

# Lines with India

Summer Newsletter 2007



## Vasiammal of Kurinjinagar



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### Mareeswari's happy story



Changing children's lives in Southern India

## Who's who on the Committee

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**The AGM is coming up. Would you like to join us in the management of *Lincs with India*?**

### Can you contribute anything?

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The Executive Committee would welcome comments and suggestions about anything to do with what we do, the projects, management, future Newsletters, etc.

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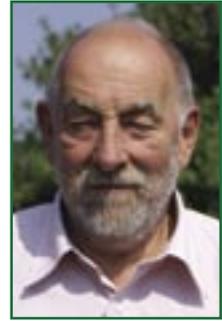
### Lincs with India AGM

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**This year's AGM** will be a bit later than usual, perhaps late August or even September. This is because we need to finalise our correspondence with **the Charity Commission** with regard to our proposed application for registered status. In any event, we are probably going to change our constitution to broaden our management team and we shall be giving members at least three weeks notice of the meeting. *Jim Needley*

# CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

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This year started well with the members trip to India. A report appears elsewhere in this Newsletter in an article by Frances Pankhurst. It is so pleasing that so many new members are taking the opportunity to visit the projects to better understand and appreciate the value of the work we support.

Several members of the January group individually undertook to find the funding for a number of unfinished and new projects at Sdetland. Special thanks to Nigel Thomas. He has funded the completion of the new cookhouse, staff room and store building (now fully operational). And, other travellers promised to find funding for the shortfall in the cost over budget of erecting a culverted bridge over the (monsoon) flood area in the roadway to Stedland, for a hand operated tricycle for one of the severely disabled members of the SDET staff, for much needed concrete paths, ramps and equipment for a village nursery school.

Ignatius supplied us with competitive building estimates and information to be considered by the Committee and we were persuaded of the paramount need for a new boys hostel at Stedland costing upwards of £11,000. The building work is now well underway, the footings are in with the brickwork (handmade of course) to ground floor level (elevated to deal with the monsoon flooding). We hope that by the time of the next visit in January 2008 the project will be completed with the hostel in use.

We have had a great boost to our funds (£1,200) from the Julie Felix concert (on the 2nd March) organised and sponsored by the Rotary Club of Lincoln Colonia. The promise for these funds came at a crucial time in our planning of the financial budget over the next year during the building of the hostel. Best of all, the evening itself was a lot of fun.

A very big thank you too to Jim and Pauline Murray who entertained a hundred or so members and friends to Sunday lunch on their lawn at Dunston on Sunday, 3rd June. Our hosts, the lunch and the friendship were fabulous (and the weather helped!). We do not know the details yet [ED. We do now (see p. 5)] but, doubtless, the objects of our charity will benefit significantly. Well done everyone connected with the day!

*Grant Allan*

**The next fundraising event is a Pig and Lamb Roast at the newly restored Alford Manor House on Saturday, 28th July. John Roddam's page has the details. I hope to see you there. Bring a friend or two!**

# VASIAMMAL OF KURINJINAGAR

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**Vasiammal is an orphan.** She is the only child of Selvam and Kamatchi, displaced tribal people from a region at the foot of the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu re-settled in the village of Kurinjinagar (one of the tribal settlements supported by SDET). She is thought to be eighteen months old. Nobody knows for sure (since the tribal people do not use a calendar of any kind).

**Like many of the villagers,** Vasiammal's parents eked out their living collecting and trading wild hill produce. One day, last October, when Vasiammal was about ten months old a tragedy took the life of her mother, Kamatchi, who was out working with her husband. She was collecting wild honey from a tree. Selvam said that she fell and was killed. The only other witness was Vasiammal.

**Inexplicably,** Selvam abandoned the child in the forest and disappeared. The baby was found and brought back to the village to be looked after by Andi (pictured) and Vellaiammal. Andi is Selvam's grandfather (aged around 60). That puts him as Vasiammal's great-grandfather. Vellaiammal is Andi's second wife (aged about 65). Ignatius thinks that Selvam, her father, and Andi, her great grandfather, are her only living relatives.

**Andi and Vellaiammal** barely have the means to support themselves (and could not pay for the food the baby needed). They only rarely now are able to go into the hills to collect herbs to sell to the plains people although, among his people, Andi is regarded as an astrologer! But, as poor as the tribal people are, the village had rallied to fund the cost of milk and food for Vasiammal.

