

Basque Refugees in Huddersfield, 1937-1939



The Basque Refugee Children at the Old Clergy House,
Almondbury.

HUDDERSFIELD AND AID FOR SPAIN

(This account first appeared in Huddersfield Local History Society's Bulletin of May 2013, No. 24. Thanks to the Editor John Rawlinson for permission to reproduce it here).

The military uprising against the democratically elected

Republican government on 18 July 1936 polarised opinion in Huddersfield as it did throughout Britain. Shortly after the rebellion the Daily Telegraph's Madrid correspondent, Reginald A Calvert came to visit his uncle H C Calvert, of Calvert & Co. Engineers, Folly Hall, at his New North Road residence. He recounted tales of the 'Red Terror' in Madrid reflecting the pro-Franco line taken by his newspaper. (1) There were even rumours that a local man, James Ronald Ricketts, aged 25 from Crosland Moor, had been shot by Republican forces, shortly before the rebels took the town of Irun. He had been in the British army for seven years, having served in India. What he was doing in Spain was not revealed. However, later in the year he returned safely to Britain. (2)

For members of the town's vibrant labour movement and all those concerned about the rise of Hitler and Mussolini the conflict in Spain was seen as part of the wider European struggle against Fascism. It was feared that the official British government policy of 'non-intervention' in the civil war meant abandoning Spain to Franco and his allies. Huddersfield became part of an international movement to aid the Spanish people. At least two local men took their commitment even further and went out to Spain as part of the International Brigades. David Horradge was killed at Brunete in July 1937 and Alec Tough, 22, of 129 Moor End Road. Lockwood, a former worker at David Browns, was captured at the battle of the Ebro and spent six months in a notorious nationalist concentration camp at Burgos. (3)

In February 1937 150 people attended a Left Book Club meeting in Collinson's Cafe entitled 'Spain in Revolt', which was chaired by Dick Horradge and addressed by a medical student from Manchester, L Preagar, who described his experiences with the

Spanish Medical Aid Unit which had gone out the previous August. Of six members of the unit , three had been killed and two wounded. He had spoken with former Halifax man Ralph Fox near Cordoba only five hours before he was killed on 3 January, and brought the message that Spain's fight was also England's. The movement gathered pace when Huddersfield Trades Council threw it's weight behind the campaign and in April a conference of the Huddersfield and District Aid for Spain Committee was held at Victoria Hall, when there was a showing of the film 'The Defence of Madrid' and Dr H Edelston of the Bradford branch of Aid for Spain warned of the danger of Fascism. (4)

The sense of outrage and urgency was compounded when, on 26 April 1937, Gernika (Guernica), the cultural capital of the Basque country in northern Spain, was destroyed in an air raid by the German Condor Legion, killing over 1500 civilians. The Nationalists tightened the noose around Bilbao, the main Basque city, which came under constant attack. An international effort was launched to save as many Basque children as possible from the bombing and the British government agreed to allow 4,000 to enter the UK. On 23 May 3,861 children and 230 adult teachers and other helpers landed at Southampton. They were housed in a temporary camp at Stoneham, Eastleigh, built entirely by volunteers.

Following a meeting with George Hargrave, an officer of Huddersfield Spanish Aid Committee, the Reverends Leonard Haley and J H Middlebrook approached the Mayor Cllr Barlow, who offered to support the campaign on the basis of a non-partisan public appeal. On ,8 June 1937 he chaired a meeting at Town Hall of 80 delegates from a wide range of organisations which resolved to do all it could to 'give sustenance and relief to

the Bilbao refugees.’ Consultation had already taken place with the national organisation supporting the children since a telegram was read out from the Duchess of Atholl thanking the meeting for its support and asking whether 40 Basque children could be maintained ‘in suitable premises.’ A consultative committee was set up with the mayor, George Hargrave, E T Sykes, Archdeacon Albert Baines, the Rev Middlebrook, J C Maggs and Mrs J R Glaisyer with a mandate to invite 30 different organisations to elect representatives onto the committee and with the power to co-opt others if necessary. The mayor estimated that £1500 a year would be required to support the proposed number of children Archdeacon Baines said it was a cause which needed no pleading and reminded those present of the welcome given in the area to Belgian refugees 23 years previously. (5)

