

India Twinnage Visit to Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Mangalore

by Adrian Abel & Stephen Hogg, from 15th January to 1st February 2016

Taking an overnight flight via Dubai with Terry Brown, Marie Branch, Adrian Abel and Stephen Hogg, we were met at Cochin airport on Sat 16th January by Bro Johnson Varghese, Indian National President, Bro K Francis, National Secretary, Bro P I Joseph, National Vice President, and several local members. After a fairly brief meeting to make introductions and discuss the itinerary for the next two weeks we made preparations for the visiting team to split into pairs. Terry and Marie were to visit the North East region of India, and Adrian Abel and Stephen Hogg to visit the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, together with the city of Mangalore which is just over the boundary into Karnataka state. The report of the visit to the North East by Terry and Marie has been published separately, and this account records the visit by Adrian and Stephen in the south.



Adrian and I boarded a sleeper train from Angamaly Station, near to Cochin airport, for the overnight journey further south to Nagarcoil in Tamil Nadu. We were met from the train at 6am by Bro Soundararaj, another National Vice President, and Bro James, our driver. After attending mass in St Francis Xavier Cathedral we drove to our first meeting at St Assisi conference in Kottar CC. We were informed of activities of this conference, which was having its meeting after Sunday mass. (It seems to be very common in India to have the conference meeting each Sunday after

mass.) As at all meetings, Adrian and I were invited to speak to the group about the work of the Society in E&W, and our Twinnage work. There are 109 conferences in Kottar CC and 25 are twinned with E&W. This CC runs a Home for the Aged and a Home for the Sick near the Medical College Hospital, Asaripallam.

We were quickly whisked away from this gathering as 5 more visits had been planned for us during our first day. Our second meeting was at The Ozanam Tailoring Centre in Utharamcode, part of Thuckalay CC, where we were greeted by a large gathering of about 140 people. This Centre was sponsored by Shrewsbury CC and had been opened in 2009. There was a formal gathering in a large hall and an opening address by Bro. Iyathurai, Pres. Thuckalay CC. After hearing about the work of the centre we were invited to present Student Sponsorships to some of the young people. Also, the Jubiloan scheme is still working well and we presented quite a number of Jubiloans to the beneficiaries. Following this we were given a tour of the facilities in the Training Centre. Typewriting (keyboard) and computer skills are also taught here. There are currently 25 students receiving computer training, 15 students on keyboard skills and 5 women on the tailoring course. This centre has been approved as a Study centre for distance learning from a Government University. Photographs were on display of a previous visit made by Vincent Naylor and Jim McDaid. There are 88 conferences in this CC and 24 are twinned with E&W. The CC President confirmed



that all twins do receive their twinnage grant. After taking some refreshment through straws from a coconut, as we did at nearly all our meetings, we were quickly moved on as we had to travel to our next appointment.

In the early afternoon we arrived at the relatively new church of St Alphonsa, Kaduvakkuzhi, in Marthandam CC. The Parish Priest, Fr Stephen, was waiting with the conference members and their families. This conference is twinned with one in Princes Risborough. The church is

undergoing extensive work around the grounds. Some of the children were keen to show us some of their traditional local dancing. The pattern of listening to a speech about the work of the conference, and then responding with information about the Society in E&W was now established. This took some time because the local language is Tamil and very few people speak English, so translations had to be done. Marthandam CC has 81 conferences, 14 are twinned with E&W. They report that the Jubiloan scheme is still very successful, and they had recently given out 13 more loans. The CC Pres reported that each conference gets Rs 3,400 per quarter from twinning. As we were now behind schedule we endured another journey at speed over very bad roads. The major flooding in October and November last year in large areas of Tamil Nadu had done significant damage to many roads.

Our 4th meeting of the day was at Infant Jesus conference, Iykianagar, in Kuzhithurai CC. This was held in another relatively new church on a hill overlooking a Rubber Plantation which is the main agricultural crop in these areas. Unfortunately, the price of rubber has fallen considerably in recent years so the return for farmers is greatly reduced and this often means a loss of livelihood for many labourers. Hence, the conference members are helping these very poor people. St Patrick's, Southport sponsored a project here last year for the beneficiaries to set up small business's. Money has been paid back from the first group, and a second group of beneficiaries has just been funded to set up their schemes. There are 120 conferences in Kuzhithurai CC, and as with all other conferences in this area their main work is the visiting of 'adopted' families each week. The CC is building 9 houses for the poorest of the poor, and expects to hand over the keys to the recipients later this year.

