,
distantly guiding sheep
dogs bark.*

*Entering the gate
I come home to my hermitage,
welcoming trees brood
and the old door creaks on rusty hinges
falling plaster needs sweeping from the floor,
softly on cold flags moisture gleams.*

*Lighting the fire
I watch slow smoke rising,
hang in the windless cwm.
The smells of the hills
roll in through opened windows,
thankfully I breath out city air,
inside my room
no sound.*

JOHN THE YOGIN

James Low

In the Hindu traditions the term yoga carries the connotations of ordering and linking, being a disciplined means of yoking the individual to the absolute. However, the Tibetans translate yoga as *Naljor* which means relaxed, at ease, at home in natural freedom.

The struggle to find a way of holding the tension between these two views goes to the heart of John Crook as a seeker, a mind and a heart that was always looking deeper and wider into the experience of embodied, contextual, contingent life.

When we travelled in Ladakh and Zangskar the yogis we encountered were ones who fully accepted the discipline of practice but had chosen to absent themselves from the monastic environments in which they had received their first trainings. This independence of spirit and profound self-reliance struck, I believe, a chord with John. He was his own person wherever he found himself and his active engaged intelligence led him into rich contact with a wide range of vibrant souls across the globe. His capacity for collaboration and collegial alliance did not lead him to settle into a niche. My experience of John was of an open-hearted traveller, a person who neither sought nor found a home.

Homelessness resonates with the Mahayana view of enlightenment as the freedom that rests nowhere. Experiences arise and pass providing stimulus and challenge and John worked his whole life to open to this naked way of being. In our conversations as we sauntered, marched and trudged through the hills he talked of how he had learned the painful truth that chasing the objects of desire is like drinking salt water – the immediate relief is followed by further intensified longing. Becoming homeless and yet at home, finding himself in easy relaxed abiding was something he strove for – and he was not insensible to the way his family background, schooling, army experience and competitive early academic career had all encouraged an attitude of focused graft that could miss the point.

This dialectic between effortful striving and relaxed openness was manifest in each step of our journey together. Whenever his sense of being the leader became dominant, events would arise to disrupt his carefully conceived plan. Again and again we were returned to the phenomenological imperative of the necessity of working with circumstances.

As Rabbie Burns said:

The best laid schemes o' mice an' men

Gang aft a-gley

For example the yogis Gonpo and Nochung Tse were most unwilling to reply to serious, straight-forward questions. The interview schedule John had devised had to be put aside as we were invited to sit on the roof of their little retreat house and drink chang while gazing into the open sky. Inconsequential chatter



arose and fell like gentle waves and as the afternoon and the alcohol wore on the space of the sky and the space of the mind gently merged. It was delightful to see John change gear and open to the openness. So much was experienced and yet so little to report – the scientist surrendered to the meditator and then the meditator surrendered to the space of presence.

Form and emptiness as collaboration not conflict was a topic we often explored. How to maintain the structures of life without being subsumed by them? The gift of the yogis we encountered was the bitter sweet taste of irony, the deconstruction of our over-investment; the revelation of the illusory nature of all our driven activity.

John often told me of his conversation in Wales with Geshe Damcho. John had been trying to clarify his understanding of Nagarjuna's Madyamika philosophy and was tuning up his incisive intelligence to this task. After some time of focused discussion the Geshe stopped him in his tracks by asking, 'John, when were you last kind?' He felt this question had punctured the bubble of his intellectual will-to-power and opened a whole new perspective.

Several years after this, in the mountains, I saw again and again how solicitous he was of the welfare of others and how ready he was to enter situations as they were. This developing flexibility and responsiveness embodied the warmth and connectivity that are the marks of a ripened yogi.

EVERYDAY JOY

John Crook, written during a solo retreat in 1993

In the practice of the Dharma it becomes essential to understand that within the everyday lies the Great Joy. It is not that Joy is elsewhere nor that it has to be laboriously worked for. It is not that one is worthless, undeserving, wicked and hence unable to discover it. Dharma Joy itself lies within the everyday.

Why then are we so normally cast down, anxious, restless or depressed, entertaining the notion that the practice of Buddhism is either out of reach, requires more than one has to offer or downright incomprehensible?

The answer lies in the fact that we have to wake up to that which underlies our negative preoccupations, doubts and failures. We see the state of the world and want to help, to bring about some positive change. Yet, in these days when there is no prevailing idealism except material advancement on offer, when Marxism and Socialism, the great creeds, have failed, when all external paths are seen as fraudulent, we often do not know in what direction to turn. The multiple alternatives of this age of post-modern relativism all seem relatively cheap, sentimental or superstitious, lacking anchorage in a firm sea-bed.

Abandoning all we might rush off to Somalia, Angola, Sarajevo Calcutta or even Belfast, filled with a zeal for do-gooding. And indeed those who rescue the afflicted in Bosnia or prevent the slaughter of a whale do achieve something. Activism is truly important. Yet afterwards nothing pivotal has changed. It all goes on again. Where next? Are politicians really as powerless and as characterless as they seem? And the junkmail of endless appeals from charities lacking the aid of any official compassion continue to pour through our letter boxes as if we personally were responsible. And indeed, collectively, perhaps we are – because who else can be?

No wonder we are cast down. The problem lies in the fact that all of us are sleepwalking within the materialist ethos and individual isolationism of our time. There are precious few alert enough to awaken us. We have to do it for ourselves.

For the moment then leave the world as it is; its cares as they are. When you are awake you will find out what to do. Only wake up. First things first. The actions of a sleepwalker rarely achieve anything. What then is this awakening? Words will not do it for you. Direct investigation can.

Dharma Joy lies within our own mind's heart in the extent to which we can set aside wanting something else, something other. We want something else out of a feeling that we are incomplete; like a shadow seeking its substance or a lonely ghost in quest of a companion on an uninhabited planet. In our ghost towns there is nobody there. There is the endless ache for a love that will fill the hole in the centre of being. Yet those who themselves lack the surety of inner love cannot fill the holes in others. Illusory romance only discloses the unsatisfactoriness of a companion which equals one's own for him or her. There is no inner completion, there is the ache after it.

Are you a ghost or a vibrant embodied being, a sentience? Do you feel your presence in the world now, here from moment to moment, a validated reality, a presence – or an absence? Presence in the world is not knowing about the world, having one's mind in the office already as one drives to work, absenting oneself from the Now. Presence in the world begins with presence in the body.

The Buddha himself had to make this discovery and he put it forward as a prime method. Mindfulness of the body as the body, in the direct apprehension of embodiedness as being the body is the start. Mindfulness means investigation not passivity: asking what is my experience of this body now and taking time to go into it, to bring it into a moment by moment continuing presence.

The method of watching the breath takes one into the body and in this practice you go on to investigate the arising of sensations, perceptions, cognitions and the prejudiced attitudes of the mind in just the same way. In the end you investigate consciousness itself and find it tainted by all that has gone before, the sensations, cognitions, prejudices. Consciousness is coloured by what goes on in these processes for we identify it as the basis that sustains them in awareness.

