

THE ART OF TRADITIONAL THAI MASSAGE

WHEN THE NAME THAILAND is spoken, many different images are conjured up; the sweet heady smell of incense and the tinkling of bells amid the splendour of golden temples; the exotic formality of Traditional Thai dance; the beautiful and opulent colours of hand woven silk; the delicate perfume of spicy coriander and coconut scented food; and against this background a modern economy which until recently was thriving, throwing up massive high-rise structures at a reckless speed. Its medical practice reflects this juxtaposition of the traditional and modern.

Thailand has established a good standard of modern health care with high levels of staffing in hospitals. Side by side with modern medicine, traditional methods are still widely practised. This includes traditional Thai massage, which many visitors to the country may have experienced. For those who have never set foot in Thailand, Thai massage is generally practised on a mat on the floor, with the receiver fully clothed. Gentle pressure is applied to the body and some assisted yoga stretches may be used.

Watching a master of Thai massage at work can be compared to watching a dance, so graceful and rhythmic are the movements. For people who are uncomfortable lying on the floor, a sequence can be done with the receiver seated on a chair.

During such a sequence the neck, shoulders, arms and head can be treated. This sitting sequence is particularly suitable for elderly people or for practice in the workplace.

The modern practitioners of Thai massage are continuing a tradition that has ancient roots, going back at least 2,500 years. The legendary founder of Thai medicine is believed to have been a doctor from Northern India known as Jivaka Kumar Bhaccha. He is reputed to have been a contemporary and friend of the Buddha and is still revered by Thais today as the Father of Medicine. He is accredited with introducing not only massage but also knowledge of therapeutic herbs and minerals into Thailand.

Although the exact events have been lost in the passage of time, it is clear that Thai massage has also been influenced by Chinese medicine and includes the use of pressure points, like Chinese acupuncture. Thailand population is over 90% Buddhist and a common sight in every town and city is saffron-robed Monks – indeed, most young men join the monkhood briefly.

Against this background of faithful devotion, Thai massage is inextricably linked with Buddhist spiritual practice. Over the centuries it has been taught and practised in the temples including the famous Wat Pho Temple in Bangkok.

Of course it is not necessary to be a Buddhist to practice Thai massage, or to benefit from it.

The theoretical foundation of Thai massage is based on the concept of energy lines or meridians running through the body; stimulating these meridians, promotes general well-being and the natural health process by moving the life-force energy around the body.

I first became interested in Thai massage as a result of my yoga practice. I no longer practice yoga but continue to find Thai massage extremely fulfilling and therapeutic for myself as well as my clients.

I studied with a well known teacher in London who has spent many years in Thailand. After qualifying I took off on a study trip to Thailand... but that's a whole story in itself.

I have just joined the team at the Breakespeare Clinic in Milton where I practice Thai massage and reflexology on Monday afternoons. The clinic's number is 01993 830913.

I'd be delighted to give talks and demonstrations to any local groups and societies and my number is 01993 830167

NORTH OXON AMATEUR VIDEO CLUB

Provisional programme.

June 16 Richard Simmons will talk and demonstrate the best use of various microphones that are available to us when filming or editing videos.

July 21 Eric George deals with making the best use of your video camera and how to use the different controls that are available for you to get best results.

August "Cam Pick" Jo Chadwick has invited us to a picnic at Hook Norton on a date to be arranged closer to the time.

WELL DONE JAMIE!

Jamie Cuthbertson, ten, of Shipton, is one of only twelve young people to have contributions accepted for a Blue Peter Time Capsule, to be buried at the Millenium Dome. His poem about the Cub Scouts was one of more than 10,000 entries.

He wins a portable computer and mountain bike as well as an all-expenses paid preview of the Dome with his parents in 1999. Congratulations!