We arrived around 7.30pm at our 5th meeting of the day at St Xavier conference, Kaisalavilai in Thuckalay CC. The people had waited patiently for us and it was now dark. There are 3 conferences here, Men's, Women's and Youth. We were again greeted very enthusiastically with garlands and banners. There is a lot going on in these 3 conferences and Fr Thomas, parish priest, is obviously supporting and encouraging the work of the conferences. A tailoring project is ongoing here where women are



given a sewing machine and are taught how to use it. They can then do repair work on clothing and make garments to earn a living. The cost of the sewing machine is slowly paid back by the beneficiary to the conference and once fully paid for the conference can then supply another machine to a new beneficiary. We were asked to present 6 new sewing machines to local women who were being helped. The Jubiloan scheme has been successful here as well and we presented Jubiloan money to about a dozen beneficiaries.

These conferences, as well as looking after the poor and needy people, have also embarked on a programme to look after the poor and needy earth. They have read and understand 'Laudato Si'! We were therefore invited to plant 3 trees in the grounds of the church (in the dark!) not only to commemorate our visit, but to help the local environment. We then travelled to a very large new educational college, St Alphonsa, which had been officially opened that day. The buildings were very impressive and the first students were starting the following day. A meeting had been arranged with the Syro Malabar Bishop who was still at the college. He had made a visit to England to support the Syro Malabar priests here. This Bishop is very supportive of the Society and every year on the Sunday after 27th September he arranges for a collection in all his churches to help the work of the local SVP conferences. We then managed to get a bite to eat in a local presbytery before arriving at our overnight accommodation at 11.30pm. What an

experience we had had that day!



Our first visit on the next day, Monday 18th, was to the shrine of Blessed Devasagayam Pillai, who was a Hindu who converted to Christianity in the 18th C, and was subsequently tortured to death over 3 long years by the local King because of his conversion. The shrine was on the route to our visit to Child Jesus conference, Santhinagar, in Palayamkottai CC, which is twinned with St Wilfred, Bishop Auckland, and they exchange correspondence through email. After the meeting with this conference, which included members of

Palayamkottai CC and was held in the open air, Adrian was again invited to present sewing machines to 3 beneficiaries. We were introduced to a number of beneficiaries and 'adopted' families who had been invited to the meeting, and all seemed very grateful for what had been done for them. The conference supplies rice, dhal, clothes, cooking oil and toiletries, as well as medical care, to these families. There are 580 'adopted' families in the whole of Palayamkottai CC. Following this we drove towards the centre of the town to visit a very impressive sewing machine workshop run by the Society. There were 12 students on a 6 month course in this workshop, and when the students graduated they had some exceptional skills with the sewing machine, and were able to make all sorts of soft toys etc to sell. We then went into the Diocesan centre and school next door for our meeting. As with nearly all meetings we started with a prayer song, before the speeches to the assembled group. As we were on a school site the children had been prepared to do two traditional Indian dances in elaborate costumes, accompanied by loud music. Lunch was taken in a room next to the Sewing Machine workshop, and then we were able to inspect a very small minibus style ambulance / freezer box that the CC funds and operates, which is decorated in Society logos.

We then left for our afternoon appointment at St Anne's conference, Rajakrishnapuram in Tuticorin CC. This conference is in a rural area and is twinned with Birmingham CC. The members told us that they 'were getting immense help from them over the last 15 years'. We had our meeting in a building that turned out to be the Ozanam Medical Clinic. The members constructed the building on a piece of land donated by a Muslim couple, who attended the meeting. This was clearly a very busy conference with 27 active members who meet after mass on Sundays. They have built 12 small houses, and a Sewing Training school was started in 2009 where 120 poor women have benefited. They have been running a Revolving Self-Funding scheme since 2004, and so far 600 poor people have benefitted by being able to set up their own small businesses. We were shown the log books of all the monetary transactions in this scheme and were asked to inspect them in detail and sign them! The conference is also funding uniforms for 75 poor school children each year. Most of their funding comes from donations by local people. This is probably because of the Medical clinic that runs in this building and is a very good local amenity. The Clinic opens from 9.30am to 1pm every day and so far 26,500 poor people have enjoyed free medical treatment! We were shown the doctors consulting room, patient's room and a very basic drug store. We left this facility being very impressed with the work that was being done. We then travelled to our base for the night, which was a very basic hotel, but with a fantastic view over the most southern tip of India.

