

**The Basque Children – the story of the child refugees from the Spanish Civil War.
Islington Museum, 245 St John Street, London EC1 4NB.**

**Private View and opening of the exhibition 19 June 2019;
A talk by Herminio Martinez 26 June 2019;
The *Guernica Children* film and Q&A with Steve Bowles 1 July 2019.**

Report by Simon Martinez



The exhibition and month long programme of events at Islington Museum were opened by Mayor Councillor Rakhia Ismail accompanied by the Deputy Mayor Councillor Troy Gallagher on Wednesday 19 June. This was the Wednesday of Refugee Week 2019. Thirty invited guests viewed the exhibition which came about through a partnership of Islington Local Studies and Museum, the Marx Memorial Library, the BCA'37UK, The Hugh Myddelton Primary School, and Islington Refugee Forum. The exhibition tells the story of the Basque Children through photos, artefacts and documents from the time, and the work of the Refugee Committee at Hugh Myddelton School.

In her welcome and introduction the Mayor explained that she had come to Islington as a refugee from the Civil War in Somalia thirty years ago and for that reason she was connected to the children who had come to Britain from Spain 50 years before her arrival in Britain. She affirmed that Islington welcomed refugees irrespective of their colour, their religion, their politics, their language, their sexuality. It had done so in the 1930's with those from the *SS Habana*, and from the trains of the *Kindertransport*, and would continue to do so. The welcome to refugees by the people of Islington and the welcome they received from the people were one of the things that made Islington a great place to live, to go to school and university, and to work. Her election as Mayor, a black Muslim refugee woman who wears a headscarf and dresses within the accepted norms for her culture is a clear indicator of how far Islington has progressed to help all its residents participate fully whilst still valuing their own culture and identity.

Councillor Gallagher, the deputy Mayor, introduced himself and reflected on his own Irish heritage and the Islington welcome all the new residents of the Borough have received and who have contributed to its very rich sense of community.

Councillor Matt Nathan for the Ward in which the museum is located drew attention to the work of the children at the local school who through their own Refugee Committee had been able to put forward their own views about refugees and how important it is to them to welcome all children into their school community, and what they can do to make this happen. They had met with Herminio Martínez one of the Basque Children and Elsa Shamash a child of the Kinder Transport. To see more about the work of the

children visit: <https://www.islington.media/news/islington-council-welcomes-school-childrens-petition-and-commits-to-resettling-100-vulnerable-children>

Manuel Moreno the son of one of the girls who had come to Britain on the *SS Habana* spoke about the role of women in organising the welcome for the children and for their care. Kindness based on internationalism and solidarity for those most vulnerable in society.

Many people have taken the opportunity to view the exhibition which runs until 18 July and to attend the events: a talk by Herminio Martinez on 26 June; and a showing of *The Guernica Children* with a Q&A session with its director Steve Bowles.