The practise of mindfulness acts by focusing attention on these realms, shifting it away from the anxious split between what you are and what you might be, where you are in life and where you might be, whether you are good or bad, beautiful or ugly, the endless dualities, and brings you to where you quite undeniably are. In the body there is no duality but rather the immediacy of actual unsplit being.

And strangely where you find yourself to be lies within an experiential continuum that has no boundaries because there are no horizons to the space within which the body, the sensations, the cognitions become objects of awareness. The bare consciousness within which you are aware, indeed which is itself awareness, contains all that which is present yet is in itself boundless and untrapped. As you relax your hold on the body, the sensation, or a thought, and slip into this experiential space you find a felt vastness which like a mirror contains all and yet stands itself in a different dimension. Indeed this awareness remains an inference for the mirror cannot know itself except within the conscious act of reflection – for this is indeed all that it is. Yet the basis of mind, this *Rigpa* of the Tibetans is more than a mirror. This awareness is a dynamic vastness, a depth and not a mere surface. As Hui-neng said, “There is no mirror bright, Upon what can the dust alight?”

Indeed the dust of our thoughts and preoccupations simply float in this inner vastness like clouds in the sky. The essential thing is to place one's sentience in the sky itself and experience the clouds from there – and not the other way about. Being sky-borne the view is vast and clouds evaporate and reform as situations change. The vastness goes on for ever. If you look at a thought from within this vastness the thought evaporates – its apparent thing-ness just disappears, it self liberates into inner space. As they say in Dzogchen; a thought is like writing on water – as soon as the sign is made it spreads out into nothing. This is self liberation like evaporating clouds or melting snowmen.

If you let the meditative attention widen to include the presence of the room, the town, the countryside, the sounds of everyday, these too are at first reflected and then self-liberate into vastness. Here then is freedom. The prison cell becomes the liberating cell of the hermit And because there is freedom from any wanting, all being complete, a joy arises, an untrammelled joyousness which shines like a lamp in ones being.

After meditation you return to the tasks of everyday life, willingly operating dualistically as you and yours in the world of them and theirs. This is the natural mode of samsara, of becoming, the mode whereby needs are met, needs for warmth, food, adequacies of comfort and relationship. It is the mode of activism.

The Chan practitioner who trains with persistence can find within this everyday dualism the inner freedom that meditation discloses. It remains then as a basis, a unity, that divides only functionally not essentially. To get things done there is land mine and you and yours. Outside and inside of that there is the experiential continuum, the vastness, the matrix of self liberation.

Our pain stems mightily from the illusion that the split mind is natural, that it has no other depth, that it is an inevitable condition of being bound by time and impermanence. This is not so. A mind lost in duality is drugged, ignorant, asleep, unaware of its basic continuum. The task is to awaken again and again to the joyous spaciousness that lies within.

In the habitual dualism of the illusory everyday you may well feel scepticism and doubt. The Buddha understood that and did not make an assertion precluding your consent. Try it for yourself was always his message. And this must be ours too whenever we are quizzed about these goings on. The uncovering of vastness is in itself enlightening for this is the light of the mind. Do not waste time for the world is waiting.

SOME OF THE BARDO RECORDS OF MASTER CHUAN DENG JING DI JOHN CROOK

Members of the Western Chan Fellowship

For 49 days following John's death the members of the WCF were invited to follow a Tibetan tradition of undertaking some practices to aid the deceased. This served as a means of a collective of individuals expressing their feelings about John and his passing away. Below are printed some of the observances that WCF members followed.

MAKING PROVISION FOR THE AFTERLIFE *George Marsh*

I found Linji's monastery in Zhending with some difficulty. It is small and run down but has a genuine traditional feel, a charming pagoda on a human scale, and a couple of volunteer enthusiasts who tell me that, "The Japanese visit here," though the Chinese neglect Linji. I purchase 76 sticks of incense, one for each fellow of the Western Chan Fellowship, and my friend and I hold them up and bow three times to the four directions. We offer the incense in gratitude to all the great teachers and I chant John's favourite invocation ('May we save suffering creatures and place them in bliss' etc.). The monks and nuns are holding a service for the dead and chanting sutras.

After dark we see old people, in ones or twos, burning things on the street corners. It is the Festival of Hungry Ghosts, and they are sending necessary things to the recently dead. You burn pictures of the clothes they will need and a house. I draw a picture of the Maenllwyd complete with sheep, another of some wellies and his long scarf, a sketch of our Green Tara, and copy out some of John's teachings. I make a bonfire of my pictures and also the items on special paper, which include a car, two motorbikes, two gold bars, and, just to be on the safe side, several billion yuan, drawn on the Bank of Heaven. So our ceremony was held on an anonymous street corner in Baoding, Hebei Province, on 14th August and a gentle breeze fanned the flames as I thanked him from our sangha.

MAKE YOUR MINDS BRIGHT *Ned Reiter*

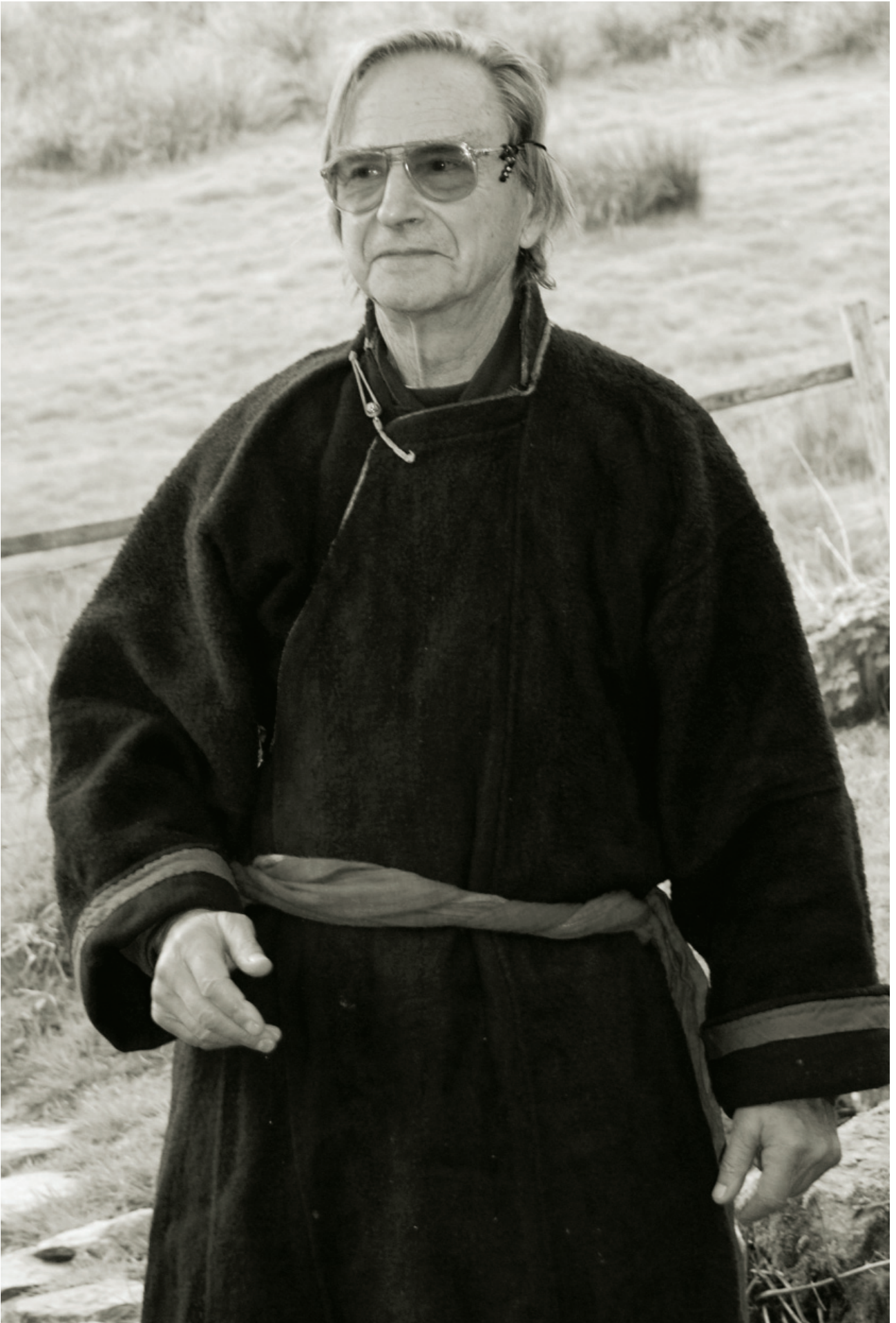
I spent a couple of quiet hours this afternoon in the grounds of Glastonbury Abbey. Tears were shed, of course, but mostly I remembered John's constant admonition: "Make your minds bright". Now that that particular bright mind is no longer here to encourage us, I guess we will have to rely even more on each other to continue the practice that John devoted so much skill and energy in teaching us.