The following morning, Tuesday 19th, we left to drive north towards the state of Kerala. Our general impression of the area of Tamil Nadu that we visited was that the roads were mostly in a very bad condition and all the piles of rubbish that were left at the roadsides looked very bad. There is clear poverty in this part of Tamil Nadu. We stopped off on our journey to look at a water supply project that had been funded by a conference in Golden Hill, Birmingham, several years ago. Water is pumped from a well up to a storage tank that is sited in among a large cluster of houses on a hillside. Families collect the water in buckets from the tank and were very happy to see us visit the project. However, the electricity supply is intermittent in this area, as well as many others as we saw on our travels. (Apparently, out of the 1,300 million population of India there are 400 million people who don't have any electricity at all.) Continuing on our journey north we took another diversion to visit St Theresa of Child Jesus Conference, Varthartha. Before leaving home I had been sent a letter from their twin, St Joseph's in Barnoldswick, so we detoured to deliver the letter by hand. This is a small women's conference, with no English being spoken. We met in the presbytery where the priest had some rudimentary English. Several days later I received an email letter from this conference for me to pass onto St Joseph's on my return home – this I duly did.



After another long car journey we arrived at the Neyyattinkara CC Office in a building they own. There were photos of several previous CC Presidents in frames on the office wall, the largest photo being of the CC President who has presided over the acquisition of the building. Our guide from Tamil Nadu, Bro. Soundararaj, was now able to transfer us to the care of Dr P V George, a former National Council



member. Following the meeting we visited several beneficiaries of the work of the local conference. The first beneficiaries we saw had a cow project from Little Flower conference, Kunnamvila, in a very rural location where they were able to sell 15 litres of milk a day to earn a living.

We then moved on to St Mary's Conference at Porranur where we were greeted by a large gathering of beneficiaries. They have set up a computer skills training course here in a small parish room, and next door in the parish hall they are running a sewing machine workshop

specialising in fashion design as well as basic sewing skills. We were invited to examine some of the designs in detail by a number of enthusiastic young women who appeared very proud of their work.

We then went to visit a young man who was badly disabled by a fall from the roof he was constructing. The local conference had bought him a robust electric wheelchair that he could use on the very rough tracks in his rural locality. He is able to use his wheelchair to go to mass, visit friends and do some shopping. He is being looked after by his parents, who are themselves poor. During the late afternoon we had a meal at a convent attached to a school where some of the nuns taught. The other nuns worked in the community as nurses and parish assistants. At St John the Baptist, Manivila, we visited a disabled man who was bedbound due to a fall from a coconut tree when he was collecting coconuts. He was looked after by his wife in very basic accommodation, and his children did not go to school because the family could not afford to send them. They are one of the conference's 'adopted' families. Arriving late at our next appointment we first attended evening mass in the Infant Jesus church at Kiliyoor, before being shown another sewing machine project operated by the conference here. After another meeting and refreshments in the company of the parish priest we travelled in the dark over very bad roads to our overnight stay in Trivandrum, arriving around 9pm. Unfortunately, someone was still occupying the room that had been booked for us, so we had to find another hotel.

