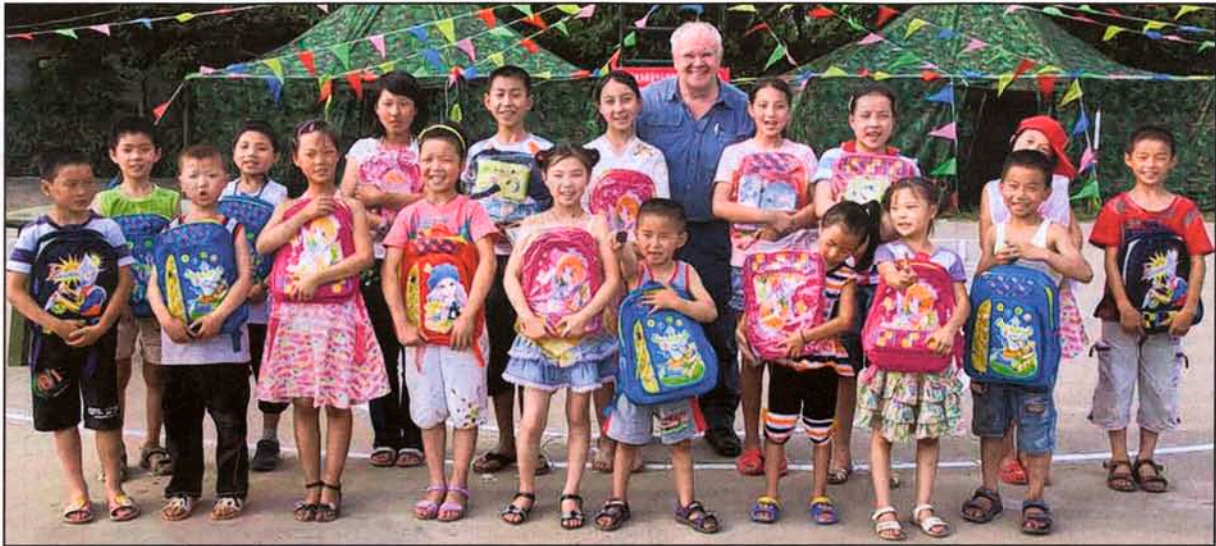


WANTAGE GROVE HANNEYS LETCOMBE



Helping out . . . Photographer John Henshall decided to forgo his holiday in China to help people hit by the devastating earthquake

Holiday turns to mercy mission

WHEN a devastating earthquake hit the Sichuan province of China just a couple of weeks before an Oxfordshire man planned to visit the country, everyone assumed he would cancel his trip.

However, 66-year-old photographer John Henshall, who lives in **Stanford in the Vale**, decided to forgo his holiday to help others.

Mr Henshall collected more than £1,500 from friends and family before setting off to Chengdu to buy much-needed supplies for some of the children whose schools and homes were destroyed by the

By Fran Bardsley

quake. He said: "When the earthquake happened everyone said are you going to cancel your trip but I decided not to chicken out and to go anyway.

"There was nowhere to go touring so I decided to take aid relief out there and try and help."

It was Mr Henshall's seventh visit to the country.

He met with local travel agent Angie Wong to identify what would be needed and where to take it.

He said: "We decided what to

take things for the children because many of the schools were destroyed so they have nothing. We wanted to bring a smile to their faces."

They went to a wholesale market and loaded up two van loads of everything from school supplies to sports equipment, mosquito repellent to sanitary supplies.

They drove up into the mountains into the communities most affected and dropped off much-needed supplies to a school operating under canvas in the town of Shifang.

He said: "When you see the scale

of it there is mile after mile of unbelievable destruction. It is totally overwhelming.

"The world has now forgotten about it, but people have to cope with it on a daily basis."

He also visited a mosque nearby which had been left in a dangerous state by the tremors and found 40 Muslim families were taking shelter there.

He said: "They were so warmly welcoming and invited us to lunch immediately, despite the state they were in.

"I did not intend for them to be beneficiaries, but the children's faces were so forlorn I wanted to do something."

Mr Henshall described the faces of many of those left with nothing by the earthquake as "empty", but were transformed by little things like the items he was able to hand over.

He said: "It was one of the most profound experiences I have ever had in my life."

Thousands of people were killed in the earthquake which struck on May 12 and tens of thousands were left homeless in the wake of the disaster.



Devastated country . . . John Henshall took van loads of supplies, ranging from school equipment to sanitary supplies and drove into the mountains to a school that was operating under canvas