KOANS *Ken Jones*

On my shrine I have placed a copy of *The Koans of Layman John*, which came as a gift, with a kind dedication. This book contains a fine selection of John's poems, one of which I shall read each morning.

NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON *Will Turner*

It is a full moon tonight and traditionally Buddhist monks sit into the night contemplating the Patimokkha, rules of the Vinaya. I had the notion that it would be good to sit tonight as a full moon vigil for John. Maybe



listening or read one of his talks. John once gave a talk on “Ceasing of Notions”, attributed to Bodhidharma. I’m sure he wouldn’t have objected to this notion.

ONE THOUSAND LAMPS AT SAMYE LING *Kitty d’Costa*

I have just returned from Samye Ling, on a visit to light 1,000 lamps in memory of John, in appreciation of his teachings and offering prayers that the Western Chan lineage will continue to flourish.

CANDLES AT NIGHT *John Senior*

I shall light a candle every night. We remembered John at our group meditation yesterday.

PRACTICE AND GRATITUDE *Jinho*

Just to share that it is also a common practice in Chan tradition and Chinese Buddhism to do 49 days practice for the deceased. That’s why we did a 49 days recitation of Buddha’s name after Shifu passed away. In my view the Bardo is neither a myth nor a reality. It is a commitment to practice and gratitude to John’s life.

DEDICATION PRACTICE *Paul Goddard*

The Turning to the Three Jewels and Transfer of Merit have a certain energy for me when I recite them. I will be dedicating these to John over the coming seven week period during my Morning practice. I will also endeavour to be mindful of his influence on my spiritual development during the day.

JOINING TOGETHER *Ros Cuthbert and Alysun Jones*

We are joining in this practice. It allows us to feel connected to John and the WCF at this time.

FUTURE BUDDHA CELEBRATING LAYMAN JOHN *Jake Lyne*

John was due to lead a weekend retreat at Barmoor in North Yorkshire. The retreat went ahead anyway. We made a small shrine dedicated to John with a statue of Maitreya with arms raised to the sky in celebration. The teachings were based on *The Koans of Layman John*.

HOLY ISLAND

The Holy Island Retreat due to start the week after John died, was cancelled, but several people went to the retreat anyway and were well supported in their practice by the staff at Holy Island. They held a special vigil for John timed to coincide with his funeral in Weston Super Mare.

DAILY CEREMONY

I have a photo of John beside which I have placed a statue if one of the Taras and a small Buddha. I have a small vase of garden wild flowers beside the photo, which I care for daily and I have a beeswax candle. I sound a Tibetan Bell at the start, and let the sound disappear into infinity. I then say the dedication:

*In my heart I turn to the three jewels of refuge
 May I save suffering creatures and place them in bliss
 May the compassionate spirit of love grow within me
 So that I may complete the enlightening path*

Then I remember John and his actions, then just dwell on his image. I then say *Om Man Padme Hum*. I stay in silence – then sound the Tibetan Bell again.

A RIVER WITH YELLS, BELLS AND SMELLS *Hughie Carroll*

Formally this practice is visualisation, mantra and all the ‘yells, bells and smells’. Informally it is a strong and steady flow of gratitude to him.

BONFIRE *Susan Blackmore*

I have done various things such as having a bonfire for John that Saturday evening and enjoying the sparks flying up into the sky, thinking of him every day in my meditation, and indeed at many other times of the day as well. I have also thought a lot about the specific advice he gave me in recent years and I have a powerful sense of now having to go it alone. The bonfire inspired my poem for John. Here it is:

Dear John,

Gone.

SUMMER

John Crook

*Soft summer sounds and sparrow chirp
murmuration of a voice and fleeting cloud,
unfathomed blue, space upon distant soace,
so moves the afternoon apace.*

*Insistent tapping, harsh metallic sound
reverberates, the world's at work,
siesta past, the silence cleaved
the birches are yet barely leaved.*

*Let silence be the way and no digression
stir the mind from higher sleeps –
contemplate upon the bracken slope
whether it's death, whether it's hope.*

*The silent room interweaves
creative light with solitude of sky
immeasurable, not understood at all
I sit and beat upon a wall.*

*But is it hope or desolation's end
that waits when passage past is done?
The wake astern my craft is streaked with sodden straws.
Do I weep or laugh?*

JOHN CROOK: ETHOLOGIST

John Lazarus

John Crook died shortly after attending, at a large house in Somerset, a reunion gathering of colleagues from his research group at Bristol University in the 1960s and 1970s, a major aim of which was to understand the evolution of social behaviour. John's eminence in this field followed his undergraduate project on Gulls in Southampton, and his groundbreaking fieldwork on weaver birds that showed how social organization evolves in response to challenges from the environment. At Bristol John had an office at the top of the rambling Georgian house that housed the Psychology Department in Berkeley Square, and his earlier work on birds was followed there by field work on primates.

This poem was written shortly after the reunion gathering, as a memory of the research group and as a tribute to John.

