

Account of the unveiling of the blue plaque at Almondbury, Huddersfield.

By Carmen Kilner

On 29 November 2013 we placed our eighth blue plaque at the Old Clergy House, Almondbury, Huddersfield. This colony was home to 20 Basque boys from 28th July 1937 to 22nd June 1939.

Following a talk I gave about the colony at Almondbury to the Huddersfield Local History Society (HLHS) last December (2012) there was much interest in collaborating with that organisation to place a blue plaque on the house where the children stayed. The house itself is of historic interest, being designed by a noted Arts and Crafts architect Edgar Wood. The work involved in placing a plaque is quite long winded and requires much form-filling, requests, permissions and finally approval from various places. These tasks and all the local organisation were generously carried out by the HLHS. They also arranged the production of the plaque and the post-event reception. Thanks for all this work must go primarily to Bill Roberts, David Griffiths and Hilary Haigh who were the 'action' committee.

Our original wish was for Giordano Diaz to unveil the plaque: both he and his brother Amador were at the Almondbury colony. In the event it was not possible for him to attend, however his nephew Alvin, niece Nerina and her son Laurie were all able to come, with Alvin and Laurie performing the unveiling in the name of Giordano and Amador. There were more changes when inclement weather forced us to hold the unveiling in the Wesley Centre. As the site on the building is quite inaccessible the plaque was on an easel for the unveiling, so this was not as difficult a feat as it sounds. The plaque has now been attached to the wall in its final position.

Yorkshire is famous for its hospitality and we were treated to a warm welcome. All those attending enjoyed a splendid tea with plenty of delicious home-made cakes and scones.

The event was very well attended with over 50 people present. Amongst the dignitaries present who made speeches were: the Mayor of Kirklees Cllr Martyn Bolt; the local MP Mr Barry Sheerman and Mr John Rumsby from the Edgar Wood Heritage Group (Yorkshire). The Event was introduced by Mr Cyril Pearce, President of the HLHS. Carmen Kilner from BC'37A UK also spoke. The *niños* were represented by Ma Luisa Toole and Dorothy Martínez, widow of Enrique, and very pleasingly there were plenty of second and third generation representatives of both *niños* and *maestras* present. HLHS was equally well represented, and there were plenty of other invited guests and even some local people who remembered the *niños*.

BC'37A staged an exhibition of 10 posters which gave the background leading up to the evacuation, and using two new posters on Yorkshire and its colonies and another on the Huddersfield colony.

The Tolson Museum of Huddersfield expressed a great deal of interest in putting on an exhibition at their beautiful site. We hope this will take place later next year.

It was a highly successful event for both our Associations. The general interest and press coverage (see below) demonstrate that there are still enthusiastic new audiences to be found and to reach, so our work is not yet over!

Together with HLHS we produced a small pamphlet of the occasion. If anyone is interested in receiving a copy, please contact me at carmen@basquechildren.org, or send a stamped, addressed A5 envelope to:

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Press coverage

www.examiner.co.uk/news/spanish-civil-war-refugee-set-6340676#comments

www.examiner.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/proud-almondbury-salutes-glorious-past-6356781

www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/main-topics/general-news/house-that-became-a-home-for-refugees-of-civil-war-1-6262988

Also see: www.huddersfieldhistory.org.uk