Ignatius says that villagers regarded Kamatchi's death and Selvam's abandoning of Vasiammal as suspicious. They say that Selvam had questioned Kamatchi about his paternity of Vasiammal. To fuel the rumours, Selvam turned up in another tribal settlement with another woman.

**“The January visiting group left SDET with funds to ‘drip feed’ the cost of Vasiammal’s care. The cost of Rs.300 per month is less than £1 per week”**

The January visiting group left SDET with funds to ‘drip feed’ the cost of Vasiammal's care. The cost of **Rs.300 per month is less than £1 per week.** We left Rs.6,000 which will take care of the situation until well into next year. This could not be the end of the story, could it?

Selvam returned to Kurinjinagar intending to take Vasiammal to his new home. He had learned of SDET's support for her. However, the villagers have set themselves against him. They returned the little girl to Andi and Vellaiammal. They have told

Ignatius that, because of his neglect of Vasiammal, she should stay in the village for her safety and wellbeing.

Doubtless, *Lincs with India* will be following this little girl's life with special interest. Of course, it is not for us to intervene in child custody or guardianship issues. If necessary, we shall encourage Ignatius to take advice. Meanwhile, we are on Vasiammal's side and perhaps, in due course, there will be a place for her at the girls hostel and school at Chokkalampatti. This, surely, will give her the opportunity to make the best of herself from a very difficult start.



*Geoff Allen*

*Vasiammal*

## LUNCH ON THE LAWN

*5th June*

Sir, may we, through the Summer Newsletter, express our thanks to everyone who contributed to the success, last Sunday, of our lunch on the lawn which has raised £2,000 for the *Lincs with India* projects.

To everyone who attended, to those who could not attend but sent a donation, to Malcolm and Margaret Miller who, having donated most of what they sold, ran the shop in the garden and raised £200, to Agnes and Eve (our Polish helpers) who gave up their Sunday for us, and, last but not least, to our family. Thank you all very much. *Jim and Pauline Murray*



[Ed. And thank you, Jim and Pauline]



*Jim and Pauline Murray*

# 'THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES'

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A personal account of the members visit to India, January 2007

**The adventure** began the moment we landed at Trivandrum airport, which seemed to be in a state of permanent transition, with its bamboo scaffolding, hand painted signs and all of two planes on the runway. I thought I knew what to expect but the journey to our Kerelan hotel was an eye opener – the heat, the noise, the dust, the rubbish, the colour and the smells – a real assault on the senses!

**The hotel** (on what is imaginatively called Poovar Island) was set in gardens amid coconut palm groves, overlooking a lagoon with a long sandy beach and the Arabian Sea beyond. From here we took a boat trip through the Kerala backwaters, a network of quiet canals winding inland from the coast where we saw a fascinating array of birdlife and people living on the margins. Then, having gatecrashed a wedding at a catholic church with a boat on its roof, we visited a fish market at a quayside and took an interesting walk from the colourful, in sight and smell, fishing village of Visinjam to the small resort at lighthouse beach in Kovalum - a beautiful bay with busy little shops and restaurants on the sea front a few yards from the high waterline. We watched teams of fisherman pulling in their nets, a good catch of wriggling, shimmering silver which was immediately sold on the beach. Four hours heavy work for over twenty men made 2,400 rupees – about £25!

**Leaving Kerala** we wound our way by coach across the Western Ghats (a mountain range dividing this state from

Tamil Nadu) to Madurai.

This all day drive made one appreciate the size of the sub-continent, for after the hills the road straightened, disappearing into the distance across

a seemingly endless plain. We passed through many villages, where life exists in the red dust of the roadside verges. Buying, selling, repairing, cooking, washing, shaving, playing all took place here, among small workshops and shops with their crates of chickens and produce (and of course the cows and buffalo hugging the shade). A particular memory of the journey was the use of the main road as a threshing floor for rice and millet – traffic, particularly lorries, is very useful for separating grain from chaff!

**Madurai** is a hive of activity only ever experienced in India. Its streets are clogged with a noisy mob of motorcycles, rickshaws, trucks, buses, cars and cows all competing for space with a sea of humanity. It is not unusual to see a family of six on one



*Frances Pankhurst*

motorbike – or even three live goats; and a two-seater autorick holds as many as possible, we counted ten young men! Shop and market traders line the street with piles of fish, fruit, spice and gleaming ironmongery (water pots and cooking vessels).