A GATHERING

In memory of John Hurrell Crook

*Gulls gather quietly by the dawning tide,
drawn by memory and the flight of friends,
dispersing to a system overhead.*

*Weavers weave their forest and savannah
ways, pairing, building, sharing space,
moulded by the pressures of the land,*

*while almost like ourselves, so many kinds,
in company, from fear and hunger, find
ways to lead a close and fitting life.*

*So, why not live alone, consort with one
or more, why care, why share? Why here, not there?
How find a way to see a common plan?*

*In that information centre, Berkeley Square –
from basement to the weaver's narrow eyrie,
an Escher's tower of corridor and stair –*

*Darwin's window gave the perfect view,
a microscope to find the theories hidden
in selection's logic and the urge to know.*

*Gathering a generation later,
remembering a closeness and a passion
shared, around a table conversation*

*finds old ties renewed, as if we'd always
known this house. Telling why we came,
how we filled our time, deserved our stay,*

*a group and mentor weave a rare weekend.
Gulls gather quietly by the dawning tide,
drawn by memory and the flight of friends.*

SNOWFALL

John Crook, 2010

Snow is falling. The white flakes drift down from the sky. Coming from the north the gentle blizzard reaches the southern hills. As the snow arrives, so comes the great silence. The track is filling up, no one can come, and no one can go. Stillness lies in the reflection of the cloud brightened snow, white around the bird table. The Bullfinch is stealing the whitened buds, the tits are pecking at the nuts and the Nuthatch takes the seed to a branch and hammers it. Although it is cold, the feeling is warm. Now, as the silence and stillness descend, the Chan house is isolated. Its true nature appears.

What might Dogen say of this?

Once upon a time a famous biologist and his Zen practitioner companion were travelling in the high mountains of Dolpo in Nepal searching for Snow Leopards. For the biologist it was an ecological project; for the practitioner the Snow Leopard was an enlightenment quest in remote places. Their mutual understanding was rather slight! The winter was fast approaching and they were on their way south under falling snows.

In a remote valley they found a tiny deserted village, all inhabitants gone south over the passes for the winter. Yet, there was smoke drifting from the chimney of a small Gumpa. Intrigued, they knocked upon the door. An old monk, one legged and dressed in yak cloth, woollen robes, creaked it open. He was quite alone. Knowing the villagers had all moved south, they asked him.

“Why are you staying here?” “Oh,” he said “Can’t you see – a one legged man cannot cross passes in snow.”

“But how can you survive the winter here, alone, deep in snow and frozen in?” they asked. “Well,” he said, “I have everything”.

The biologist understood him to mean he had logs and dung for heating, and supplies for simple food and drink. The practitioner understood him to mean something quite else. What was that? Perhaps only another practitioner can understand.

When the track is blocked for vehicles at Winterhead in winter, which is a rare occurrence, there can be no coming and going except by horse or on foot. With a damaged back, there can be no movement. What does it mean to stay in minor uncertainties? Perhaps the calor tank will soon be empty? Maybe the electricity will fail? Are there enough supplies in the freezer? Do I have everything?

Do we have ‘everything’ when uncertainty strikes? What is that?

The snow flakes drift softly on the Buddha room windows. The incense burns and the candle flames wander to and fro on the silent images. The sitter sits. The gentleness of the lone home floats the air. Everything is here, nothing missing. The sitter lets self dissolve in stillness. What is to be found? Do you know the fruits of silence? Do you know the blessing of the snow?



JOHN AS A LOVER OF TRUTH

Peter Reason

I have been sitting at my computer trying to write about John. Our editor has asked me to write about John's concern about the effects of human activity on our planet's health. But that feels too distant, too impersonal, too early in my grieving. For as I try to write, above all I have a feeling of loss: for I loved him and I miss him. And I know I am not alone in this, that there is a diverse community of family, friends, lovers, old students, Chan practitioners, all of whom loved him and miss him.

My writing is hesitant, goes in stops and starts, feels inadequate. I still find it difficult to imagine a world in which John is not present. How can it be that I cannot lift the telephone and call him, cannot hear his abrupt response as if deeply irritated at being disturbed; cannot hear how his voice softens and engages as the conversation unfolds?

At the last meeting of the group of men we called the Western Academy, just a few weeks before he died, he spoke of passing his 80th birthday. He was looking forward to the forthcoming gathering of his past doctoral students; he had plans for a new Chan hall at Winterhead; he was deeply engaged in his memoir; and just beginning to think about a new book. He talked a little about his own Chan practice, both the struggles and the new depth he was increasingly experiencing. He told us that he was planning on living until he was 90, but if he died before, that would be okay too. So I felt that he would go on for ever, and still feel in the middle of uncompleted conversations, about Chan, about inquiry, about what it means to be a human being.

As I have wondered whether I would manage to write anything at all, I turned to Steinbeck's appreciation of his friend Ed Ricketts, which is included as an introduction to *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*.¹ Ricketts died suddenly and unexpectedly just as John did – although in a motor accident rather than from a stroke – leaving a hole in the lives of his friends, just as John has. Steinbeck writes how impossible it was to define Ricketts, for he was so many things to so many people. Just as John was.

Steinbeck also writes that Ricketts would not die; that he haunted the people who knew him, present even in the moments when his loss was felt most deeply. I suspect this is true for many of us who knew John as a close friend or more slightly, from a distance. On the one hand 'Nothing matters/And everything must go'; and on the other hand, '...love is having the heart touched/In the valleys of suffering.' So Steinbeck sets out to write his many memories of Ricketts in the hope, as he puts it, to 'lay the ghost'. Of course, this is what we did – family, friends, Chan community – at the scattering of ashes at the Maenllwyd, we shared stories and memories. So all I can do at this point is to set down some more of my memories, tell something of the importance of John in my own life.

There are so many memories: weekends with the Western Academy; conversations over lunch in a pub; out walking the hills around Winterhead and the Maenllwyd; trips with him on my yacht Coral; and of

course, on retreats he led. I have memories of simple friendship; of seeing wildlife as if through his eyes; of convivial feasts of a shoulder of Welsh lamb, piles of roast vegetables and a bottle of wine. And memories of intense, impassioned debates about the state of the world, about the nature of science, about the conduct of inquiry, and of course about the contribution of Buddhist thought and practice to these questions.

I first got to know John properly through the Western Academy, which formed in the 1980s, inspired by James Hillman's *Freud's Own Cookbook*² and by Hillman's suggestion that intellectual exchange would best take place in a convivial atmosphere, with friendship, food and wine. Peter Hawkins was very taken with this idea and wanted to bring together such a convivial group of men with shared interests in personal and social change. A group of five of us formed – Peter Tatham and Malcolm Parlett joining John, Peter, and myself. We were still meeting in early 2011, although sadly Peter Tatham had succumbed to dementia and could not longer join us.

We met alternately at each other's homes, one to cook, one to bring wine, one to bring some intellectual stimulus. John was characteristically both intrigued and guarded about the whole idea, asserting that he was quite unable to cook but might manage to make a shepherd's pie. In the early days he was reserved, cautious about committing himself: he would play hard to get when it came to fixing dates, forgetting to bring his diary to meetings, unclear about his commitments to the retreat calendar. Yet at the same time he was reaching to the possibility of new friendship.

As we continued to meet – in the end for nearly thirty years – our conversations became more intimate and personal. John came to appreciate the unique combination of intellectual exchange and friendship that we were able to establish. During the life of the group John retired from Bristol University, started his intensive practice with Shifu and was in time appointed Dharma heir, established the Western Chan Fellowship, built the Chan Hall, wrote several books and led many expeditions. We were privileged to hear intimate stories of his personal struggles as well as accounts of his adventures.