On Wed 20th at 9am we were collected from our hotel by Bro. Somy, our new driver, and Dr George to travel to the coastal village of Adimalathura, about an hour's drive away. The community of about 1500 families in this area are mostly involved in fishing related activities, including many poor women in the fish vending operation. We visited St Fatima conference based in the Latin church by a very sandy beach. There are 3 conferences based here, men's, women's and youth, and all have about a dozen members. We were told that they are twinned with St Hugh of Lincoln in Stretford. After a short meeting we moved along the coast to the much bigger Church of St Alphonsa. Here we met with the Trivandrum CC which comprises of 144 conferences, and 51 are twinned with E&W. We



met Bro R. Zacharias, CC President, Bro Don Bosco, CC VP, and Mary Rose, Conference President. We were told that Vincent Naylor had 'sanctioned' many projects in this area. We listened to the report of the work done here, and the provision of medicine for cancer patients, help for poor students and loans to fish vendors took much of their resources. The loan to fish vendors, to set up their business, is 5,000 rupees and this is paid back over 2 years. We were invited to distribute some of these loans to new beneficiaries during the meeting.

After this we visited St Mathews Conference, South Kollemcode Church, Pozhiyoor, who wanted to show us the Ozanam Karunya Bhavan, the old folk's home that is run by Trivandrum CC. The ground floor is complete and operational and houses 15 elderly people. They have built the walls of the first floor extension and are looking for funding to complete the roof and interior decoration. They have calculated the cost to complete the work as £25,000 and believe they can raise £15,000 from local donations. We were asked if we could contribute £10,000 to complete the project. We explained that we were not able to do this and told them about the CIAD fund operated from CGI in Paris. We left them to find out more about that fund, but were impressed by their determination to see the project through when they will be able to look after 35 residents. They are trying to find an additional 3 Lay Sisters with nursing experience to care for the residents.

We left this facility to have a lunch break in the Diocesan Centre, called the Animation Centre, near Kovalam. Following lunch we drove back into Trivandrum where Dr George took us to the Natural History Museum and Zoo. Dr George kindly invited us to his home for an evening meal where I met his wife Mary Cutty George, who had made a visit to an SVP meeting in England many years ago, and the rest of his family.

On Thursday 21st we started with a very fast two and a half hour drive along very busy roads to Kollam, where we were to meet the members of Quilon CC. We were met by Bro Sebastian Thomas, Vice Chairman of National Finance Committee, and the CC President with about 120 members. It was explained to us that Quilon has an 'ancient and historic' past. St Thomas, the apostle, is said to have set up a Christian community here, and later in 1329 Pope John XXII constituted the first Diocese in India here. There are 96 conferences in the CC, and 44 are twinned with E&W. 25 conferences have voluntarily given up their twinning grant so that poorer conferences can benefit from the grant. One of the activities in this CC is the organising of free 'eye camps' since 1976, where 85,000 patients have benefitted from eye treatment. One of the conferences runs a cancer detection camp funded by one of the members in memory of his late wife. In the last four years 600 patients have been helped. A number of small projects have been funded to help poor people set up their own business. Providing shelter to the homeless has been a priority of the CC for a number of years, and decent accommodation has been provided for over 500 families. Their conferences fund scholarships for more than 100 deserving students each year in professional courses like nursing etc. We were very impressed by the variety of work undertaken by Quilon CC. However, one of the surprises in the meeting was the high number of complaints from conferences that twins in E&W were not corresponding with them. We therefore asked for a list of twins where this was a problem, so we could investigate and encourage communication. Bro Sebastian agreed to compile the list and give it to us when we met him again at the National Council meeting in Cochin on Sunday 31st January. (This he duly did, and I am working on the list now.) Our visit had coincided with the completion of a new small house that had been funded by this CC, so we were invited to go to the house and be part of the opening ceremony. Adrian was asked to perform the ceremonial unlocking of the front door, and the handing over of the key



to the resident. The parish priest said some prayers of blessing and lit the traditional oil burning flame. Following the meeting we were taken to have lunch with the Latin Bishop Stanley Roman, whose Secretary is the CC President's son!