Madurai was our base for our visits to **Sdetland**, the main reason for our trip. Here '*Lincs with India*' supports 37 boys in a purpose built hostel and 20 girls in rented accommodation in nearby **Chokkalampatti** village. The high spot of the tour was to meet the children and their staff. We were all struck by how very happy the boys and girls seemed and how proud and smart they were in their green and cream uniforms. They attend the village Primary School (supported by *Lincs with India*) where we were welcomed by a concert of children's songs in English. Money is needed here to build ramps to the classrooms and provide equipment for a nursery classroom, which was very bare.

We visited one of the First Aid Medical Centres supported by *Lincs with India*. This is small but gives the only means of access to basic medical attention for the

poorest people in the region, including vaccinations for TB and minor injuries. Funds support a part-time doctor, nurse, medicines and equipment.

**It was upsetting** to see the disabled children (physical and mental) at the day centres at Sdetland and **Srivilliputhur** which *Lincs with India* has provided limited support for. But, as disturbing as it to see the poor children receiving much needed care, this is matched by admiration for the dedication of the teachers, physiotherapist and speech therapist.

More cheering was the trip to the **Sdet Computer Centre** where, in a tiny room, a Saturday class is held to teach IT skills. Apparently some thirty of the students are now in work.

Cont...

“We were all struck by how very happy the boys and girls seemed and how proud and smart they were in their green and cream uniforms.”



“much has already been achieved, Lincs with India has made a difference”

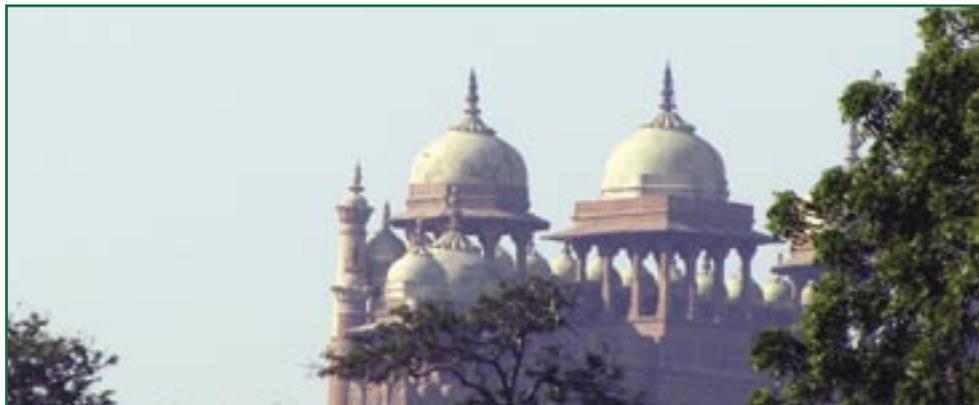
**The emotional rollercoaster** continued with our visit to the tribal settlement **Kurinjnagar**. Originally a hill tribe of hunter gatherers, the people have been resettled in a government village. The houses are of shoddy construction and the village seemed without purpose. However, the **Balwadi** (pre-school group) was flourishing and the children enjoyed showing off their skills. It was here that we met baby **Vasiammal** and heard her tragic story.

**We had a celebratory last day** at Sdetland with a ceremonial opening of the new kitchen and staffroom block and a communal al fresco lunch with the children. So, we left knowing that there

was still much to be done (the current major project being the new hostel for the boys) but with a sense that much has already been achieved **and that Lincs with India has made a difference.**

**Our second week** was entirely different, travelling the classic tourist route of the Golden Triangle – **Delhi, Agra and Jaipur**. The contrast between the vast open plains of Tamil Nadu and the dark, claustrophobic alleys of **old Delhi**; between the ramshackle buildings of the old city and the elegant, spacious symmetry of Lutyens designed **New Delhi** was quite disconcerting. I loved the bicycle rickshaw ride through the narrow, teeming alleyways of Old Delhi, the darkness lit up by the scintillating colour of the sari shops and sheet array of sequins, ribbons and trimmings. I loved the tranquillity and simplicity of **Mahatma**





**Ghandi's memorial**, in the San Ghat gardens on the bank of the River Yamuna.

We visited many mosques and temples on our trip but the most famous of all the mogul riches is of course the **Taj Mahal** at **Agra**. Described as 'a poem in white marble' it is wonderfully and painstakingly inlaid with precious and semi-precious stones, taking some 20,000 workers 22 years to build. Beyond Agra is the ghost town of **Fatehpur Sikri**, built by the Maghul emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century, but almost immediately abandoned through lack of water. Today the red sandstone palace and court complex stands

almost intact, but I found it quite an eerie place, a forlorn relic of a past empire.