The following Tuesday the Spanish Relief Committee was formed at the Town Hall and it was resolved to adopt 20 Basque children as ‘an experiment’. The Mayor was elected chairman and George Hargrave secretary. The committee was given the power to obtain suitable accommodation by approaching the Corporation estates Committee about using the Old Clergy House at Almondbury. There was some apprehension about the project from some quarters. A letter from the local BMA, which had been asked to serve on the committee, was read out expressing ‘considerable disquiet’ at ‘the grave risk of serious infectious disease being introduced from Spain,’ and proposing ‘complete segregation of the children for a period’ . A discussion, (obviously uninformed about the climate in the Basque country), also ensued as to whether it would be better to raise support for housing the children at a location in the south of England ‘where the climate was more favourable than the North’. Cllr Butterworth offered the Cinderella Society home at Honley for three months, saying the

Basque children's needs were greater and that he presumed they would be 'segregated' and checked for diseases before they were sent. The Mayor proposed that the Old Clergy House belonging to the Corporation Estate would be better, since it was empty, was available for more than three months and could house 20 children, with the advantage that it was opposite the recreation ground. The number of 20 children was decided on and the finding of suitable accommodation was left to the Committee. (6)

Arrangements were finalised after a meeting between members of the committee and David H Thomson, the travelling officer of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief on 13 July. It was announced that 20 boys, aged 5 to 12 would arrive on 30 July from the camp at Stoneham, accompanied by a teacher and other adults. The Ladies Committee section of the Relief Committee was busy equipping the Old Clergy House. It was estimated that 10s a week would be required to support each child and an appeal was made for funds, the mayor proposing that individuals, or groups, should sponsor a child. In the following week four individuals and New North Road Baptist Church each agreed to maintain one. (7)

The Duchess of Atholl was billed to speak at the Town Hall on 29 July and it was decided to try and get the children to Huddersfield a few days before the event. Mr Bernard Pilkington, clerk to the health committee, who was also secretary of the Ladies Committee, reported that a 'matron governess', a Spanish refugee of British nationality, would be in charge. George Hargrave appealed for boots, shoes, socks, towels, caps, games and musical instruments, while Mrs W Lawton, of Marsh, chair man of the house committee, asked for help with the gardening and donations of carpets, furnishings, balls, cricket bats and boxing gloves !

Mrs Lawton, along with other volunteers, had been at the house every day from morning until night spring cleaning and renovating the rooms, helped by her husband who was a railway charge hand joiner, whose skills were called on for the repairs. Members of the Labour League of Youth helped with transforming the 'wilderness' into the semblance of a garden and stripping the wallpaper. She considered the mental break the work offered a good substitute for her fortnight holiday. The large house, designed by architect Edgar Wood, with its mullions and leaded windows had been unoccupied for years, some of the panes were broken and the floors were filthy. Four of the upper rooms were converted into bedrooms and the downstairs included a kindergarten and a dining room with trellis tables which could also double as a class room. There were also facilities for a matron-governess, a teacher and a cook. Mrs Lawton said the intention was that they should not feel that they were in an orphanage but receive motherly love. She asked for donations of sweets for the tuck-shop and the services of anyone who could speak Spanish. The house was also well stocked with coronation mugs for the use of the children. As a finishing touch an hanging basket donated by a local florist, decorated the porch entrance.

