

Background to the Montrose Colony

"The colony in Montrose was the most northern colony in Great Britain and the only one in Scotland. The Dundee Free Breakfast Mission offered the use of Mall Park House to the Basque Children's Committee.

At least thirty five different groups sponsored the Basque children, the result of a long fundraising campaign in Dundee and the surrounding area, spearheaded by the Dundee Spanish Medical Aid Committee. Mall Park House was a large house, with a dining room and Director's office on the ground floor and dormitories above. Miss May Wilson was put in charge. Fluent in Spanish, she had worked with the Spanish Gospel Mission and in May 1937 had been sent to Southampton to act as interpreter when the children had first arrived.

24 children came to Mall Park House, 14 girls and 10 boys, and they were accompanied by a Basque teacher, Adelina Larraga, who gave them lessons every day. Their Basque helper, Maria Blanco, was, fortunately, also a good cook and so the children were able to enjoy Spanish cooking. The older girls helped with the housework and looking after the younger children, the boys brought in the coal and chopped wood. To raise funds for their upkeep, the children performed Spanish and Basque dances and songs throughout Scotland, often accompanied on the accordion by Charles McNeil.

At one such concert in Dundee in November 1937, the children performed to an audience of three thousand."