One of our meetings was shortly after he returned from his expedition in the Himalayas with James Low.³ They had sought out remote yogins to inquire into their theory of mind – and in one encounter were rebuked for their stupidity in doing so, a story retold in the *Koans of Layman John*.⁴ On their way out of the mountains they were held up by early winter snow, and had to stay in a rough hut overnight – John told us about the large and initially scary dog that settled down between him and the drafty door, helping to keep him warm. Next morning they faced a critical decision: should they take the chance of crossing the pass or risk being trapped for the winter? They chose to go, and John described in great detail the challenging trek, wading knee high in snow, hoping they would not miss the track. He told us how he chanted the mantra “*Om Mani Padme Hum!*” under his breath the whole way up, both to give rhythm to his walking and as inspiration. He wouldn't have got to the top without it, he told us triumphantly.

After we had been meeting for a few years I bought my yacht, Coral. John was enthusiastic when I invited the men to join me on a weekend cruise along the Cornish coast. More ambitiously, he and Malcolm joined me for the return trip from south Brittany. This turned out to be one of those frustrating times when there was no wind for the whole week, yet we were obliged to press on under power because of diary commitments. Motoring round the Pointe de Penmarc'h, a low headland with a tall lighthouse which seems to take for ever to get past, the sea was calm and the boat needed no attention, so John and I went forward to sit on the foredeck away from the engine noise. Suddenly two or three dolphins broke the surface alongside, and for several minutes played in the bow wave right next to us. They were so close, within a couple of yards, that we could see every detail of their glistening skin, eyes that seemed to be looking at us, and the opening and closing of that strange breathing hole in the top of their head.

John was completely fascinated, utterly engaged with them, deeply appreciating a new experience of the natural world. I have seen dolphins from Coral with many different people, and they are all thrilled with the experience. John brought something a bit different, a bit special: a combination of scientific, observational curiosity and an almost mystical respect, meeting the dolphins as other beings in the world rather than simply as a spectacle. He brought a sense of wonder and linked it with a scientific curiosity.

A few days later we took advantage of the calm conditions to visit Île de Sein, a tiny inhabited island set amongst the extensive rocks of the Chaussée de Sein off Finistère. Getting to Île de Sein is tricky: the approach must be made between underwater reefs; the lighthouse and beacon that mark the leading line for the safe passage are distant and often shrouded in mist; and strong tidal streams can set the boat off course quickly. Careful pilotage is essential. We found our way from the Pointe de Sein on the mainland to where we could just pick up the markers, and cautiously motored through the hazards until we found the clear channel into the little harbour. John was fascinated by the whole process, asking questions about the techniques of pilotage, quickly grasping the principles, relating them to his experience of map-reading on expeditions in different parts of the world. He often referred to the experience in later conversations, saying how wonderful it had been to make our way safely between the rocks and into the protected anchorage.

Writing this down reminds me how affirming I found his attention. On board Coral, some people are simply passive and allow me as skipper to get on with the sailing. With them I feel the loneliness of leadership. Others ask questions in a manner that suggests anxiety and lack of confidence, and I have to work hard to prevent their anxiety from spilling over and getting me worried. John was different, in that he quickly found ways to partner me in the process of pilotage. He asked questions because he wanted to understand, and once he understood he found ways to contribute. And he understood that the practice of sailing requires qualities of attention not dissimilar to those of a meditation retreat.

Sailing with John on the West coast of Ireland a few years later was at times like an inspirational natural history lesson. He was so excited by the bird life, pointing out the different species to us, not just naming

them but explaining their different patterns of flight and how they fit into the ecology. One day we anchored in Pulleen Harbour, a narrow cove near the entrance to Bantry Bay. As we explored the rocks and caves in the dinghy, John pointed out to us how the brackish water, where fresh water running off the land mixed with the salt of the sea, produced a particular ecological niche. He showed us how different fauna and flora inhabited the fresh water streams, the area where the waters mixed, and the true salt water of the sea

In his memoir of Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck wrote that Ed loved the truth. As I remember these little stories, I realize that this was what I wanted to say about John. He loved and was fascinated by the things that the world offered, whether it was the birds in his garden, the nests of weaver-birds, his pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, the intricacies of a Buddhist sutra. He studied them intensely both in experience and scholarship because he loved the truth they embodied. Of course he could be also very opinionated and was quite capable of embarking on a long ‘rant’ – his word – about the stupidities of his fellow humans when they would not face up to what he saw as important truths.

Our later meetings of the Western Academy took place over long weekends, and our Saturday morning breakfasts often took on a particular quality. We would assemble slowly, prepare a huge cooked breakfast, continue with toast and marmalade and endless cups of tea and coffee. The conversation was often stimulated by a report in the morning paper, and we would turn the issue over, ‘putting the world to rights’ as we put in. We often talked about our shared anguish about the devastating human impact on the great ecosystems of the planet, in particular climate change and loss of biodiversity. Very often, these conversations would turn to discussion of the unexamined assumptions that lay underneath the topical event. We considered these underlying worldviews – ways of construing and understanding reality – to be at the root of the problems that face humanity. We each had our ways of talking about this – Malcolm would talk about the field conditions, Peter Tatham about myth and archetypal influences, Peter Hawkins and I drawing on Gregory Bateson’s phrase, the ‘errors in epistemology’.

It was in these discussions that John became fascinated with ‘Tinbergen’s doubt’ – the uncertainty as to whether the human species is capable of making the cognitive and behavioural adaptations that will permit survival and flourishing in the current intense and fast changing environment we have been instrumental in creating. He wondered how Buddhist practices and ways of thinking might answer Tinbergen’s question, and this wondering led to his book *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism*.⁵

The truth for John was not just about what we knew, although he loved his empirical knowledge of the world, it was about how we knew, and how we could develop our capacity for better knowing. He was both a scientist and a Buddhist because he saw both as being about ways of knowing. It is telling that Chapter Twelve of *World Crisis*, at the end his account of the lessons of global Buddhism, is titled ‘Truth Claims of Buddhist Thought’. He summarises his argument that ‘Buddhism is based essentially in the practice of subjective empiricism;’ that the key ideas ‘are open to test and repeated tests by people living in different cultures’, tests which ‘convince by way of producing changes in mental attitude, the quality



of awareness and actions in the world.’ After setting down these truth claims, John repeats that they cannot be ‘merely asserted: we have to investigate them.’⁶

So writing this piece has allowed me to find out what I want to say about John and the crisis of sustainability. I think he leaves us with the question, a question that is a challenge: are we individually, as a civilization, and indeed as a species capable of facing up to and grasping the truth of our predicament?

Investigate!

