

DHAMMA TALAKA PAGODA





Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma

Born in Myanmar in 1929 he ordained at a local monastery as a novice at the age of twelve and showed himself to be an excellent scholar. Going on to study under several eminent learned monks, he obtained the highest degree in Pali at the age of 23 and was awarded the title of Sasanadhaja Siripavara Dhammacariya by the Myanmar President in 1953. Three years later he was awarded a state scholarship and left to study at the Sanskrit and Hindi universities in Varanasi (Benares) in India.

In 1960 he obtained the Shāstri (BA) in Mahayana Buddhism, in 1964 an MA in Sanskrit and Indian Philosophy and in 1967 a PhD. He was by then teaching in the universities and in 1967 was appointed chief editor of the Encyclopaedia of Buddhist Technical Terms. He also published several books in Pali and Hindi. His two volume commentary on the Abhidhammattha Sangaha was awarded the Kalidasa prize as one of the outstanding books of the year by the Hindi Academy in 1967. This is now used as a Buddhist textbook in many Indian universities.

He forsook this career to come and work in Birmingham in 1975. Since then he has established an international reputation as a teacher of Buddhism and Vipassana meditation and has led retreats throughout Europe and the US as well as giving talks and lectures at such universities as Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Lancaster, Zurich, Harvard, Columbia, Berkeley, Macomb and Champagne. He has also now published a number of books in English. In addition he has become known for his promotion of peace and reconciliation and has been invited to address many conferences and symposia, notably in Asia.

DHAMMA TALAKA PAGODA

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

June 26th. - 28th. 1998 (CE) 2542 (BE)

THE PROGRAMME

Friday 26th. June

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| 2.00pm - 5.00pm | Multifaith Dialogue Discussing "Devotion" according to their traditions |
| 7.00pm - 9.00pm | Teaching of the Dhamma and Meditation |

Saturday 27th. June

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| 9.00am - 11.00am | Religious Ceremonies: Prayers and chanting by representatives of the main Buddhist traditions in Britain |
| 11.00am - 12.00pm | Offering of alms-food to monks and a meal for the laity |
| 12.30pm - 1.00pm | Asian traditional procession from Pagoda to Tower Ballroom |
| 1.00pm - 4.00pm | Civic Ceremony: To take place in the Tower Ballroom, situated near the Pagoda at the Edgbaston Reservoir. |
| 7.00pm - 9.00pm | Teaching of the Dhamma and Meditation |

Sunday 28th. June

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| 9.00am - 11.00am | Transfer of Merit and offering of alms-food and gifts to the invited members of the Sangha |
| 2.00pm - 5.00pm | Seminar on Myanmar Culture, Buddhism in Myanmar and Myanmar's contribution to the development of Buddhism. |
| 7.00pm - 9.00pm | Teaching of the Dhamma and Meditation |

All events will take place in the Pagoda, except for the civic ceremony (on Saturday afternoon) which will be held in the Tower Ballroom situated near the Pagoda at the Edgbaston Reservoir.

DHAMMA TALAKA PAGODA

Buddhism in the West Midlands

The situation in the cosmopolitan West Midlands accurately mirrors the cultural ferment everywhere. There are Indian, Sri Lankan, Thai and Vietnamese monasteries in the north of Birmingham, as well as another monastery in Wolverhampton and a traditional Chinese temple in the Black Country. Two further Theravadin monasteries in Birmingham with a Thai and a Myanmar as their heads cater for Westerners; another in Warwick is headed by a Briton trained in the Thai forest tradition. Three different Tibetan schools are represented in the area and the headquarters of the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order recently moved to the city, where there has been a community of the Order for some time. In the Zen tradition Throssel Hole Abbey has recently established a branch monastery in Telford.

Originally those interested in Buddhism in the Birmingham area had formed a couple of lay societies. Following a visit to the city in 1974, however, His Holiness the

XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa recognised the potential there and asked Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma to establish a Buddhist Centre. The following year saw his arrival in England but it was not until 1978 that suitable premises were found at 41 Carlyle Road. Followers of the Tibetan and Theravadin traditions shared facilities and teachings together in harmony, until sheer weight of numbers made it necessary to buy another house. In 1981, therefore, the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara was founded at no.47 with Bhante (meaning venerable bhikku) as its head monk.

