

Pensioner helping to build a new life for children

Place to call my home

By Karen Bate

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A PENSIONER who is transforming the lives of destitute children in India has built an orphanage and a nunnery for youngsters on his latest trip.

John Hunt, 71, 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.

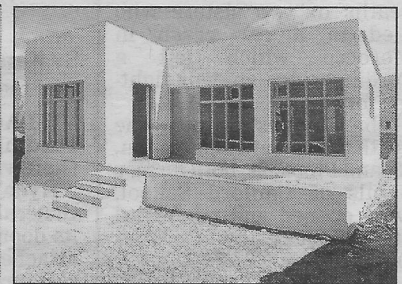
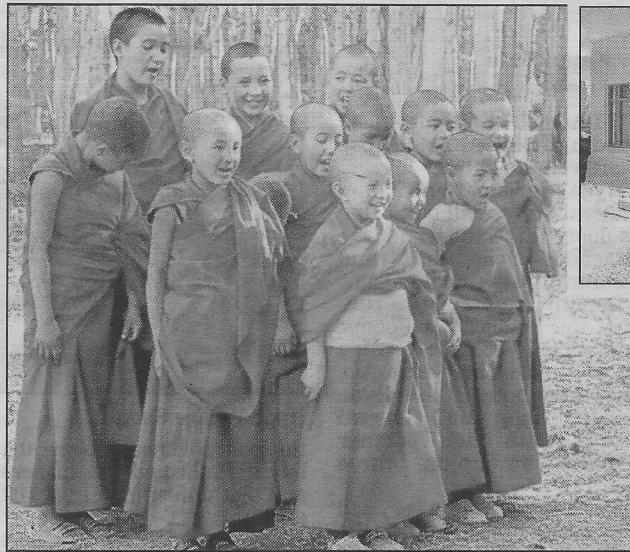
His latest projects have seen him and a group of students from St Paul's School in London build an *anganwari* – a child care centre – in a village close to Ladakh.

And youngsters from Winchester College raised £35,000 and accompanied Mr Hunt to Basgo to build a nunnery for Buddhist girls.

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.

"I was so devastated I could not speak to my wife because I was in tears," said Mr Hunt.

"Little children were living in terrible places. The only way out is education.



anganwaris. We have a big task ahead."

Mr Hunt is offering to take individuals out to India for a life-changing trip, if they can raise £1,000 to donate and pay the costs of their travel.

He said: "The work that the young people do when we go to India is phenomenal. The trips are truly life-

"*Anganwaris* are vital places and give mothers, who work on the fields or in offices, a place to leave their children while they work.

"Mothers who work in the fields strap their babies to their backs or leave their children at home, sometimes tied to their beds. An *anganwari* can stop this. They are also built next to schools, which help parents place a greater value on education.

"The local government run them and local women staff



them. They cost £8,000 to build."

The nunnery, which will cost the charity about £70,000 to build, was built to give young girls a safe home.

"We built the nunnery to give the girls a home. Their parents can no longer afford to look after them. A third of the Indian population are living below the poverty line. The problem is enormous."

Mr Hunt added: "We have been asked by the Indian government to build 97

changing and give a new perspective to one's own life.

"There are 1.2 billion people in India, and 400 million live below the poverty line. That's a third of the world's poor, in one country."

A curry night is planned for Saturday, November 3 at Hyde War Memorial Village Hall to raise funds. Tickets are available on the door.

For details about the charity ring Mr Hunt on 01425 650493 or email johnhuntnfo@lotusflowertrust.org.