NOTES

1. Steinbeck, J. (1958). *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. London: Heinmann.
2. Hillman, J. (1987). *Freud's Own Cookbook*. New York: Routledge.
3. Crook, J. H., & Low, J. (1997). *The Yogins of Ladakh: A pilgrimage among the hermits of the Buddhist Himalayas*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
4. Crook, J. H. (2009). *The Koans of Layman John*. Available from the Western Chan Fellowship www.westernchanfellowship.org.
5. Crook, J. H. (2009). *World Crisis and Buddhist Humanism. End Games: Collapse or renewal of Civilization*. New Delhi: New Age Books.
6. *World Crisis*, p.140–146

LIGHTENMENT

John Crook, December 2002

*Pausing at the front door
turning back into the garden
for another look
in the gaze of the moon.*

*December twilight
cloudless
beyond silhouetted twigs
grandly she rises.*

*Black light empowers
the onset of frost
fading sunlight filtering
a line of dark oaks.*

*The Old lady climbs above bleak hills
presence of place
clear lights
meeting on limestone nights.*



THE BUDDHIST LEGACY OF JOHN CROOK

Simon Child

One day many years ago, in a short break on a retreat, I was standing outside the Chan Hall in the sun. I noticed a beetle stuck on its back, trying to roll over. I squatted down, flicked it over the right way up, and moved on. Later that day, in interview, John asked me, "How is your beetle?" I hadn't known that he had observed me, and it seemed such an insignificant act not worthy of comment, and yet now John was asking me about it in interview. I replied, "I turned it the right way up and it walked away". John commented, "That kind of thing often happens here, the beetles that live here are very lucky!"

HISTORY

In very many ways the Western Chan Fellowship has been shaped by John Crook, and so in considering the legacy he has left behind we inevitably reflect on how it arose in that way, based on John's approaches and personality which in turn are based in his personal history.

John had some childhood experiences of deep peace and joy, arising spontaneously in quiet solitude as he explored the New Forest whilst bird watching. Neither his parents nor his school teachers seemed able to relate to what he described to them but in his reading he discovered that Buddhism not only knew about such experiences but also trained in them.

He explored Buddhist monasteries whilst serving on National Service in the army in Hong Kong in the 1950s,¹ and received some teaching from Mr Shi Liang Yen, a layman who had trained with Chan Patriarch Xuyun. After leaving the army, he went to Cambridge for his PhD, and was involved in the Cambridge Buddhist Society. But it seems his prime focus thereafter was on his academic work until the late 1960s when he was a research fellow in California and he became excited by and involved in the personal growth and Encounter movements. He continued this interest after his return to UK, establishing the Bristol Encounter Centre. But he had not forgotten about Buddhism, and he learned and practised meditation especially at Samye Ling and at Throssel Hole Buddhist Priory (as it was then called). He worked towards integrating into a Buddhist context the skills and exercises he had learned in the Encounter Movement, establishing the Western Zen Retreat at Maenllwyd in 1975. He continued his contact with diverse forms of Buddhism, including his encounters with Tibetan yogins² during academic work in the Himalayas in 1977 and 1986.³

His approach was exploratory, enquiring, experimental, sharing with friends the excitement of both the journey and the discovery, but in a way which was not casual – he was committed to this exploration, for example buying and restoring the Maenllwyd especially as a property suitable for this purpose, and ultimately taking early retirement to release more time for it. What was his motivation?

No doubt he was partly driven by wishing to train his own mind, having confidence in the practices and the potential of the human mind to experience the world in ways other than its usual habit. Setting up

group events provided an opportunity for this, though in fact he himself more readily practiced and found a quiet mind in quiet solitude than in a group situation: on a solitary retreat at Maenllwyd; travelling in the Himalayas; simply being in nature; and in his later years living alone at his home at Winterhead. His motivation for leading group events was probably twofold. Undoubtedly there was his Bodhisattva spirit, the joy of liberating others, of helping others in their difficulties though applying insights and methods of practice. There was also his stated fascination in the human condition: he enjoyed people-watching both from afar and in the intimacy of the interview room. This was not voyeurism but rather a desire to help – sitting with John in interviews I saw him moved by the pain of other people's lives and trying his hardest to help them.

Perhaps this might have been as far as it went, effectively a one-man show running occasional retreats at the Maenllwyd. But circumstances led, unplanned, to activities moving up a gear. He had continued to make occasional visits to his original teacher in Hong Kong, who in the meantime had become the monk Yen Why Fashi. But Yen Why Fashi became old and deaf, and after visiting him in hospital John realised that he could not rely on him being his teacher for much longer. He felt the need for an authentic teacher, not least because he was aware of a lack of acceptance of his work, with some quarters regarding it more as an extension of his Encounter Group work than authentic Buddhism. As he left the hospital there was a Buddhist bookshop across the road and he went to browse in it. There was only one book there in English, *Getting the Buddha Mind*.⁴ From this he first heard of Chan Master Sheng Yen, and he realised that attending retreat in New York would be more accessible than travelling to the Far East.

From the mid-1980s he took to travelling to New York to train there on retreats with Shifu, simply for his own training and not seeking any recognition. After a few visits, wishing to share his new-found teacher with those who practised with him at the Maenllwyd, John was successful in persuading Shifu to come to Maenllwyd to lead retreats. He was very surprised when, at the end of his first UK retreat in 1989, Shifu gave John permission to teach Chan in Europe as Shifu's personal representative. Of course, this was not a random event; Shifu had already made an assessment of John's experience, understanding, and capabilities over a few retreats led by Shifu where John had been a participant. Nevertheless John was greatly surprised by this event, and even more so when in 1993, unheralded, Shifu gave Dharma Transmission to John, making him Shifu's second Dharma heir (after Ji Chern Fashi) and the first Western Dharma heir.

In effect giving Transmission implied an acceptance of the work John had been doing with his creations such as the Western Zen Retreat, and indeed subsequently Shifu asked John to lead Western Zen Retreats at his Dharma Drum Retreat Center in upstate New York. In fact initially he proposed that we should lead them six times per year, but we felt that might be excessive! However we have led them annually since 2001, either John with me, or me with Hilary, and in fact I am typing up this article whilst sitting on a plane to New York to lead a Western Zen Retreat there once again! We have also led Koan Retreats there on several occasions.

So recognition had certainly moved up a notch, and activity began to do so too. The Bristol Chan Group was founded following Shifu's first visit to UK in 1989. Shifu had confirmed my experience in 1992 and I subsequently began training with John to lead retreats. Also John had retired and offered more retreats per year.

In February 1995 John convened a meeting at Maenllwyd of a few 'seniors/regulars', including myself, to consider further developments. Subsequently in *New Chan Forum 12*,⁵ John proposed founding a charitable institution. Though there was a natural reluctance to taking on such bureaucracy, and indeed John himself has been wary of institutionalisation, it seemed a natural step to move towards taking the administrative burden off John (at which he had never been very efficient!) e.g. advertising retreats and taking bookings. But more than that, we were consciously founding an organisation with the intention of establishing something which at least potentially could continue beyond John's lifetime. More meetings followed, a constitution was drafted and tweaked and retweaked,⁶ and the Western Chan Fellowship was founded and subsequently registered as a charity in 1997.

The constitution was carefully worded to try to build in checks and balances to reduce the risk of abuses of power that have occurred in some other Buddhist institutions. It also included a leap of faith: to be eligible to be elected Teacher following John's death a candidate had to be a Dharma Heir of Shifu or his descendants, but at that time there were none (other than Ji Chern Fashi)! However I subsequently received Dharma Transmission from Shifu in 2000, and other Dharma Heirs of Shifu created subsequently, as well as John's own Dharma Heirs (had he created any), would also have been eligible. The constitution also recognised the importance of the emerging network of local groups, and these have grown further since then, and in various ways the organisation has supported the groups: training and mentoring for the group leaders; publicity via the WCF website; in some cases help with start-up funds; reclaiming Gift Aid on donations.

