

Peggy: Tutor, Mentor and Friend - A Personal Reflection

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It is an honour to be asked to write a tribute for this Festschrift for Peggy Morgan in celebration of her eightieth birthday and to look back on her life and the contribution made to academia and interfaith relations.

I first encountered Peggy whilst an undergraduate at Westminster College where she was one of my tutors. She taught world religions and encouraged personal encounters with those from faith communities. This was a very interesting approach and so much more informative than simply reading about faith communities in textbooks. During the first year we visited a local synagogue in Oxford and also the Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in Great Gaddesden in Hertfordshire. Both of these visits provided real opportunities to meet and ask questions of those faith practitioners and we were made very welcome at both venues. I recall how tactfully Peggy dealt with a rather awkward question by one of my student group which prevented any offence to those hosting us. This is just one example of her open and careful approach in multi faith encounters. Peggy was my supervisor for my final year dissertation and carefully guided me in defining my topic choice and more importantly keeping me on track. She was happy to share her numerous contacts within the Buddhist community to enable me to meet and interview the Ven Dr Medagama Vajiragnana Nayaka Thera who was at that time the Chief Bhikkhu of the London Buddhist Vihara based in Chiswick, London. This proved a pivotal part of my research and I was welcomed back on several occasions to participate in ceremonies and meet other bhikkhus and many years later took part in several interfaith events based on the initial meeting which Peggy had facilitated.

During my time at Westminster I, along with other students, was introduced to the Religious Experience Research Centre which was housed on the campus. At that time Peggy was the Director and it was fascinating to learn about the history of the archive founded by Sir Alister Hardy in 1969 in Oxford. I spent some time researching the accounts of religious experiences catalogued within the archive and at that time

researchers were permitted to examine the original submitted accounts which gave them a special resonance. When Westminster College closed in 2000 the site at Harcourt Hill was leased to Oxford Brookes and became part of that university. As a result the decision was taken to transfer the archive to the University of Wales (Lampeter campus) and Peggy oversaw the relocation and establishment of the RERC in its new home.

Also during this time a new Masters course in religious experience was about to be launched, initially at Westminster College but later under the University of Wales. Peggy used her considerable experience and knowledge to write a Buddhist module for the Religious Experience MA programme. The degree was available by the time that I graduated and Peggy was instrumental in bringing it to my notice and encouraging me to continue with my studies on the part time MA programme. I duly enrolled and enjoyed the study days at both Westminster and later at Lampeter.

Peggy was an active member of the World Congress of Faiths and also supported the establishment of the International Interfaith Centre in Oxford in collaboration with the Revd Marcus Braybrooke (who was incidentally also a tutor at Westminster College) I became aware of the WCF through Peggy and later heard that The Buddhist Society was seeking a representative on the executive committee. I volunteered for the post and attended for an informal interview where to my surprise the first question was, 'so you are one of Peggy's' indicating the esteem that she was held in by those at the Society. I believe that this endorsement alone secured the post for me.

As I mentioned earlier Peggy first introduced me to the RERC archive during my time as an undergraduate at Westminster College. Peggy was very active in both the Society and Trust and attended many conferences organised in conjunction with Lampeter. She often lectured and we are fortunate to have some recordings from those conferences still available today.

I remained in touch with Peggy and we often met at interfaith events or conferences and she is also a regular attendee at the Alister Hardy Members' Day conference held annually in Oxford and has lectured and spoken at many related events.

In the present day I continue to benefit from Peggy's wisdom and knowledge of faith communities, particularly from the Buddhist perspective. She is always gracious in welcoming you to her home in Oxford and is happy to discuss new developments in religious studies or prompt you to consider new avenues of research. Most generously she will often loan books, indeed sometimes suggesting that you share these with others, rather than returning them.

In summary, I am honoured to know Peggy and have learnt so much from her own tactful interactions with those of other faiths. Writing this article caused me to recall many key moments of my life and to appreciate the influence that Peggy had in guiding me at

both Oxford and later in Lampeter whilst also supporting my membership of the WCF and AHS.

Peggy is widely known and respected in both academia and the interfaith world. However, perhaps her greatest achievement is reflected in the number of young students that she has supported over many, many years. Her gently persuasive manner which opens doors and encourages new avenues and approaches to the study of religions is a wonderful testament to her life in education which of course continues today, although she is in semi retirement. I would like to add my own best wishes and thanks and wish Peggy many more years of active and healthy life.