Foundations for the Future

Since his arrival in England in 1975, the majority of those who have called on Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma for teaching have been English. Impressed by this, and wishing well to the future of Buddhism in England, he realised that the teaching would only become truly established here once the British themselves took responsibility for its development. Buddhism is not a missionary religion in the sense that is usually understood. Religion cannot be

imposed from outside; it must develop in line with the culture in which it finds itself, and how best to do this can only be truly understood by people who are native to that culture. On the other hand, it is also necessary for these people to have some depth of understanding of Buddhism itself, and so they must have training and information available to them which is suitable to their cultural background and age group.

Interest in Buddhism from schools and colleges has steadily increased over the years and the Vihara has become one of the major centres in the West Midlands serving this need. As Buddhism becomes more and more an accepted part of comparative religious studies so we welcome the many groups and individuals who need information and guidance from us.

While the main users of the facilities of the Vihara are western people, the bulk of the financial support for the Vihara comes from generous donations by the Myanmar community round the country, pleased to see such keen interest in the teachings they venerate and hoping others will benefit from them as much as they. The building of the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda marks a significant stage in Buddhism's acceptance in our area.

The Pagoda in Buddhist Tradition

The pagoda is an oriental style of sacred tower. In Buddhism it is also called a stupa or caitya. The building of pagodas dates from the time of the Buddha's passing into Nibbana, around the sixth century BCE.

At that time, the Buddha's body was cremated and only fragments of the bones remained. These sacred relics were divided among the rulers who were his devout followers. They placed them in golden chambers in their respective countries and built pagodas over them so that people could pay homage and venerate them.

The pagoda symbolises peace, compassion and other exemplary qualities of the Buddha. As such, it is venerated by Buddhists everywhere. With the spread of Buddhism, pagodas were built in all those countries where it became established. The pagoda is the earthly manifestation of the mind of the Buddha and, as such, stands as a prime symbol of Buddhism.

The Dhamma Talaka Pagoda will fulfil three purposes: it will be a shrine for Buddhists to perform their traditional ceremonies, a focus where non-Buddhists can learn about Buddhism, and a sanctuary where both may find peace and tranquillity.

DHAMMA TALAK



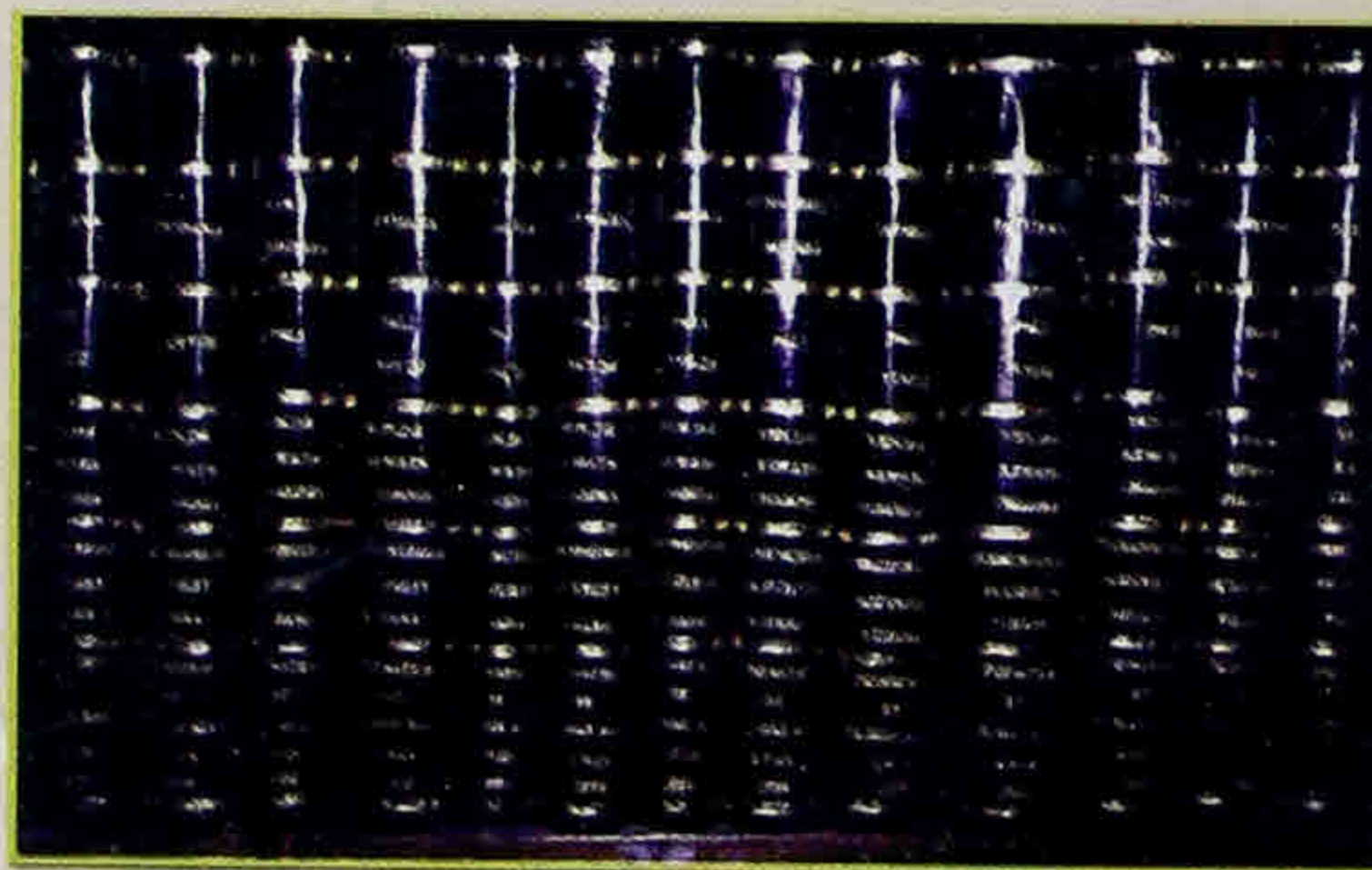
■ The marble Buddha forms the focus within the Pagoda