We still continue to tweak the constitution, to consolidate the same principles and to adapt to changing circumstances. For example the original drafting occurred when John was the only retreat leader doing all the teaching, but now we have several experienced retreat leaders and the constitution needs adaptation to reflect this.

LEGACY

John Crook started teaching with no support, no contacts, no accreditation, and for several years on a very small scale. I don't believe John set out to found a Chan institution, nor even to become an accredited Buddhist teacher. Yet he did these and more. So, where are we now, what legacy has John left us?

Most forms of Buddhist practice in the West in the 1970s were essentially copies or direct translations of Asian Buddhist traditions. John pioneered and innovated, integrating techniques learned from personal growth work with traditional Buddhist practices, in the context of intensive meditational retreat practice. This produced an approach which is not merely a hybrid nor a corruption of Buddhism but which is an

appropriate development of practice methods which originally evolved to suit Asian cultures and which need some adaptation to be most effective for engaging and liberating Western personalities.⁷ This is perhaps most apparent in the Western Zen Retreat but these skills and approaches have also transferred to our other retreats. And yet to complement these we also represent traditional formal practice, for example with our Silent Illumination retreats, and we have the benefit of holding a significant lineage to sustain us, that of the Dharma Drum lineage of *Linji* and *Caodong* Chan.

Our practice has depth and breadth. We have depth through John's emphasis on the importance of experiential learning on intensive retreat, and breadth due to his openness in learning from different traditions including Chan, Zen, and Tibetan Buddhism. The practice has been tuned to the needs of practitioners in our time and place and, importantly, due to the emotionally opening effect of the innovation of the Western Zen Retreat we do not tend to have a problem with our practitioners being stuck in quietism as can occur with some practices. This verbal method of self-inquiry is ideally suited for Western minds which are educated to explore and be critical of didactic knowledge. This method had not evolved in Asian Buddhist practices as these cultures do not so readily engage in self-inquiry in this way as it is not in conformance with their cultural values of respecting given teachings and humbly avoiding talking about themselves.

Traditional teaching would say not to try to inquire using words as it would waste time. John would agree that the answer is not to be found in words, but noticed that Westerners will in any case respond by thinking in words, as they have been educated to analyse what is given to them. So, he offered these exercises which speed up the process of discharging words so that the Western practitioner can more quickly enter a traditional non-verbal meditative enquiry once they have exhausted all possible trains of thought.

This exercise was itself derived from Zen practices, in particular the interview with the master when words are used, so it is not out of place in a Zen retreat. However this particular combination of practices was a novel development and turned out to be very powerful and we continue to run these retreats regularly several times a year over the last 37 years gaining much experience in this process of inquiry. This is an example of John's approach to teaching – by taking a more or less conventional approach to teaching, but making relatively small adjustments to make it more directly applicable to Western minds which tend to be more ready to engage in verbal enquiry. This attitude of emphasising inquiry, alongside calming, is apparent in our more traditional retreat formats as well as in the Western Zen Retreat. As he established his teaching career John taught a wider range of methods of practice, based in tradition but also perhaps with careful adjustments based on his experience of teaching to Westerners.

For example, our Silent Illumination retreat (Silent Illumination is one of the main methods of Chan and related to the Japanese practice of *Shikantaza*) is very traditional in format and teaching, and indeed, when I have taught to audiences including Chinese monastics they say that it is the same as hearing the teaching of the late Chan Master Sheng Yen. But based on our experience of the risks in excessive

quietism we take care that practitioners do not lapse into Silence alone but also cultivate insight/illumination.

John also received permission to teach Tibetan *Mahamudra* practice from a text that was given to him by a yogin whom he had met in the Himalayas. This text and the story behind it is described in a book which John co-authored with James Low, *The Yogins of Ladakh*. So each year John also taught a *Mahamudra* retreat as he felt this was similar to and complemented the practice of Silent illumination. Based on his experience of how Western practitioners sometimes have difficulty engaging with methods such as the *huatou/koan* (which is the other main method of Chan practice), John also developed a slightly adjusted approach to this practice. Our *Koan* retreat is very traditional in emphasising wordless investigation of the *koan*, but to facilitate reaching the wordless state we teach practitioners how they can discharge words rather than just suppressing them. In this way they engage more fully with the *koan* in a shorter time, which is especially important to lay people who do not have much time available for intensive practice.

So John's academic background as rational scientist, investigator, experimenter, being informed about Western psychological techniques, has led to the teaching of practice in ways which are definitely traditional Buddhist practice but which are fine-tuned to engage more directly with the typical personality and mental habits of the Western practitioner. John was also a poet and story-teller, and enjoyed the magic and mystery of Tibetan Buddhism, but took these to be psychological practices rather than belief systems and was able to use them as such in his teaching.

A consistent theme in his approach to teaching was the importance of self-confrontation. We must continue to investigate the mind even if it gets difficult due to reasons such as encountering shameful or other painful memories, or else we shall get stuck if we opt out and suppress these thoughts.

THE WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP

We now have a well-established institution, 14+ years old, with a strong constitution and a clear administrative structure, and a developing membership. We have a well-established retreat programme offering a range of retreat types (Western Zen Retreat, Silent Illumination, *Koan*, *Huatou*, *Mahamudra*, and others). For some years we have been running retreats in several locations, not only at Maenllwyd, but we also continue to use Maenllwyd. About a year before his death John facilitated the negotiation of a rental agreement for Maenllwyd between WCF and his children, and this agreement continues.

We are no longer a one-man operation. We have a team of trained and experienced retreat leaders who are able to continue and develop this programme. We have a network of local leaders and groups who are supported by the mentoring of our retreat leaders and by annual training events. And we have a committee and others assisting in our administration.

By some standards we are a small organisation, e.g. if we compare ourselves to those large international Buddhist organisations with thousands or tens of thousand of members. But curiously we are also a



relatively large organisation by some standards. I was invited to a conference of 230 Western Buddhist teachers in June 2011 at the Garrison Institute in USA,⁸ and in conversation many teachers there said they would consider us as a large organisation because so many sanghas are not much larger than one of our local groups – 15–25 people congregating in one town around one teacher.

We are a non-residential lay organisation, rather dispersed across our country and members of our different local groups do not often meet, but we do have a sense of community as well-demonstrated at our recent memorial events for John.

We have national and international connections in a variety of ways. We have our advisory board, defined as per our constitution, comprising some prominent Buddhists from various traditions. We have good relationships with Dharma Drum Mountain, the root of our lineage, and with Dharma Drum Retreat Centre in upstate New York where John and I have been teaching since 2001. But, importantly, we are independent of these organisations and able to regulate our own activities.

