

John, 72, gives hope to Indian youngsters



A PENSIONER who is transforming the lives of destitute children in India has taken a ten-year-old girl on a life-changing journey to be fitted with two prosthetic hands after hers were blown off by dynamite.

John Hunt, 72, from Hyde has been changing the lives of some of the poorest children in rural India over the last four years. In that time he has helped create more than 15 schools and homes.

His latest projects have seen him open the Janet Sheed Roberts School and a home for children with special needs and take a little girl called Bharti for a life-changing operation.

Bharti lost her hands when she was cutting the grass for her father. The knife hit a stone and created a spark, which ignited the dynamite that is used to frighten wild boar.

Mr Hunt said: "Victims of accidents and those people with disabilities are very often treated as outcasts in India and have little or no facilities or education.

"I was very keen to provide a school and a home for more than 100 of these children, many of whom are being integrated into society for the first time.

"Many of these children have Down's syndrome, club foot, cleft palate, deaf and dumbness and partial blindness."

By **Karen Bate**

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Mr Hunt, a former army captain and Marks & Spencer boss, founded the Lotus Flower Trust four years ago after witnessing the horrors facing children in Assam's railway slum.

Thousands of people attended the school's opening ceremony, which included a performance of a special dance led by Bharti.

Sarah Branquinho, who attended the opening ceremony on behalf of Women in Travel, which funded the project, and as chairman of the Lotus Flower Trust, said: "It was a simply amazing day - very emotional. It is impossible to describe the difference this will make to 100 children who have had no access to education, or in many cases to society."

On his latest trip, Mr Hunt helped dig earthquake foundations for the Guwhati Railway Children's Home, which is being built to house hundreds of children living in treacherous conditions on the railway line.

And Mr Hunt opened the Ashram Shala Savada home for 150 children of the lowest caste before visiting Rajasthan, where he is helping create a skills centre to train women and girls in leathercraft.

● For information about the charity visit lotusflowertrust.org.



Top - John Hunt at the site of the the Janet Sheed Roberts School and Home for Special Needs Children, and above, welcoming Bharti back.