■ The Diamond Bud



■ The Umbrella or Crown is mounted at the apex of the Spire



■ Ancient Scriptures (Tipitaka)



■ Crystal Cha

PAGODA PROJECT



above the Umbrella



■ Hand-carved teak doors



■ Images of the 28 Buddhas line the circumference of the dome



■ Teaching Throne

The Dhamma Talaka Pagoda Project

It was in 1985 that Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma first wrote to the Birmingham City Council asking for a suitable building that could be adapted, or for land on which to build.

After we had viewed a number of other possibilities, we were offered the Osler Street site in 1990. It was on space behind the Edgbaston Reservoir once occupied by terraced houses (now demolished) and within five minutes walk of the Vihara in Carlyle Road.

The land was sold (at 10% of the market value) to the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara Trust, which has administered the building programme. Following a suggestion from Yann Lovelock that the project should have a name incorporating a reference to its location, Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma decided that it should be known as the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda: the Reservoir of Truth.

Our architect David Jones drew the basic plan for the site and Bhante obtained designs for the stupa from Myanmar. Two artists, Win Tin and Khin Zaw U, arrived from Myanmar in 1994 to start work on mouldings and other decorations, and also to help with modifications to the original plan. Sadly Khin Zaw U was knocked over in a road accident in January 1997 and had to return home; his place was taken by U Aye. Meanwhile the shell had been sufficiently completed by October 1996 for that year's Kathina Day to be held

inside in the presence of the Myanmar ambassador. Since then the dome and spire have been completed, the interior refurbished and all the decorations put in place.

The Relics

What is to be enshrined in the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda represents a fusion of the old and the new.

Firstly there are relics of the Buddha, enclosed in a crystal casket. These were once in the possession of the former royal family of Myanmar. Thibaw, the last king, was exiled by the British to Ratnagiri in India, where he was kept under supervision. There he was visited by two Myanmar monks whom he entrusted with a portion of the Buddha's relics. One of them, U Kitti, eventually passed this on to U Arsaya, another Myanmar monk living in India. In his turn, shortly before his death, he passed them on to Venerable Rewata Dhamma in 1964. When the latter travelled to England eleven years later, he left the relics on the shrine of U Nu, a former Prime Minister of Myanmar then in exile in India. After his return, his daughter Daw Than Than Nu kept them in her shrine room. With the inception of the pagoda project, Venerable Rewata Dhamma brought the relics back to England.

Many more objects have been donated by devotees to enshrine in the pagoda, following a custom that goes back to the Buddha's day. These are principally divided between the bell of the spire and a reliquary on the shrine within the pagoda. A fascinating contemporary inclusion will be a piece of the old Berlin wall that Bhante

picked up when it was being demolished in 1989.