The Matron Governess was Mrs Clark, the widow of William P Clark, who she had met in Barcelona when he was a representative of the British Dyestuff Corporation Ltd. She now lived with her sister in law at Kaye Lane, Almondbury. 'It is a lovely old house. I think it will be ideal for the children,' she said.' I hope to be able to help them forget the horrors of the Civil war.' For those concerned that the children would suffer because of the climate she pointed out that the Basque country could be even colder than Huddersfield. (8)

The boys arrived by train at 7.30 on the evening of 28 July to a reception by the mayor in the station entrance hall and the greetings of a crowd of several hundreds in St George's Square. They were then loaded onto a special bus and taken to Almondbury where another crowd was waiting. They were accompanied by a teacher and assistant teacher, Senioritas Soleded Gorrino, from Guernica, and Hilaria Alonso, who were to remain with them and a Miss Sykes and a Senior Lipovitch, an interpreter, who returned to Stoneham Camp the next day. They were met by Mrs Clark and her 12 year old daughter Jean, a pupil at Greenhead High School, who also acted as an interpreter. Some had already picked up some English, since some responded 'Good Night' to the mayor's parting 'Buenos Noches'. After coffee they had a medical examination and it was proposed to quarantine them for two weeks to monitor their health. They were put to bed on 'a good Spanish supper' of tripe, onions, potatoes and coffee. (9)

A spokesman for the Committee asked the Examiner to reassure its readers that they were 'all very nice children and we need not expect the slightest trouble from them.' These reassurances were unfortunately necessary since the same edition of the paper which announced the boys arrival also carried an eyewitness account of the Brechfa incident by Harry Ducksbury, the manager of the George Hotel in Huddersfield, who had been on a fishing holiday in Wales. A gang of boys, housed in what was formerly a camp for the unemployed, were accused of a 'raid' on the village, smashing windows and holding up motorists to demand cigarettes. His own car had been vandalised. (10)

The Duchess of Atholl spoke at the Town Hall on 29 July. Opening the meeting the mayor announced that 13 of the boys had now been 'adopted'. Catholic organisations including St Patrick's

Church, St Joseph's, the St Vincent de Paul Society and the Society of Ladies of Charity had come forward with support. The Duchess explained the background to the refugees coming to the UK and the concern to evacuate Bilbao following the air raid on Guernica. The National Joint Committee had got permission from the government to bring in 4,000 children on condition that they were not selected according to their parent's politics and that they were maintained by voluntary effort. The Roman Catholic archbishop of Westminster had promised to place 1200 in homes and the Salvation Army hundreds more. Yorkshire was one of the first places to offer help and now, nationally, there were 71 centres. She believed that the children would soon endear themselves to the people of Huddersfield since 'They are very bright children, very graceful, with good manners, a sense of dignity, a certain Spanish pride and a great deal of feeling'. She described the emotion with which the children in the camps had received the news of the fall of Bilbao on 19 June. In moving a vote of thanks, G Hargave compared her to Florence Nightingale, whilst the Rev Middlebrook said,

'The National Joint Committee was one of the bright things in these days of fear and hatred. It stood for co-operation, compassion and philanthropy, the elements that made for civilisation, the spirit that made for peace. He hope that the focusing of attention on the children would result in efforts to give a squarer deal to the children of our own country and that arising from this work we would have a better England and a better world.'

The following day, along with the Rev. Middlebrook and the mayor, the Duchess visited the Old Clergy house and talked to the voluntary workers and the boys. She was presented with a bunch of flowers by the 'tiniest little refugee', whilst the eldest boy gave

a short speech of welcome. She thought the accommodation 'a charming old house' and was delighted that they had a garden. A cinematograph film of the event was made for the mayor which showed him having a 'hay fight' with the boys ! (11)

On Wednesday, 25 August, the boys were treated with a trip to Greenhead Park. They tried every facility in the playground, but Giordano Diaz was forbidden by his brother Amador from trying the slide because he had his best pair of trousers on. He was given a stick of rock as compensation, while Amador protected his own trousers by acting as goalkeeper in the elder boys game of football. The reporter found them 'terrifically keen' about 'soccer' and said they had been to a Huddersfield Town practice match a couple of days before. An appeal was also made for bicycles since the boys had a tendency to 'commandeer' other children's bikes in Almondbury , 'something the committee doesn't approve of. Generally speaking, however, the young Basque boys are well behaved, especially if other children don't tease them.' (12)