We then moved on to St Peter's Church, Moothakkara, next to the harbour, which houses the locally famous Infant Jesus Shrine. There were about 100 people there to meet us, with another large garland for both of us, and a specially prepared welcome banner. A large

group of CC Officers accompanied us to these afternoon meetings. We heard about the work of this conference which is mainly related to the fishing industry, where many micro-financing projects have been instigated – mainly fish vending. The beneficiaries have needed more help because fish is now sold to them at higher prices. We noticed that this conference has a small permanent office in the grounds of the church where they are able to conduct the micro-financing business. A number of beneficiaries attended the meeting. From here we travelled to another church which overlooked a lake, it is called Ashtamudy. The conference here runs a Family Welfare Fund, which runs under very strict conference rules involving only local catholic families. The fund started in 2002 and has helped 159 people so far. The details of the scheme were explained to us during the course of our late afternoon meeting. From here we transferred to our overnight accommodation where we were treated to a boat ride on the lake, and then had an evening meal with 20 Kollam CC Officers.



Friday morning commenced with another long drive with Bro Somy, and also Bro Baby Thekkan, Project Officer for the Kerala Region. We were aiming for Punalur CC, and the conference of Our Lady of Velamkanni Mathi, which is twinned with my conference of English Martyrs, Reading. So we drove into the hills for about 2 hours and were surprised to see how the landscape changed and appeared to be better managed than anything we had seen before during our journey. We discovered that this is a rehabilitation plantation started by the



Indian and Kerala State Governments in 1972 to house refugees from Sri Lanka. Most of the people work in the rubber plantations here. The small church was built in the 1980's and caters for the scattered rural population. We were greeted enthusiastically by the conference members and their families and friends, together with Fr Baiju Xavier the parish priest who covers 5 small churches in his area. He had invited the bishop's secretary to the meeting and they were both very supportive of the work of the Society. None of the conference members speak English, so an English speaking priest is a blessing. We had the meeting

in the open air, with a warm wind blowing to keep us cool. There are 6 women members and 2 men in the conference. Fr Baiju gave me his mail and email address and is happy to translate correspondence for us. My conference had sponsored a sewing machine project for them, so we were invited to officially hand over the 10 machines to the female beneficiaries so they could earn a living.

We were then taken to visit Bishop Selvester Ponnuthan, Bishop of Punalur, who was interested to hear about our visit. His residence was on our route to Palai, where the roads are being totally re-laid as we travelled over many stretches of rough stoned tracks. We arrived at around 6pm to be greeted by Bro K K Jose, CC President, and other CC Officers, including Bro Ignatius who is well known to some members of our National Twinning Committee. Another CC meeting followed to hear about the work being done. There are 186 conferences in this CC, with 49 twinned with E&W. The conferences look after 1,196 'adopted' families in the CC area and run many other initiatives to help the poor and needy, including micro-financing, feeding the hungry, building houses and latrines together with granting education scholarships to deserving students. However, the two major projects funded and run by Palai CC are The Blessed Kunjachan Missionary Bhavan which looks after 115 mentally ill people and The Home for The Destitute at Kozhuvanal which cares for some 30 orphaned people suffering from various diseases. Palai CC has joined in the internal twinning programme and currently has 8 such internally twinned conferences. They expressed their gratitude for the twinning grant that they receive from us. We were then informed that a meeting had been arranged with their Bishop before we would travel another 30 minutes to visit the Blessed Kunjachan Missionary Bhavan. This home for the mentally ill, which was opened in 1990, does great work for the patients here, but Adrian and I were both shocked by the conditions that some of the more difficult cases were being held in. The home has plans for expansion as the need for such care is increasing. We were asked if the Society in E&W could help fund this expansion, but we had to explain that this was not possible. Some families pay for the medication to treat their loved ones in this facility, but most of the funding comes from local parishes and Society members. Some of the residents look after cows, others grow crops and there is a candle making operation run by the home.

Saturday morning started at 5am when we were woken by the town siren acting as the town alarm clock! Bro Baby Thekkan returned home after breakfast, leaving Bros Jose and Ignatius to accompany Bro Somy and ourselves on a visit to the shrine of St Alphonsa. She is the first Indian to be canonised and has a very modern shrine not far from Palai. Then we headed off over more rough roads to drive to Kothamangalam CC, the home CC of Bro Johnson Varghese. Our first appointment was to meet the Diocesan Education



Secretary at Bishop's House, Rev Dr Stanislaus Kunnel; he is also the National Spiritual Advisor to the Society. After a 30 minute meeting with the Bishop discussing a wide range of issues, he asked us to lunch with him. Our next visit was to Mary Help of Christian's conference, Manjummel, which is one of the twins of Mary and Adrian Abel's conference. This conference is in an urban area and is a women's conference. (A male conference also operates in the parish.) There are 11 women in this conference and their main activities are taking care of cancer patients, looking after 9

'adopted' families and sponsoring a student. After the meeting we took tea in the Carmelite Monastery next door to the church, which was more of a building site than a monastery. We were driven for another three hours to our base for the night at Thodupuzha, which was not far from Bro Johnson's home.