Our last stop was **Jaipur**, where the highlight was the elephant ride and visit to the wonderful **Amber Fort**, again sixteenth century. The rugged exterior belies its inner magnificence and beauty, with mirrored and inlaid work in precious and semi-precious stones and colourful, intricately painted walls, a fusion of Mughal and Hindu styles.

They say the travel broadens the mind. This trip to India has been an experience, an education, but above all a privilege. Thank you to all who made it possible.

*Frances Pankhurst, Louth*

## FROM THE SPONSORSHIP SECRETARY

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Thank you to all of you who sponsor children. At the moment all the children are sponsored with the exception of one teenage boy. There are 34 boys sponsored and 20 girls. However, as soon as the new hostel is finished Ignatious will be keen to fill it. This will mean that there will be

an extra 15 children to sponsor. If anyone would like to sponsor a child please let me know as I intend to keep a waiting list of potential sponsors and allocate children to them in list order.

*Maggie Allan*

# ENFORCED DISPLACEMENT OF THE TRIBAL PEOPLES

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In her account of our January 2007 trip, Frances mentions our visit to the **tribal settlement, Kurinjinagar**. Here, we were charmed by the children at one of the pre-school 'balwadis' and entertained by them dispatching with glee a large bundle of sugar cane (see picture) which Ignatius recommended we should buy for them on route rather than the bag of sweets we had in mind. And, of course, this is where we were introduced to and heard the story of Vasiammal of Kurinjinagar.

For me, Kurinjinagar was a very sad place. Not because the people there are so poor. They certainly are as poor as any we see



on our travels anywhere. It's something else. The village comprises a few rows of houses, a kind of 'social housing' I suppose. The State Government funded buildings are of concrete (evidently, substandard concrete). Virtually, every other one is derelict with its concrete slab roof caved in. Those occupied seemed to be in various stages of disrepair, sometimes woefully so. The contrast with the (much more dignified) mud brick and banana leaf roofed homes of other, just as poor, villages in the region could not be starker.

The difference perhaps, as Ignatius explained, is that the tribal people of Kurinjinagar do not want to be there. These are displaced people. Ignatius led us just a short walk out of the settlement to a viewing area with a panoramic view of the forested slopes of the lower regions of the Western Ghats (a mountain range running north/south and separating the 'green' state of Kerala with its palm tree lined beaches, its agriculture, tea and spice plantations from the vast barren plains of Tamil Nadu).



“After the formation of the State Government Forest Department the tribal people have been gradually driven out from their forest homes.”

In Tamil Nadu the percentage of tribal people is about 1% of the total population, according to the recent surveys. There are 36 races represented in the tribal people here. In this, Kurinjinar, region the tribal people enjoyed life in the forest with limited needs. After the formation of the State Government Forest Department the tribal people have been gradually driven out from their forest homes. This is in the name of ‘forest conservation’ although, apparently, deforestation on a massive scale has taken place. Certainly, we saw that the roads are busy with huge timber laden trailers.

Ignatius says that these tribal people have, or should have, protection under

the law. But, for all practical purposes, they have lost their birthright to the forested area. I suppose it could have been quarrying or mining, the building of a dam, some industrial process or other but it just happens to be the demand for timber. Apparently, the people of the plains (the Tamil plains that is) treat the tribal people as being of the lowest caste. Consequently, or in any event, they struggle to adapt to any kind of work other than as they have known.

Ignatius sums it up (in his words):

- they have lost their properties;
- they have lost their freedom;
- they have lost their jobs;
- they have lost their income;
- they have lost their status;
- they have lost their knowledge;
- they have lost their health;
- they have lost everything.

This is the background to the SDET scheme to try to help the deprived and underprivileged children of the region

*Geoff Allen*

## THE NEW BOYS HOSTEL UPDATE

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The seeds were sown a year ago. Plans (sketched initially by our Brian) followed by architects in Tamil Nadu, and so on, took several months and the Committee members on the January 2007 visit (Grant, Maggie, Patsy and Geoff) met with Ignatius to collect and review four builders estimates for the job. More plans and another quote later and, back in the UK, the full Committee of Lincs with India met on the 21st February and gave SDET the green light.