In order to increase public involvement permits were issued by the secretary of the Committee, Mr Pilkington, to those interest in visiting the Old Clergy House which was open for an hour on Wednesday afternoons. Visitors were encouraged to donate either to the children's entertainment fund or the general fund, although money had to be sent to the treasurer care of the Town Hall and not left at the house. An appeal was also made for winter clothing, particularly gabardine coats and a request was made for a globe of the world so that the teacher could 'show them where they have come to, as graphically as possible.' (13)

A newsletter, 'Ambiente Nuevo' was also published, priced 4d and available from Mr Pilkington at the Public Health office. He also edited the translated articles and pictures by the boys. The first

issue contained a dramatic eyewitness account by Amador Diaz, (the boy so concerned about his brother's trousers), of the bombing of Guernica, which he described as, 'one of the criminal actions of the war.' Mrs Clark, the Spanish matron, expressed 'Many thanks to England'...'The shadowed and sorrowful faces of the children are now illuminated by a smile, because they are beginning to forget the horrors of the cruel civil war...England with a gesture of infinite pity has done a very great favour to these poor children.' Pilkington expressed the delight of the committee with the behaviour of the children, all of whom were now being taken out on trips by local people or were visiting them for tea. (14) The second edition of the bulletin, price now 9d, came out at the beginning of November with articles by the Spanish teachers on their impressions of England and the description of a bull fight by J B Wilkinson of Thornton Lodge, one of the local interpreters. The Examiner also reported that although repatriation of the children would take place as soon as possible it would not begin in less than three months . (15)



Detail of mother and child from Picasso's 'Guernica'.

That month, the local Spanish Relief Committee met to discuss the running of the home at Almondbury. It was chaired by Cllr Joseph Barlow and George Hargrave reported that the children had the best level of health of any of the homes. B Pilkington gave an account of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief conference which he had attended in London saying that he had 'come away...with the firm impression that the Huddersfield Committee has cause to be well satisfied as to the position in this town.' At Almondbury the cost of each child was 13s.10d per child, per week while the national figure was 15s.9d. Food cost 5s.2d per child a week compared to 6s.7d nationally. It was announced that the Almondbury children were to give a concert at the Victoria Hall. At this event Commander Pursey, a former British naval officer, gave an eyewitness account of the bombing of Bilbao. (16)

In January 1938 Miss Jessie Moorhouse from Leeds spoke at a meeting at the Brunswick Street School chaired by T. Bertram Porritt on the International Voluntary Service for Peace, a Quaker organisation, appealing for support for the starving women and children of Spain. She had spent three months at IVSP farm at Pulgierda with volunteers of different nationalities producing food. She showed slides of the activities. The chairman said that 'Some of the volunteers gave all their spare clothing to the refugees and left Spain with only the clothes they stood up in.' The Labour Party held a 'Milk for Spain', meeting at the Victoria Hall in February chaired by J.P Mallalieu and addressed by the Leeds MP J Milner. The Basque children were also invited to the Labour childrens' treat in the Northumberland Street Methodist Chapel to be entertained by songs and Punch and Judy . (17)

In December Alec Tough, the former POW, spoke at a meeting to support a food ship for Spain along with Ms D Brook of the Left

Book Club. The campaign was supported by the mayor, Fred Lawton. 'Rosalind' in the Examiner's 'Woman to Woman' column also reported on a concert of the Basque boys from the Old Clergy House held along with the children of Dalton New Church who had performed an operetta 'La Princesa Carmencita'. She told her readers, 'some of them don't even know whether or not their mothers are alive.' They had already made many friends in Huddersfield. B. Pilkington, secretary to the committee of the home had asked her to appeal for Christmas gifts, 'surely we can remember this little family of refugees and help to make their Christmas a happy one.' (18) By now there was also concern for other victims of Fascism in Europe and a carol singing event was held for the relief of Czech and Jewish refugees. (19)

