

## SLA support spreading

During Premdas's visit to the UK in April, Andy Paterson, a member of the Q II 'India venture' team (and now SLA Trustee), drove our Indian guests down into the Welsh mountains, to the small village of St Ishmael, to meet the people there who have been supporting one of NASA's rural villages, Chinnayapalem, for some years. St Ishmael first heard about NASA through Christian Aid, and wanted to 'adopt' a rural village.

When Q II were in Tuni they visited this remote jungle village and met the welcoming people, bringing them a gift of money from Wales. Some members of this small Welsh village now also support SLA: their concern and interest are much appreciated.

Many of the people on the Island of Burray, Orkney, and the Island of Tiree are also generously supporting SLA. They made Q II more than welcome in summers 1998 and 2000 during our work projects there, and showed much interest in the Indian children's home-cum-school.

Wherever members of Q II who were on the SLA project go, they talk about the project, about the Q II venture, about the problems of untouchability, about the establishment and aims of the Trust and about their Indian experience. All this helps to raise awareness.

Gillie Davidson

## Fundraising

**2001 Calendar.** Help support SLA for less than £1 a month by buying a £10 calendar of the "Children of SLA" – colour photographs taken by this summer's Q II visitors. Contact Susan Inch (Tel 447 5142) or look out for our stall after morning service at Greenbank.

**Bag-packing at Safeways.** Look out for SLA supporters on 31st December at the Morningside Road Safeways. They will be pleased to pack your bags – and accept a contribution for SLA!

**Bridge Night.** This will be held on Saturday 2nd February 2001 – full details to follow. Tickets, £10 per person, will be available from Dilys Gellatly (Tel 447 1969).

## Keeping in touch

If you did not get your own copy of this Newsletter, would you like to be added to our mailing list? If you did get your own copy of this Newsletter, did we get your address correct? Please contact Gillie Davidson (Tel 337 8999) if you would like us to modify our mailing list.

## Aims of the SLA Trust

- To raise money to feed, clothe and educate the children of SLA.
- To help facilitate visits and other work ventures with SLA. *This is an important way of keeping in contact with the ongoing work with the children. An example can be found in the visit by Andrew and Jane to Tuni in 2000, described in this Newsletter.*
- To raise awareness of the problems of untouchability.

## Patron

We are delighted that **Tom Fleming**, the renowned actor and broadcaster, has happily agreed to be our Patron.

## SLA brochure

Accompanying this Newsletter there should be a copy of our new full-colour brochure, which describes the building of the children's home, and explains the work of the SLA Trust; it also includes a return slip for donations. If you did not get a brochure, or would like further copies for distribution, contact John Murison (Tel 337 7056).



No 1 : December 2000

## Hello!

We are sending this Newsletter to all those who so kindly supported Q II's 'India Venture' in 1999; Q II is the youth group at Greenbank Parish Church, Edinburgh. We hope that, as a 'Friend of SLA', you will enjoy reading about our progress.

As you will see from our new brochure, we have taken the step of establishing the children's home-cum-school in Tuni, which we funded and helped to build in 1999, as a registered Trust, a recognised Scottish Charity. The Trust is called 'SLA' – *Scottish Love in Action* – a name chosen by the Indian director in Tuni (Dr Christopher Premdas) who thought the sound of 'SLA' was so unusual in his language, Telegu, that it would draw interest in Andhra Pradesh!

After an exciting, hard, but wonderfully rewarding time in this fascinating culture during the Summer of 1999, we returned to Scotland, and realised that it was all too easy to forget about the project. Having worked with the children and local people we realised that this would not be possible – we were involved and an ongoing commitment was required of us.

This rather daunting task of continuing to feed, clothe and educate 150 children, mostly orphans, now living safely there, is the main aim of the SLA Trust.

In the summer of 2000 two members of Q II, both

university students, went out to India to work with the children and to gather research for their theses, in geography and anthropology. They funded their own trip as well as raising money for the children – as did the original Q II team.

As you will see from Andrew Gellatly's report of their time there, they loved the children, gathered much information for their research and altogether had an amazing experience. This is one way in which the Trust hopes to keep the links strong.

Life for the people in Andhra Pradesh is hard, and many of the population do not have the 'luxury' of thinking about their future – they live from day to day, in much poverty. Despite this the people are resilient, happy, caring and, much to our delight, understood the Scottish sense of humour – assuming our translators were reporting us correctly! Certainly we always seemed to cause much laughter and great curiosity, as the "white chickens from the other side of the world"!

We feel that this project, although small-scale, is worth supporting and hope that it will continue to develop. There is much to be done, as 'untouchables' in many parts of Andhra Pradesh continue to be despised and given no education, no healthcare, no basic human rights.

We would be delighted if you were willing to continue to support our project.

Gillie Davidson



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The SLA Trustees (clockwise from top left): Brian Barron, Susan Inch, John Murison, Iain Wood, T-J Watts, Colin McRae, Andrew Paterson, Gillie Davidson (Chairperson), Dilys Gellatly.