We are invited to lead retreats at Gaia House every year since the 1990s, and have friendly relations with Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey. We are longstanding members of the UK Network of Buddhist Organisations (NBO)⁹ where for many years our own Sally Masheder was the Secretary, and three years ago we joined the European Buddhist Union (EBU)¹⁰ and I have attended their AGM each year as our representative. In association with the EBU AGM there is an annual meeting of European Buddhist Teachers (BTE),¹¹ which I have attended annually since 2003, of which I have been the organiser since 2007, and which John also attended several times. Through this I have built up good relations with several senior European Buddhist teachers. Both John and I were both invited to the Western Teachers ‘Maha Teacher Council’ meeting in Garrison Institute in New York in June 2011,¹² though John was not



able to attend. Of course we also have affiliated groups in Poland and Norway, and contacts elsewhere in Europe.

We have a good public image with our website, Facebook page, conferences, and our longstanding publication *New Chan Forum* which for many years has been edited by John with many articles being written by him. Very importantly we have avoided creating scandals due to misbehaviour. John's motivation in insisting that our constitution included provisions for regulating the Teacher was because he had not only read about scandals in other organisations but had also experienced the after-effects of abuse when asked to help at least two sanghas recover after difficulties with their previous teachers. As a result of such events newcomers can rightly be wary of engaging with some organisations, and some newcomers tell me that indeed they checked us out carefully before attending for the first time, both hearing our reputation and checking our constitution.

FUTURE

There is a tendency for teachers to teach the methods and approaches which worked best for them. This is natural, since they have most confidence and experience in those methods. Gutei learned from his teacher raising a finger, and used that trick often throughout his own teaching career. John similarly taught what worked for him – emphasising the power of silent and isolated places, preferring to practice in such places, and emphasising the importance of intensive silent retreat. Part of John's legacy is that those who practiced with him would also be those who appreciated this approach. Perhaps our challenge for the future is to take care to maintain that aspect of practice whilst also developing additional

approaches which can spread the Dharma more widely to others of different temperaments. We also need to deepen the practice of our members – John was especially concerned about deepening practice so as to be able to maintain the lineage, especially so after the question was raised whether lay lineages can ever be sustained beyond a couple of generations.¹³ John respected tradition but did not feel bound by it, being able to make adaptations where appropriate. Perhaps this sums up our approach to his legacy – we must respect his transmission to us but, as I think he would have expected, continue to develop it rather than fossilise it.

NOTES

1. John Crook, *Hilltops of the Hong Kong Moon*, Minerva Press 1997
2. John Crook, *Yogins of Ladakh*, Motilal Banarsidass 1997
3. John Crook and Henry Osmaston, *Himalayan Buddhist Villages*, Motilal Banarsidass 1994
4. Master Sheng-Yen, *Getting the Buddha Mind: On the Practice of Chan Retreat*. 1982 Dharma Drum Publications
5. John Crook, A Fellowship of Western Ch'an Practitioners?, *New Chan Forum Issue 12* Autumn 1995
6. John Crook, The Western Chan Fellowship: Constitutional Discussion, *New Chan Forum Issue 14* Spring 1997
7. Simon Child, Presenting the Dharma Within Western Culture: Finding New Expressions While Preserving Authenticity, *Chan Magazine* Summer 2009
http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/uploads/media/Chan_Magazine_Summer_2009.pdf
8. http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/index.php?option=com_civicrm&task=civicrm/event/info&reset=1&id=106&Itemid=998
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9. <http://www.nbo.org.uk>
10. <http://www.e-b-u.org>
11. <http://www.e-b-u.org/buddhist-teachers-europe.html>
12. http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/index.php?option=com_civicrm&task=civicrm/event/info&reset=1&id=106&Itemid=998
13. John Daido Looi, *The Eight Gates of Zen*, page 197, Dharma Communication 1992.

ON PURSUING THAT WHICH LEAVES NO TRACKS

John Crook, 1975

*From the beginning
there is nothing to be sought.
Already within
is the complete solution.*

*There is no sense in travelling.
No sense in seeking to get
from a learned teacher
the wisdom you already possess.*

*No sense in austerity
mindlessly sitting
sifting and searching
for another's insights.*

*No sense in adopting ceremonies,
rituals, oblations,
doing good just to feel good
trying to reach a destination hidden in the heart.*

*No sense in walking
to reach a goal that isn't there.
No sense in thinking
to solve a problem that doesn't exist in thought.*

*All you have to do
This minute
is to stop –
turn the mind upon itself.*

*Draw your sense within
Turn yourself inside out:
Gazing into the lake of awareness
Let what is there emerge from its lair.
Let what is there
invade your breathing.
Let what is there
pulsate in your heart.*

*Let what is there
warm your loins, spin in your skull.
What is this anguish of seeking in the future
that which is already lying in the palms of your
hands?*

*Right now – you have it. Hold it close.
Look directly behind your own face.
Grasping the monster firm let him be
or he'll ride you out again along the paths of time.*

*And let it all go!
Fall!
Gone gone altogether gone!
See within the Universe ringing in your ears.*

*Time and space
are simply the ring
through which the Tiger
jumps.*



RETREATS & EVENTS

WESTERN CHAN FELLOWSHIP RETREATS 2012

The retreats below are scheduled in 2012. Keep an eye on the website for any updates of retreats and practice days and to read full booking details including how you may now book and pay online using debit or credit card: <http://www.westernchanfellowship.org/retreats.html>

2012 WCF RETREATS

■ 25TH MAY – 27TH MAY	<i>Introduction to Chan</i> LEADER: JAKE LYNE VENUE: HOURNE FARM, E. SUSSEX
■ 26TH MAY – 31ST MAY	<i>Western Zen Retreat</i> LEADER: FIONA NUTTALL VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES
■ 20TH JUNE – 30TH JUNE	<i>Ten Day Silent Illumination Retreat</i> LEADER: SIMON CHILD VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES
■ 2ND JULY – 9TH JULY	<i>Hsin Hsin Ming Retreat</i> LEADER: KEN JONES VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES
■ 4TH AUGUST – 9TH AUGUST	<i>Western Zen Retreat</i> LEADER: HILARY RICHARDS VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES
■ 15TH SEPTEMBER – 22ND SEPTEMBER	<i>Koan Retreat</i> LEADER: SIMON CHILD VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES
■ 13TH OCTOBER – 18TH OCTOBER	<i>Constructing a Lay Practice</i> LEADER: EDDY STREET VENUE: BARMOOR, N. YORKSHIRE
■ 27TH OCTOBER – 3RD NOVEMBER	<i>Silent Illumination Retreat</i> LEADER: SIMON CHILD VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES
■ 1ST NOVEMBER – 4TH NOVEMBER	<i>Retreat with Ken Jones</i> LEADER: KEN JONES VENUE: HOURNE FARM, E. SUSSEX
■ 10TH NOVEMBER – 15TH NOVEMBER	<i>Western Zen Retreat</i> LEADER: JAKE LYNE VENUE: MAENLLWYD, WALES

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NEW CHAN FORUM

is published and distributed by the Western Chan Fellowship www.westernchanfellowship.org

Registered charity number: 1068637

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*Nothing matters
and everything must go
Yet love is having the heart touched
in the valleys of suffering.*

JOHN CROOK (1930–2011)

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