Artefacts

The interior of the Pagoda focuses upon the marble statue of the Buddha sitting serene and peaceful in the meditation posture, the statue is from Mandalay in Myanmar. The Buddha sits on a magnificent golden throne and above him is a canopy in the traditional Myanmar style. Images of the Twenty Eight Buddhas are mounted round the inner dome of the pagoda. There are many other Buddha statues, old and new, in the pagoda. A complete set of the Theravada scriptures, the Tipitaka, together with the Commentaries, is mounted in the bookcase; there are also ancient scripts on palm leaves.

The hand carved teak doors are also from Myanmar. The parquet flooring is made from Myanmar teak. According to tradition the two lion statues at the entrance of the pagoda provide protection from evil elements. At the summit of the spire is the diamond bud, and below this the umbrella or crown.

Donations

The funding of the pagoda has been international. Since learning of the site's availability, Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma has publicised the project widely and repeatedly. There have been substantial donations, especially from Myanmar people living in the UK and in Europe, USA, Australia, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Devotees

in Myanmar have enthusiastically offered such requisites as the umbrella for the spire, the Buddha statue and throne, the carved doors and other items, as well as giving generous financial support. Due to the major problems we encountered during the building of the basic structure, we have continuously exceeded our budget and at times it was touch and go whether we would be able to proceed. However, knowing the traditional reputation of the Myanmar people for generosity, there was never any great anxiety. But such generosity is not a quality to be taken for granted and we record with much gratitude the part played by all these donors in what has been achieved.

Teamwork

The Vihara

It is evident that teamwork has been a major factor in the success of the Vihara. Many local people help Bhante in different ways including Nath Kottegoda, Denys Richards, Mark Scan and Bill Strongman. Children's classes are run by Ellen Parker. Classes for adults are led by Vajira Bailey, Ramona Kauth and Yann Lovelock. The Vihara Newsletter is compiled by Mike Regan; in previous years Karuna Bodhi had this responsibility.

We would also like to thank the following people who have supported Bhante ever since his arrival in England, and without whose support neither the Vihara nor the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda would exist. Daw Ohn Myint Aye, a founder trustee of the Vihara and currently a patron. U Khin, founder trustee and currently a patron, and his wife. Dr. Aung Myin and his wife

who have supported many of Bhante's projects over the years. U S. T. Aung, founder trustee, and his wife, who have helped initiate projects for teaching the dhamma. Dr. Mar Mar Lwin who became a trustee of the Vihara as soon as she settled in Birmingham, and has made very generous donations to its upkeep, including day to day running costs.

The present trustees of the Vihara are: Ann Lovelock, Malika Kottegoda, Dr. Mar Mar Lwin, Brian Lester, Dr. Kyaw Myint Oo, U Maung Maung Than, U S. T. Aung, Lesley Gray and Mr. Samsari Lal. Previous trustees who have resigned due to personal circumstances are: Dr. Kyi Maung, Dr. Tun Tun Hlaing, Mike Clement.

The pagoda project

The building of the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda has been made possible by a large number of people working over a long period of time, to all of whom we are grateful. Special thanks are due to those who have held the project together over the years, and without whose constant effort it could not have been realised, notably the following:-

Samsari Lal: Originally from the Punjab, he was a follower of Dr. Ambedkhar and a disciple of Venerable Dr. H. Saddhatissa. He came to Britain in 1956. When Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma arrived in England in 1975 Mr. Lal was among the first people to greet him and has worked closely with him ever since.

Dr. Mar Mar Lwin: Born in Myanmar she qualified as a medical doctor from the Institute of Medicine in Yangon (Rangoon). She has also

studied the Abhidhamma, and is a trained meditator and an upasika.

Ann Lovelock MR PharmS: British born, she became a Buddhist in 1967 and has been a disciple of the Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma since he arrived in Carlyle Road. A hospital pharmacist, she is a founder member of the Vihara and its long serving treasurer.

The artists *U Win Tin and U Aye:* There are many paintings and friezes by Win Tin at Myanmar religious sites. He has been in Britain since 1994 doing preparatory work for the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda and superintending its installation. U Aye is a famous Myanmar sculptor who has worked on temples in Myanmar and Singapore. He arrived in Britain in 1997 to replace Khin Saw U.

David Jones BSA (Hons), B. Arch RIBA: David graduated in Architectural Studies in Cardiff and went on to gain his B.Arch. with distinction in 1972. He is the supervising architect for the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda project.

