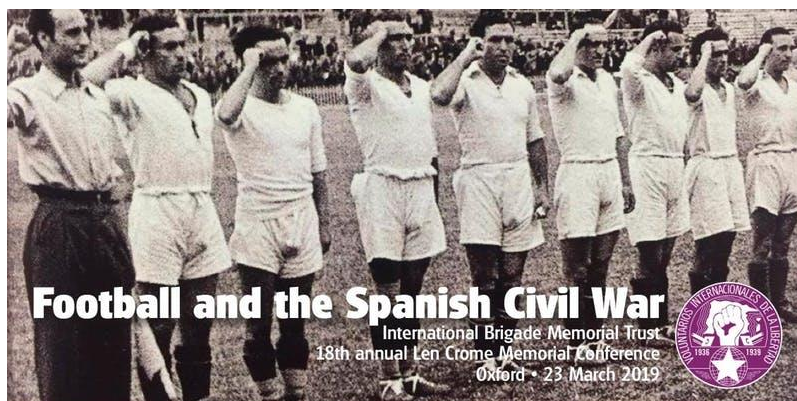


**FOOTBALL AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR**  
**Len Crome Memorial Conference 2019**  
**(International Brigades Memorial Trust)**  
**Kellogg College, Oxford**

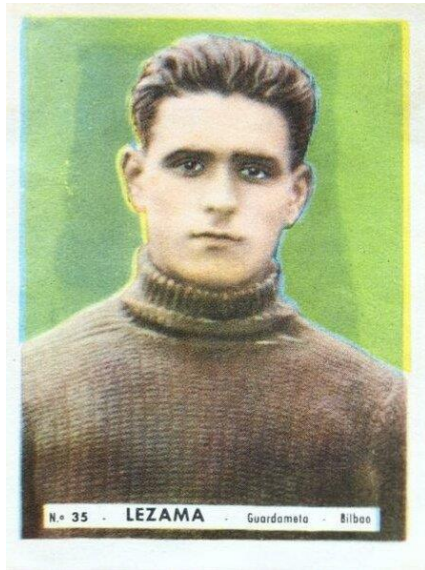
Saturday 23 March 2019

*Report by Edward Packard*



The Basque refugee children of '37 featured prominently in the International Brigade Memorial Trust's annual Len Crome conference, held at Kellogg College in Oxford on 23 March 2019. This was perhaps unsurprising given the general theme of 'Football and the Spanish Civil War' – after all, some of the *niños vascos* were the first professional Spanish football players in Britain. Their story formed the basis of Daniel Gray's morning talk, which provided an overview of the circumstances behind the evacuation of nearly 4,000 Basque children to Britain aboard the *SS Habana* in May 1937 followed by summaries of the pioneering footballing careers of six of the boys: Emilio Aldecoa, Sabino Barinaga, José Luis Bilbao, José and Antonio Gallego, and Athletic Club legend Raimundo Lezama. Deploying some vivid turns of phrase, Gray gave a real sense of what playing football meant to these *niños*, and described how they were able to spin 'miracles from misery'. I also noted that, while 'Tony' Gallego had a short spell with the perennially unsuccessful Norwich City, his brother at least had a brush with greatness at Southampton, where he was looked after by none other than Alf Ramsey.

Basque football also featured in Sid Lowe's remarkable afternoon talk: he described the dominance of Basque adult players in the Spanish league during the 1930s, and the *Euzkadi* 'national' team that toured Europe and Central and South America during the Spanish Civil War. Lowe's central theme, however, was the rivalry between Real Madrid and Barcelona, and how the former has become associated with Francoism and fascism and the latter with the Republic and revolution. Skilfully dispelling this popular, yet offensive, myth, Lowe focused on the life of Rafael Sánchez-Guerra, club president of Madrid before the Civil War, and subsequent prisoner of the Franco regime.



*Raimundo Lezama and Emilio Aldecoa:  
two of the Basque children who played professionally in England and Spain*

The conference also featured the folk duo Na-Mara, who performed their song *Solo Por Tres Meses* about the Basque children. Rob, the guitarist, is the son of a *niño*. Other highlights included a rare screening of a Henri Cartier-Bresson film *With the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain* from 1938, courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, and a more recent documentary about Patricio Escobal, a former Real Madrid player who was imprisoned by the Francoist authorities, escaped, and later published his memoirs, revealing the extrajudicial killings that took place in prisons under the dictatorship. The conference ended with the audience singing Jarama Valley.

The Association for the UK Basque Children was represented throughout the day by Simon Martinez, who maintained the ever-popular exhibition and ran the stall.

