

The Basque Children in Manchester and South Lancashire Ordsall Hall, Salford - 9 July 2017

A report by Barbara Coombs

The talk, linked to Claire Hignett's exhibition which runs until the 23 September 2017, was well received by the audience. Special guests included the following closely associated with the *Habana*: Maria Toole, a *niña*, and her three children, the three grandchildren and great grandson of Enrique Martinez Baranda, a *niño*, the daughter of Carmen Gil Soto, the *Senorita* at the Tynemouth Colony (see pictures below) and the grandson of the founder of the Keighley Colony.



Maria had found her Colony in Cambridge the best of them all, had met her husband to be there and moved to Bolton for married and family life. Enrique came to England with his two brothers and was at Wickham Market, Barnet, Margate and Epping / Theydon Bois. Carmen was the *Senorita* at Tynemouth.

Simon Martinez talked about the background of the largest single evacuation to Britain on one day and the welcome given to the children by the people despite the opposition of government and a narrow section of society. He explained how the nearly 250 children and teachers had come to Manchester and South Lancashire in June 1937 and how they slowly returned to Spain or made their lives in England. He concluded his talk with his personal observation that his and his family's life had been hugely enriched by the 'kindness of strangers' and it felt especially rich because of the extra grand-parents he had benefitted from.

Claire Hignett introduced her exhibition and told us all the story of the children homed in the Salford Colony and how children's reactions to events often outlived their childhood, and that through capturing childlike things art could shine a light on the darkest episodes of history and help us understand what had happened and also the tragedies of our own time.

Following the talk and questions the exhibition was visited and viewed with Claire. All were particularly moved by the linking of the Basque Children to Alan Kurdi's short and tragic life across 80 years.