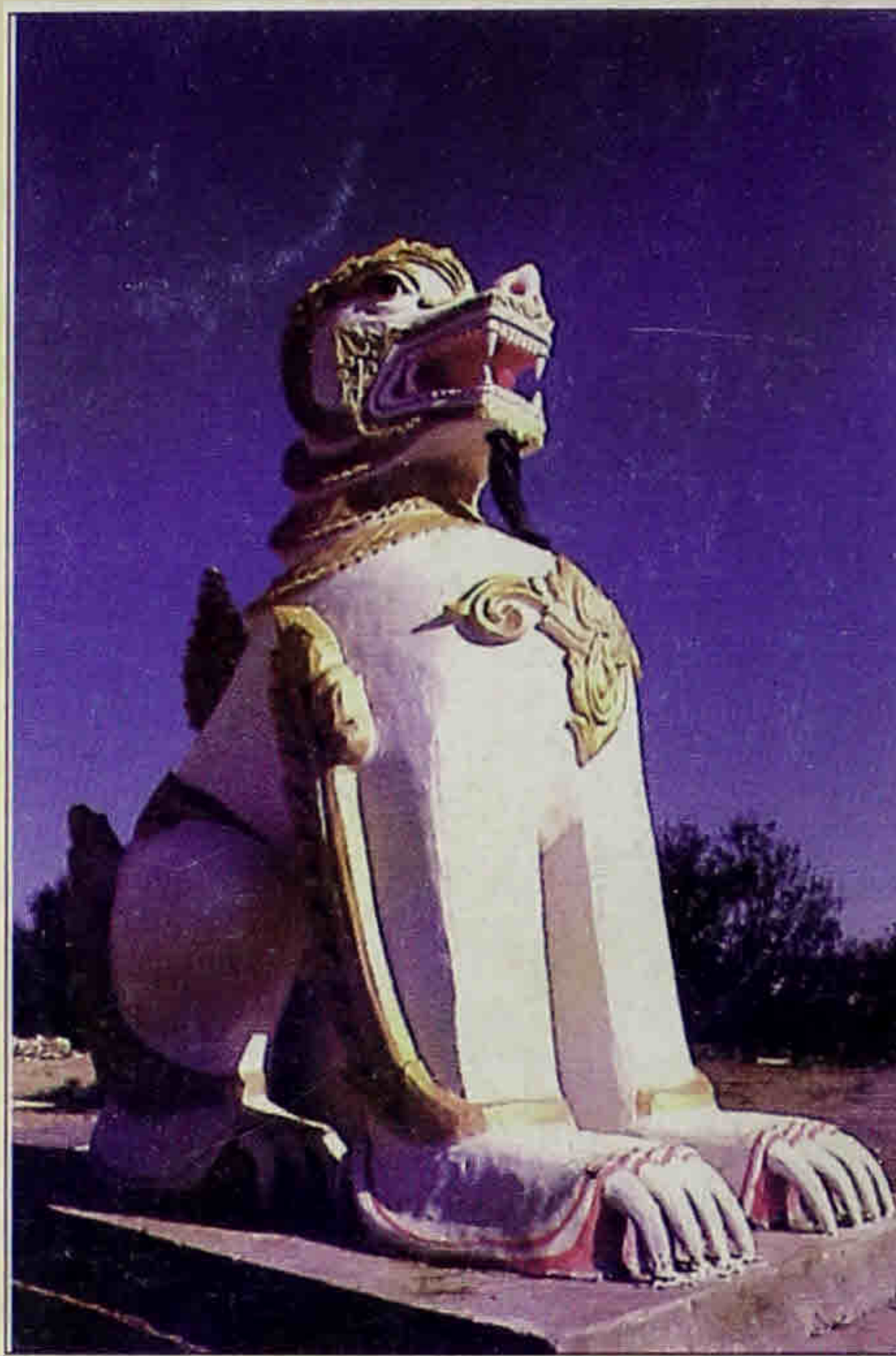
Martin Walker, LL.B: Martin obtained his degree in Law from Hull University in 1981. His interest in Buddhism started a few years before he came to Birmingham in 1992. Ever since his arrival in the city he has acted as our legal advisor for the pagoda project on a voluntary basis.

Dhamma Talaka Publications

In 1995 the Vihara launched a publishing venture, funded by Dr. Mar Mar Lwin. Income from this will be used for future publications. We have so far published three books by Venerable Dr. Rewata Dhamma: *Introduction to Buddhism*; *The First Sermon of the Buddha* (now brought out by Wisdom under the title of *The First Discourse of the Buddha*); *The Maha Paritta*.



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Stylised lions guard the entrance to the Dhamma Talaka Pagoda

Birmingham Buddhist Vihara Trust

(A Registered Charity No. 513368)

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