

From Keith Gimson 29th November 2010

Mrs M. South, who was the matron at the Oaks, Carlshalton colony for Basque refugee children.

Marie Janet South (née Adam) was born in Huelva, south west Spain in 1890. She was my mother's sister and one of the five children of Charles and Marie Adam, who had settled in Huelva while he was working there for a British company.

Following Spain's recent World Cup football victory, Charles was recognized by the placing of his bust in Huelva with the words

“Charles Adams Primer Presidente Del Futbol Espanol. 18-12-1889 Inaugurado en el 2008. (119 Aniversio Del Club)”

There must have been some confusion in adding an 'S' to his name!

Marie was brought up in Huelva and in 1918 married George South who worked for the railway company. Their only child was, Mary, was born in 1919. However, George South's health was not good and in about 1933 they came to England where he died in 1935.

Marie had never been trained for a job and she had a financially hard time. I don't know exactly when she became the Matron at the Oaks but I think it was mid 1937. With her fluent Spanish and a background of Spanish customs, she must have been well suited for the work. I am also not certain when she left the Oaks but in July 1939 she had a short holiday with my family in Cornwall. I was 12 and didn't fully register the many moves of my relations in the war that followed. At different times she lived in Dulwich with my mother and her other sister and also living with other relations and looking after her own mother. I remember her in the blitz of 1940-41 as an active member of the fire watching team and a high speed clearer of bomb damage. Her daughter Mary served in the WRNS, mainly in North Africa.

Until 1956 Marie lived a somewhat 'Nomadic' existence. She then move into a mews cottage in Peckham where she and Mary, by then a Further Education lecturer, lived a happy social life until Marie died at the age of 97.