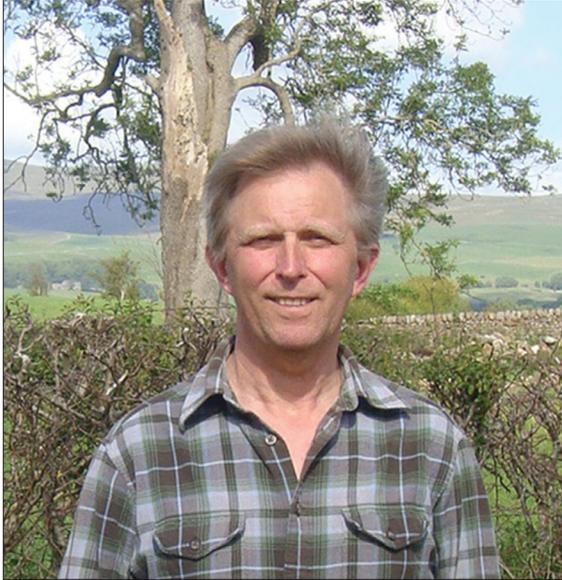


Obituary of Professor Ian Charles Harris (June 17th 1952 to December 23rd 2014)



Many people's understanding of Cambodian Buddhism, Buddhism and politics, and Buddhism and environmentalism, owe much to Ian Harris. Initially a student of Buddhist philosophy, his recent academic interests focused on the modern and contemporary history of the Cambodian monastic order, Buddhism and politics in Southeast Asia, Buddhist environmentalism, and landscape aesthetics (he was a keen organic gardener and hill-walker).

The UK Association for Buddhist Studies was founded by Ian together with Peter Harvey in 1996, after they met at a conference in Hawaii the year before. While there, it was Ian's response to Peter's suggestion that he was thinking of starting a local group of scholars of Buddhism in the north-east of the UK — 'Why not start a national group?' — that led to the development of UKABS. Ian was its first treasurer (1996–2002), later its secretary (2002–2008), and was its current president (2013–2014) until having to bow out due to his deteriorating health. Even during his periods abroad, when not formally serving on the committee, he still found time to contribute to UKABS and help with some of the conference arrangements.

Ian left school at 16, spent time working in a laboratory then did a Higher National Diploma in Science before studying Biochemistry at the University of Sussex. Having travelled overland to India twice, he started to teach himself Sanskrit. After being given a lift by David Smith of Lancaster University's Religious Studies Department, he went on to do an MA there in Religious Studies. He then did a doctorate at Lancaster, with his first book, *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Brill, 1991), being based on his doctorate. After his time at Lancaster University (1977–1982), he did a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education at the University of Cambridge and was then a teacher of Religious Studies and then Head of Department at schools in Bradford and Keighley. In 1987, his time as a Lecturer in Religious Studies at St. Martin's College Lancaster (later part of the University of Cumbria) began.

Ian developed an interest in Buddhism and environmentalism, on which he contributed a string of articles from 1991. Research on Buddhism and politics culminated in his edited volumes, *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-century Asia* (Continuum, 1999) and *Buddhism, Power and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Routledge, 2007). Working on the first of these, Ian could find no contributor for its chapter on Cambodia, so he rolled up his sleeves to do the research needed to do this himself, and realized the need for more understanding of Buddhism in Cambodia. This then became the focus of his research, leading to his *Cambodian Buddhism: History and Practice* (University of Hawaii Press, 2005). He then produced two pioneering volumes, *Buddhism Under Pol Pot* (Phnom Penh, Documentary Center of Cambodia, 2007) and *Buddhism in a Dark Age: Cambodian Monks under Pol Pot* (University of Hawaii Press, 2013). Ian also was editor of *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Buddhism: A Comprehensive Guide to Buddhist History and Philosophy, the Traditions and Practices* (Lorenz, 2009). Most recently Ian had been working on a provisional typology for Buddhism and politics and was planning further research in this field.

Ian was Professor Emeritus at the University of Cumbria and had also held visiting positions at the University of Oxford, the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, the National University of Singapore and Dongguk University, Seoul. From 2003 to 2007 he was a senior scholar at the Documentary Center of Cambodia in Phnom Penh leading a small team of researchers investigating the fate of Buddhist monks during the Pol Pot period. Some of this work has fed into the ongoing tribunal into alleged serious crimes committed by senior surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge. During 2011–2012 he was the Tun Lin Kok Yuen Distinguished Visiting Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto. More recently he had been assisting in reviving the Preah Sihanouk Raja Buddhist University, Cambodia's pre-eminent institution of monastic education. As of June 2013, he was visiting Professor of Buddhist Studies at King's College, London.

Ian was a fine man, who got on with things with a sense of humour and a wry smile. The UKABS conference in Lancaster this July will pay tribute to him. He will certainly be missed by many.

An online obituary of him by the Khyentse Foundation (<http://khyentsefoundation.org/2015/01/dr-ian-harris/>) says:

Dr. Ian Harris was our mentor and hero. He will be deeply missed by all the people of Cambodia who came into contact with him for his scholarship work on Buddhism and his unlimited wisdom. He was so kind and generous and

has touched many lives.

Pou Sovachana, Wat Unalum, Phnom-Penh, Cambodia
Organizer and teacher, Buddhist Education Peace Centre,
and friend and colleague of Dr. Harris

Ian died peacefully, surrounded by his wife, Gwen, and three children. He died of Mesothelioma, a form of lung cancer associated with exposure to asbestos. UKABS have made a donation to the Mesothelioma UK charity on Ian's behalf. Others may wish to do this individually.

'Pip pip' to Ian – to use his favourite sign-off to messages. May he go well to the next life.

Peter Harvey

Co-Founder of UKABS, Secretary 1996–2002, and President 2002–2006.

Cathy Cantwell

President of UKABS (co-opted 2014); and Secretary 2008–2014