

# Ardmore House, Manor Road, Guildford.

By Emilia Chadwick, daughter of Rodolfo Vela Santos.

My father Rodolfo arrived at Southampton with the Basque Children on the SS Habana in May 1937. At 14 he was the youngest of his family and came with his eldest sister Puri Vela. He was at the Stoneham Camp, Southampton for 2 months prior to moving on to Ardmore House, Guildford in the July. Ardmore House was situated in Manor Road in Guildford and was generously loaned to the children rent free, although unfortunately I do not know who the owners were. It was in a dilapidated state but within a few weeks with the help of volunteers it was repaired and decorated so that on 12 July 1937 40 children arrived in the care of two Spanish adults. These were my aunt, Puri Vela and school teacher, Señorita Aizpuri.

A local newspaper report stated: *The Home had its difficulties with staffing and with language. These problems were overcome thanks to the co-operation of the existing staff and the extremely good conduct of the children.* It became one of the happiest Basque Homes in the country and the quality of the school work produced surprised many educationalists in Guildford. Dr Camps, Inspector of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief visited with the Spanish Ambassador's wife Señora de Azcarate, who told the officials that the house was one of the very best in the country.

Miss Peggy Jamieson, a prominent local Red Cross worker, took over as principal of the Home and took up residence there. In later years she was to become a very close friend of my family. The other notable person who became influential with the children was Mr Frederick Price BEM who as well as being an engine driver on the railway was on the committee of the London South Western Railway Servants Orphanage. He was involved in the arrangements for organising and running Ardmore House. Mr Price would take the children on outings including London and camping trips to Hayling Island.

Funding was very limited as the only money they received came from generous benefactors, so the children helped support themselves by entertaining locally by singing in Basque, Spanish and English as well as performing dances they remembered from their homeland. Other means of funding were also found such as running bring and buy sales. None of the children had played football before they came to Britain but they soon learned to play and had some notable successes scoring no less than 46 goals during their stay. Collections were made at games as yet another way that the children helped to support themselves. Sadly four players were called back to Spain, thus weakening the team.

After 18 months, of the original 40 children there were now only 21 left, 14 boys and 7 girls. These were the ones who had no homes to return to at that time. One of the boys, Eliseo Redondo who was 14, was repatriated to Spain and within a month was conscripted into General Franco's army. Gradually the numbers dwindled and when the home closed there were no fewer than five farewell parties. In the end only my Father and my Aunt stayed on in England where they remained for the rest of their lives. Puri married and moved to London whilst Rodolfo spent the rest of his life in Guildford where my sister and I were born. We became very close to Fred Price and his family who became surrogate grandparents to us.