The food ship for Spain campaign was launched in January 1939 and the Examiner carried a photo of the opening of the depot for donations, featuring the mayor, Mrs Glaisyer, the Rev, J.B. Middlebrook, and B Pilkington with six of the Basque boys from Almondbury and their Spanish teacher Senorita Gorrina. The Depot on New Street was also a centre for spreading information about Spain. (20) Some grocery shops (one was photographed in Kirkburton) put out baskets for donations for the food ship. (21) The first lorry load of food was ready less than two weeks later and the mayor was pictured shaking the driver's hand before he set off. (22) It was announced in April that Huddersfield's donations had reached Spain safely. But it was already too late to help the Spanish Republic - Madrid surrendered on the 28 March.

With their homeland now firmly in the grip of Franco and the fascists the last seven boys left Almondbury in June. They were photo'd at the Old Clergy House with B Pilkington and the matron

Hilaria Alonso and at a 'Touching Leave Taking at the Station'. Ramon Ortega, aka 'The Mascot', shed some tears as the boys said goodbye to Mrs Dennis who had befriended him in Almondbury. Senoritas Gorrino and Alonso remained behind in Huddersfield. (23)

At least two local men retain fond memories of their friendships with the Basque boys. Huddersfield Local History Society would be pleased to hear of any other recollections of this interesting aspect of the areas history.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. HUDDERSFIELD EXAMINER (WEEKLY) (HEW) 15 Aug; 22 Aug 1936. This account inevitably relies heavily on the Examiner. For the background to local events see Fyrth, Jim, *The Signal Was Spain*, (Lawrence & Wishart 1986) pp. 230-231; and Bell, Adrian 'Only For Three Months', (Mousehold Press, Norwich 2007).
2. HEW 19 Sep 1936; 13 Feb 1937.
3. David Horradge is commemorated in the International Brigade role of honour available on the internet. I assume he was related to Richard (Dick) Horradge of the Huddersfield Aid to Spain Committee; HEW 29 Oct 1938 Alec Tough's return to Huddersfield..
4. HEW 20 Feb 1937. HEW 10 Apr 1937.
5. HEW 12 June 1937. Among the organisation represented at the meeting were: Huddersfield Rotary Club, Huddersfield Trades Council, Spanish Aid Committee (Milsbridge Section), Spanish Aid Committee (Huddersfield Section), Peace Pledge Union, YMCA, All Saints Home (Almondbury), Waifs and Strays Society, British Federation of University Women, Left Book Club, Technical College, Labour Party, Charity Organisations Society, Chamber of Trade, Pattern Weavers Trade Union, Electrical trade Union,

Huddersfield Industrial Society Ltd, Soroptomists Club, Hillhouse Congregational Church, Victoria Nurses Organisation, Royal Society of St George (Huddersfield Branch), Guild of Help, International Voluntary Service for Peace, Huddersfield Esperanto Society, Huddersfield and District Free Church Committee, Huddersfield Round Table, League of Nations Union (Gledholt Branch), New North Road Baptist Church.

6.HEW 19 June 1937.

7.HEW 17 July 1937.

8.HEW 24 July 1937

9.The 'Examiner ' reporter was intrigued by every detail and, while not reporting what they had for breakfast, recorded that they had two meals during the journey, 'corned beef, sandwiches and fruit for lunch, and fruit, biscuits and chocolate for tea.'

10.Fyrth, Jim, The Signal Was Spain, (Lawrence & Wishart 1986) pp. 230-231.

11.HEW 31 July 1937.

12.HEW 28 Aug 1937. For Giordano's account of his experiences see below.

13.HEW 4 Sept 1937

14. HEW 18 Sep 1937

15.HEW 6 Nov 1937

16.HEW 4 Dec; 18 Dec 1937.

17.HEW 12 Feb 1937.

18.HEW 29 October; 17 Dec 1938.

19.HEW 24 Dec 1938 There was also growing concern for the plight of British 'refugees' if war broke out. 'Puck' in the Examiner complained about the use of such a term because it implied foreignness ! This view was obviously held in official circles because the term was abandoned for 'evacuee'.