## A visit to Tuni in 2000

In July of this year, Jane Cumming and I, two weary Scottish students, arrived at the station of a small town in Andhra Pradesh, India, after an arduous but fascinating overnight journey in an Indian train. Our short stay in the city of Chennai was a real eye-opener to Indian culture and we were taken aback by the bustle of hundreds of people in the streets and the volume and diversity of the traffic which crowded the roads, from bicycles and rick-shaws, motor-bikes and taxis to cars



*Andrew and friends dressed for performing the male, Indian, rhythmic stick dance!*

and large trucks. We had expected the streets of the small towns to have been somewhat empty in comparison but we were greatly mistaken. The town which we arrived at, Tuni, was equally busy, but with the added attraction of cows, pigs and chickens being allowed to roam freely and, in many circumstances, taking over the whole road! The town had the advantage of clean air but the humidity was intense and we broke out in a sweat just carrying our luggage off the train.

The purpose of our time in Tuni was to work at the orphanage which was funded by Greenbank Parish Church in 1999. The fund raising was carried out by the church Youth Group QII of which Jane and I are members. Twenty five of this youth group ventured out to India in the summer of 1999 and helped in the actual construction of the building which was to be home and

school for 150 children. Jane and I could not attend that trip but both jumped at the opportunity to visit "SLA" (the name of the home) and stay there for 5 weeks in the summer of 2000 working with the children and doing research for our theses (anthropology and geography).

When we arrived the orphanage looked magnificent, a gleaming white building in the intense heat. The children welcomed us with garlands and sang songs of welcome to us. All the children were desperate to get a look at the new visitors, just as we were eager to get to know each one of them.

The orphanage is situated next to a field which the children use at playtime. There are several volleyball nets there and the children have great fun playing all sorts of games, especially kabaddie. The whole complex is surrounded by walls and fences and two watchmen are employed to make sure the children are safe at all times. Situated next to the orphanage are some smaller buildings, including one called "Gillie's Cottage", in which Jane and I stayed. This cottage is named after Gillie Davidson, the QII leader who has worked so hard to get the orphanage off the ground and establish "SLA" as a recognised Scottish Trust.

It was a lovely wee place and doubled as the office for Dr Christopher Premdas (universally known simply as 'Premdas') who runs the NASA project of which he is the founder. NASA works with the local "Untouchable" people helping them, amongst many things, to raise their living conditions, which are extremely poor, bring them education and basic health care, promote social awareness and challenge their oppressors in court – untouchability is illegal but the laws against it are mostly disregarded.

The day to day routine of the children starts early in the morning when they go to wash under two little taps on an outside wall. After a rice breakfast and prayers the school day starts. There are currently only four teachers for the 150 children so the class rooms are often crowd-



*Learning to till the land: it is hoped that SLA will eventually have its own vegetable garden in the grounds.*



*Children of SLA and one of their daily chores, watering the coconut orchard planted by QII in Summer 1999.*

ed. We hope that this situation in time will change, but lack of money restricts the number of teachers who can be employed – as well as many other things.

However we were amazed at the quality of the teaching and the knowledge of the children.

After lunch and afternoon classes comes playtime when all the children take to the field to exhaust Jane and yours truly at as many games as possible – Frisby, cricket, blind's man buff, volleyball, football, and Indian dancing are all high on the agenda! After this come the chores. The boys help to irrigate the coconut orchard which was planted by the original Q II team last summer, though this generally ends up with them having water fights with each other! The trees are growing well and the coconuts will, in time, help to feed the children. The girls clean and tidy the orphanage, in between gossiping and dancing! Food, homework and then bed follow.

The building is only half finished – more funds are needed to complete it. It currently consists of just the ground floor, although there are plans for a top floor too. This would mean that the classrooms would not be so crowded and the children would have more than just one big room for the girls and one for the boys to sleep in. They sleep on the floor in tight rows, some with not even a blanket. Other priorities are doors and windows for the coming winter months: it gets considerably colder at night especially, and the children will need more protection than just a roof over their heads. While we were out there the girls were being built a wash room, but the lack of lavatories is a big problem. The children currently just use ditches in the grounds, creating hygiene problems, intensified by the heat and abundance of flies in the area. There is also the problem of snakes, so Premdas discourages

the children from going out at night. For these reasons a toilet block is desperately needed. On good days, at lunch and supper time the children eat under a tree in the grounds around which QII had helped to build a kind of platform/meeting place, but when it rains they have nowhere to go, so they line the corridors of the orphanage. There is no kitchen so the food has to be driven from Tuni, which is an added expense – a kitchen and dining room are also high on the agenda.

It is evident that housing the children has given them a good, safe home place to live and to be educated in, for which they are all very grateful. I have never seen children so happy to attend school as these orphans are. Just thinking of the joy on their faces makes us want to go back and see how they all are, how much they have grown and how they have changed. To supply the children with these necessities and ensure their comfort and safety, more funding is needed over and above the continuing costs of just feeding, clothing and educating them (which costs £15,000 a year).

My first impression of the orphanage was how wonderful it all was and how happy the children were. During our stay, new orphans arrived from local villages following the deaths of their parents and we had the joy of watching them blossom as they joined in the constant fun and laughter which we associate with the home. As we got to know the different children's personalities we could see the potential in each one and understand the opportunity which the orphanage had give to them.

Leaving was one of the hardest things I have had to do and I will never forget the love and joy that everyone showed me during my stay.

I can only hope that the home will continue to flourish and provide a safe haven with education for these children until they are ready to venture out into the wider world to start an independent life for themselves.

*Andrew Gellatly (final year Geography student at Glasgow University)*



*Clean water – an essential which many villages do not have. Jane at the inauguration of a new well – always a time for celebration.*