The new hostel will cost *Lincs with India* the pounds sterling equivalent of about

£11,500 which will stretch us but the Committee is satisfied is within our means.

Work started on the 18th April. We had to provide 20%, £2,240, in advance for materials. The building has substantial footings and building has progressed to ground floor level (in practice a metre above the ground – to allow for the effects of the few monsoon days of the year) and we have paid the second 20%, £2,240. Everything is presently on course for the building to be completed in time for the January 2008 visitors to witness the official opening. We shall see.



## SECRETARY'S REPORT

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**The dilution and delegation** of my former duties, as reported in the last edition of the Newsletter, has continued apace. **Marjorie Barr**, my understudy, now deals with all incoming photographs and acts as Assistant Secretary, **Geoff Allen**, with a good deal of help from his daughter **Jude Kenney** now edits,

publishes and distributes the bi-annual Newsletter, **John Roddam** oversees fundraising, **Maggie Allan** deals totally with sponsorship and **Roger Woodrup** continues as our Treasurer.

We are delighted to have had the offer of services from another member, **Claire Patterson**, a website designer

who is bringing her professional skills to the group and will shortly be putting us on the world wide web. This year, as reported elsewhere in this edition, our principal capital project is the funding of the building of **the boys new hostel at Stedland**. **Geoff** has taken under his wing the financial control of the project which will cost us about £11,500. Then there is the matter of our status as a charity which **Geoff** has reopened in correspondence with **the Charity Commission** and this will be taken forward at this year's AGM by another of our solicitor Committee members, **Jim Needley** of Louth.

I see my role in the management team of *Lincs with India* principally now as one of co-ordinating the efforts of the other members of the Committee and in handling the day to day correspondence with SDET's **Ignatius Amalraj** about the application of the funds we provide. [Ed. in the modern world Brian, this job is called **Chief Executive**]

“So far I have given 62 talks about our work to a variety of audiences”

I have however also retained the role **propagandist** and have bookings for presentations stretching well into next year. So far I have given 62 talks about our work to a variety of audiences from Primary Schools to University of the Third Age groups. Whilst I hope to be able to continue with this work, I am grateful to those members who have also given talks advocating the support of our work.

Most of our new members are recruited by means of these presentations and it is important that these continue. Incidentally, thank you to **Chris Pankhurst**, one of this year's India visitors who, using his professional skills, surveyed the Sdetland grounds and has produced a plan with photographs which will be of enduring use and value to us.

I also hope to continue to act as **Membership Secretary**. We now have some 300 members and the number continues to grow steadily. The membership fee of £5. may, at first sight, appear insignificant but more often than not it is accompanied by a donation. This stream of income is the basic lifeblood of our charity from which everything else flows.

**Perhaps all those reading this would try to recruit a new member during the coming year and with this in mind our Newsletter publication sponsors have paid for extra copies of this Newsletter. If you receive an extra one please pass one copy to a friend or neighbour.**

Every new member boosts our income but the added benefit is that every now and then a new member appears who, in some way or other, is able to bring a significant contribution to our work by helping with the development or management of our Association. This way you are supporting **some of the most underprivileged children in the world**.

*Brian Harrison, Secretary*

# MAREESWARI (in memory of Rotarian Kevin Fawcett)

## A sad story with a happy ending

**Early in 1993** the International Children's Trust offered for sponsorship a 9 year old girl called Mareeswari who was thought to be both deaf and dumb. The girl, her two brothers and her widowed mother were living with grandparents in a small thatched house in the village of Inam Karisalkulam.

**Kevin Fawcett, a member of the Rotary Club of Alford and Mablethorpe,** was moved by Mareeswari's situation and accepted her sponsorship in the name of the Wine Bar in Mablethorpe which he owned and managed. Not only did Kevin provide support for the girl and her family but he also arranged for her to be seen by a Consultant who conducted an audiogram. This confirmed that the girl was profoundly deaf. However, it was only because Mareeswari had never heard sound that she was unable to speak.

**Treatment,** which involved, as our Indian agent at the time reported, 'fitting hearing aids to her both ears' resulted in Mareeswari being able to hear some sound for the first time. Since then she has learnt to speak sufficiently well to obtain employment in a local match factory.