20.HEW 21 Jan 1939.

21.HEW 28 Jan 1938.

22.HEW 11 Feb 1939.

23.HEW 24 Jun 1939.

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On 5 November 2018 Huddersfield Local History Society received the following information which traces the subsequent lives of two of the Basque boys from Almondbury:

'I visited the Basque House in Almondbury recently when passing through Huddersfield and I just thought I'd contact you. The house and wall plaque are in good repair but the interpretation sign is so dirty that it is difficult to read.

I'm quite keen on people knowing about the Basque children. They were the single, largest influx of refugees in British history. But there is also a family connection.

My father, Jack Ainley, lived in the village of Almondbury as a child and a young man. His best friends at school were Roberto and Aurelio Diaz Mata who were refugees brought from the Basque country during the Spanish Civil War on the ship Habana.

After a few months in Huddersfield, tThe two boys were due to return to Spain but their parents (who were politically active against the dictator Franco) couldn't be found so the boys stayed in Almondbury until the end of the Second World War. Roberto even managed to become a member of the Home Guard. (Apparently he was very proud of his badge.)

At the end of the Second World War the boys' parents were located. They had fled to Venezuela. Robert and Aurelio joined

them in 1946, by which time both boys had forgotten much of their first language and spoke English with very strong Huddersfield accents.

Roberto later returned to Spain. Our family kept in contact with him, his wife and his children for many years. As a family we visited Bilbao and I remember being taken to Guernika to see the site of the old dead oak tree with a new oak tree growing through it. His children came and stayed with us. Later, as a teenager, I spent a summer working as an au pair for some of his family friends. I spent time up in the mountains and on the coast. I particularly remember dancing all night at a Basque fiesta in Bilbao and drinking wine with Basque and Spanish friends at the top of a cliff overlooking the sea.

Aurelio set up a building business in Venezuela. One of his buildings, Edificio Almondbury, named after the village of Almondbury of course, still exists in Caracas, Venezuela, today.

Jack and Roberto are no longer alive but recently I took my husband to Bilbao to see the Guggenheim and listen to the Basque Orchestra. I hope to take our daughter to Bilbao too so that the connection between my family and the Basque Region is not lost.

I remember the region and its people, and Roberto and his family, with great affection. It seems to me that the young Basque refugees that sailed to Britain on the Habana have given us all so much more than they have taken. It is a shame that modern-day politicians cannot see refugees the same way that the people of Huddersfield did all those years ago.

With very best wishes,

Susan Mitchell

This e-mail was sent from a contact form on Huddersfield Local History Society (<http://www.huddersfieldhistory.org.uk>)

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FOR BASQUE PLAQUE UNVEILING CEREMONY SEE:

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

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Yorkshire Post 23 November 2013

GIORDANO Diaz can still recall the makeshift ambulances he saw crossing a bridge in his hometown in northern Spain more than 70 years ago.

It was the evening of April 26, 1937, and the lorries he saw were carrying casualties to the nearest hospital in Bilbao from the stricken Basque [country](#) town of Guernica.

The infamous aerial attack on civilians on market day, which shocked the world, marked a turning point for the teenage boy growing up during the Spanish Civil War.

In May that year, the 13-year-old was to leave Bilbao with his older brother, Amador, and two cousins and board a ship with almost 4,000 other young refugees to sail to the safety of the UK before ending up in Yorkshire.

“I do not remember being frightened,” said Mr Diaz, 90, who had lost his mother when he was three years old and left his father and grandmother in Spain. “Some of the children might have been scared because it was something completely new, going on a ship or leaving their homes, but I am not aware of that.”

The young evacuees, who ranged in age from five to 15 years old, were initially housed in tents on a campsite near Southampton.

“In this camp we noticed there were tents,” said Mr Diaz. “That was a surprise. Everyone was thinking of playing ‘cowboys and Indians’ because there were these [round](#) tents.”