All the Sunday masses in Kerala start early so we were picked up at 7am by Bro Johnson and his wife, Lena, to go to the Syro Malabar mass at a nearby large new church. All the men were standing / sitting on the left and all the ladies on the right, which I think is normal. This was a very musical service which took the normal time of just under two hours! After breakfast our driver Somy collected us to go to the Malayinchii conference, which is in a very hilly region, and is twinned with a conference in Oldham. A project was arranged about 2 years ago for this conference to help



set up small businesses for some very poor people in this rural area. We visited a small shop that was set up to help a young man who has had sight problems since birth. He is helped by his wife and they just about earn enough to look after themselves. We then moved on to a meeting with Kothamangalam CC which was held in Ozanam House. This building was built by the Society members who gave their own money to start the work and then they made an appeal to the diocese for additional funding to complete the project. There is a large meeting room, 5 guest rooms which house patients attending daily treatment at a local hospital, CC offices and also the National Secretariat Office used by Bro Francis several days a week. There is one paid employee in the office. We learned during the meeting with this CC that there are SVP conferences in every parish in this diocese, and the CC officers meet once per month. Out of the 128 conferences, 22 are twinned with E&W. There are 630 'adopted' families being looked after in the CC area, educational help is given to 378 students and medical aid was given to 2,505 people last year. The CC President and CC Officers visit all 128 conferences at least once per year; this is probably why the work of the CC is vibrant and extensive. After this meeting we were invited to Bro Johnson's house for dinner. He is still working in the local College but is planning to retire at the end of this year.

Another early start to leave at 7am on Monday 24th for another long drive. Today we had been invited to the wedding of the daughter of the National Twinning Officer, Bro Cyriac Mathew, so plans had been arranged to get us there in good time. Bro Francis, National Secretary, was now our companion for the next four days. Unfortunately, a mixture of heavy traffic and major roadworks, leading to stationary traffic for nearly an hour, meant that we arrived around 12.45pm, just as the wedding party were leaving the church. However, we were able to join in with the wedding meal at the second sitting of over 240 people. Bro Cyriac was not sure how many guests were there, but thought it was somewhere near 1,200 people. Apparently, these numbers are not unusual at Indian weddings!

By 2pm we were on our way again to visit St Mary's conference, in Pathirappadom, in Mananthavady CC, towards the hill country. During the meeting it was obvious that none of the members spoke English, so a young mother with babe in arms had translated the report into English and read it out to the meeting. Apparently, both her parents are members of the conference, but she was not. During discussions it was revealed that this conference is also twinned with Mary and Adrian Abel's conference in Huddersfield. This conference does not seem to be receiving Mary's letters, so action was agreed to remedy that situation. As with nearly all our meetings we had to write something in their visitor's book to commemorate our visit.

We had to leave after an hour because we still had a long drive to reach the Ozanam Home in the Wyanad region. We were now in tea plantation territory and the hills were becoming mountains with small monkeys living amongst the trees. We reached the home at 7.45pm and were very weary after nearly 11 hours in the car today. The Ozanam Home currently accommodates 59 elderly people, but they have space for another 16 people with space and beds already available. However, they need Government approval before the additional people can be taken in. Adrian and I occupied two of the beds for the next two nights.



There are 9 paid staff here plus one volunteer manager / secretary. Adrian and I were both surprised and amazed at the number of homes for the mentally ill, aged and destitute poor people that the Society is funding and running themselves through member's contributions and money raised by the CC members from the local communities. The Home runs a small ambulance that was jointly funded by St Edwards School in Cheltenham and St Bernardine Parish in Buckingham. The land for the building was donated by a local man who now lives in a small house next door to the home.