**Sadly,** shortly after the girl's treatment, **Kevin Fawcett died at a very early age.** A new sponsor was found to continue the family's support. And, it was also discovered that **Kevin's Wine Bar had collected £297** for Mareeswari's benefit. The Executors of Kevin's Will were good enough to pass this money to me which



*Mareeswari*

I invested in Indian stock on her behalf. I was able to see Mareeswari during my annual Indian visits and, once she reached adulthood, she was happy for me to continue to hold the money for her.

**In April** this year I heard from Ignatius that a marriage had been arranged for Mareeswari and she wished to have the money to defray the costs of the ceremony (and I imagine, perhaps, her dowry). By this time the money had more than **doubled to £613.59** or approximately Rupees 51,000 and this was sent to India through **SDET**. After Ignatius had consulted Mareeswari and her family it was agreed that she should receive half now in cash and the remainder would be deposited in an interest bearing account in her name at the Pandyan Gama Bank in nearby Krishnankovil.

**Mareeswari** (now in her early twenties) can now both hear and speak and, as the picture shows **she has just married Annaraj**. He has a steady job as an electrician at a Spinning Mill in Rajapalayam and, thanks to Kevin, she now has money in the Bank to provide some security for her for the future.

**Kevin would have been delighted with the happy ending to this story.**

*Brian Harrison*

# FUNDRAISING (with the emphasis on fun)

Well, what a year it has been and it is only June as I write.

**Thanks to The Rotary Club of Lincoln Colonia**, we have had the Julie Felix concert in March which raised £1,200. for what we do. This was a great night with a full house and our **thanks to Des Butler**, a member of both *Lincs with India* and the Colonia club who masterminded the whole thing.

Then, only last week, we had the garden party hosted at Dunston by Pauline and Jim Murray, another *Lincs with India* and Lincoln Colonia Rotarian, which raised £2,000. A fantastic effort thoroughly enjoyed by everyone, perfect in every way including the weather. Well done Pauline and Jim.

**Back in Alford**, at the historic and recently restored **Manor House** there will be a hog (with a lamb too) roast event with live music on **Saturday, 28th July** which I hope will be well supported. **Tickets £10 from Geoff Allen 01507 466843 (email ga2@tinncriddle.co.uk) or Grant Allan 01507 462384.**

I am delighted to report that there will be another garden party before the summer ends. **Kate Pike**, one of this year's visiting party to India, has kindly agreed to open her house and garden for lunch on **Sunday, 9th September - 12.30 for 1.00 p.m.** The venue is **7 Church Lane, Sedgebrook, near Grantham, NG32 2EU. Tel: 01949 843386.** The cost is just £10 per person which includes a glass of

wine. So, give Kate a ring, or just pop a cheque in the post with a covering note of who you are.

What is particularly good about Kate's party is that it is in an area of Lincolnshire that is virgin territory for *Lincs with India*. Let us hope that we get some new members as well as having a very enjoyable afternoon.

Would you like to host a coffee morning, a garden party or event to raise funds? This is not a competition to see who can raise the most money. These gatherings are relaxed meetings of like minded people which help to spread the message about what we do and attract more members and supporters.



**If you would like to discuss any ideas you might have please give me a ring on 01522 789161. Now is the time to book your event for 2008!!**

Thank you for your support and I look forward to seeing you at the AGM

**John Roddam**

**Tel: 01522 789161**

**Email: john@lincswithindia.org.uk**

# A POSSIBLE NEW PROJECT

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**Ignatius** has been running two centre's for disabled children (presently up to 55) including one at Srivilliputhur.



Until now, they have been financed by the International Childrens' Trust and we have only helped in a minor way, with equipment and transport for the children. Judged by our standards here, these centres are modest but, in this very poor area of the world, Ignatius and his staff are clearly doing very valuable work providing respite for the parents of these children and care and attention to the children themselves. Ironically, however, just as these centres have achieved recognition in the form of Special School status from the State government, the funding from ICT has dried up. We have given some emergency funding to take tide them over for a very short period and we are considering ways in which we might be able to form a kind of sponsorship scheme to secure the continuation of this important work. Thank you all on behalf of the children we are already helping but **can you help us help these handicapped and disabled children?**

*Grant Allan*

*Ignatius with a disabled boy from the Special School threatened with closeure*

**All the costs of design, publication and distribution of this Newsletter have been sponsored to avoid any cost to our charity.**

**Lincs with India - Changing children's lives in Southern India**