After a good night's sleep it was nice to have a little quiet time and time to relax, attend a prayer service in the beautiful chapel with the residents, and talk to the CC members who had come early for the meeting with Mananthavady CC. We heard about the work done in this CC whose area is very extensive and covers several mountain ranges. We were introduced to Bro Augustine KodiamKunnel who is one of the CC Officers and he had started 90 new conferences in this CC area. There was an extensive question and answer session and we had to field some very difficult questions during the meeting from Johnny Pattany, the previous Kerala project officer, who claimed to have submitted over 50 projects last year and said that only a handful had been approved. He was blaming E&W for this situation and complained that he had not received any feedback. We explained that all these projects had not been received by Vincent Naylor, so

the problem must reside at Indian National Council level. He did not have any facts or evidence with him so we could not take information and investigate the problem. It did leave an unsatisfactory ending to our meeting. However, we did raise the matter at the meeting with Bro Johnson and the new Project Officers at the National Council meeting the following Sunday and they seemed completely unaware of the situation, but they said that they would investigate. The local CC youth officer was very interested to hear about the work in E&W being done by Claz Gomez and asked for her email address to find out more. In the afternoon I was taken to visit a project run by the local conference in a very rural area. They had built 4 homes for 4 'adopted' families and were keen for me to meet the beneficiaries. The conference has plans to build some more homes, a church and a shop. I was asked if E&W could fund some of this work and I had to explain that this was not possible. Bro Francis and I were both asked to plant a tree each to commemorate the visit. On our route back we took a safari trip through a National reserve area and were lucky to see a herd of young wild elephants.



The next morning we left the Ozanam Home at 6am for the long drive from the hills to the coast at Calicut to connect with the 10am train going north to Mangalore. This is where Bro Somy our driver for the past 8 days left us. Bro Francis accompanied us to Mangalore where we were met by the CC President Bro Herald Monteiro and a former CC President. We were taken to our hotel where we were able to shower and change before walking to the Catholic Club which was the

venue of the Mangalore CC meeting. The walls of the meeting room were covered in photos of past Club Presidents and from their names it was obvious that there is a strong Portuguese heritage here. The Society was established in Mangalore in 1926 and there are now 108 conferences in 116 parishes here, with 6 twins in E&W. As at all our meetings some of the AC Presidents had travelled a long way to meet us and hear about the Society's work in E&W. There are 4 local languages in Karnataka State where Mangalore is situated so not all AC presidents spoke the same language. We concluded the meeting with a meal in an apartment owned by one of the Brother's family.

An appointment had been arranged with Bishop D'Souza early the following morning before we met with Rev Dr Pius Fidelis Pinto who is the Parish Priest of St Francis Xavier Church in the village of Ferrar. During the past 6 years the Ferrar conference has been spending the grant from the 'Walter Fund'. They have sponsored self-help projects involving pigs, goats, cows, as well as tailoring and computer classes, and have also repaired old houses and instituted agricultural projects. During the meeting Fr Pinto gave Adrian 3 project completion reports from earlier projects and also handed over several new project applications

amounting to around £7,500. Apparently Mangalore CC will be submitting projects to a similar value in the near future through the normal channels. Fr Pinto told us that he is visiting England in July so if there is a need to clarify anything on the projects we could meet him to discuss them. After the meeting we departed for the station to get the train for a 7 hour journey to Cochin where we had started our journey 13 days earlier. Bro Johnson met us at the station in Cochin as he happened to be in the locality after attending a funeral of a past National President. We were then taken to our base in Cochin where we met up with Terry Brown and Marie Branch, and where we were to spend the next 3 days. Terry and Marie have already reported on the activity during this time in Cochin, and meetings with the Indian National Board Members, in the report of their visit to North East India, so I will end my report here.

A short report of our visit to Tamil Nadu and Kerala giving general impressions of the visit has been published in the 2016 Spring Edition of the Vincentian Concern magazine.

The photo below shows some members of the Indian National Council who we met in Cochin with Adrian, Terry and Marie Branch.

Stephen Hogg

Twinnage Officer, Portsmouth CC.