“They were ordinary tents which were not as developed as they are today. We had imagined they were what cowboys and Indians were living in. That was the impression we got; it was a novelty.”

The children were soon distributed to ‘colonies’ around the country, established by local voluntary efforts and the Diaz boys headed to the Old Clergy House in Almondbury, Huddersfield, which was to become their home alongside 18 other boys for the next two years.

“Everything was new, even travelling in trains,” said Mr Diaz, who lives in London.

“The trains in Spain were more rudimentary – wooden seats with slats. Here they were upholstered.”

More than seven decades have passed since Mr Diaz left his home in West Yorkshire but he will return on Friday to unveil a commemorative plaque at the Old Clergy House to remember those children who were offered refuge there.

The retired engineer, who worked at the Royal Mint, was delighted when he discovered he could access newspapers in the nearby library.

“One of the things I discovered was that we were right across from the public library,” said Mr Diaz. “I could not understand much English. I made it my [business](#) to keep going into the library to read the paper. I found that somehow the people who were running the library, the curators in there, must have been very kind to have tolerated me. No-one told me off for going there to read the papers.

“The papers were fixed onto sort of upright desks. You could turn them over but you could not take them away. You had to read them standing up but I did not mind. I was not very tall but able to read the papers. I could make out enough to know what was happening in Spain.”

He also recalls the Latin motto engraved in a fireplace in one of the Old Clergy House’s rooms: “*Laborare est Orare*: To work is to pray.”

The plaque at Almondbury has been sponsored by the Basque Children of '37 Association and Huddersfield Local History Society, following a talk to the society last year by Carmen Kilner, trustee of the association.

She said: "We are delighted to be able to thank the people of Huddersfield who so generously offered a home, safety and kindness to children fleeing a vicious war 75 years ago."

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**The following article first appeared in
the [Huddersfield Examiner 3rd October 2012](#):**

Local historian Alan Brooke, who has himself worked with refugees for 20 years, tells the story of the Basque children who were given a warm welcome in Huddersfield in 1937 in the run-up to a talk in Huddersfield from one of the children's descendants at the end of this month.

HUDDERSFIELD took part in the largest single refugee arrival operation the UK had then known 75 years ago.

On April 26, 1937 Gernika, the cultural capital of the Basque country in northern Spain, was destroyed in an air raid by the German Condor Legion, killing over 1,500 civilians. The Nazis supported General Franco, the leader of the fascist military uprising against the democratically elected Republican government, whose troops were now advancing on Bilbao the main Basque city.

An international effort was launched to save as many Basque children as possible from the bombing and the British government agreed to allow 4,000 to enter the UK. So 3,861 children and 230 adult teachers and other helpers landed at Southampton on May 23 and were housed in a temporary camp at Stoneham, Eastleigh, built entirely by volunteers.

The mayor of Huddersfield, Clr Barlow, endorsed the local campaign and 80 delegates held a planning meeting at Huddersfield Town Hall on June 8. A telegram was read out from the Duchess of Atholl, chair of the national support group, requesting that the town take 40 refugees.

The following week a Spanish Relief Committee, formed at the town hall under the auspices of the mayor, resolved to adopt 20 children as 'an experiment'. The mayor suggested the Old Clergy House at Almondbury, which belonged to the corporation as suitable premises for the children, especially as it was opposite the recreation ground.

An appeal was made for boots, shoes, socks, towels, caps, games and musical instruments, while Mrs W Lawton from Marsh – chair of the house committee – appealed for help with the gardening and donations of carpets, furnishings, balls, cricket bats and boxing gloves! Members of the Labour League of Youth stripped the wallpaper and helped transform a 'wilderness' into the semblance of a garden.

The boys arrived by train at 7.30 on the evening of July 28 to a welcome by the mayor in the station entrance hall and the acclamation of a crowd of several hundred people in St George's Square. They were then loaded onto a special bus to Almondbury where another crowd was waiting to greet them. They were

accompanied by a teacher, Seniorita Soledad Gorrino, from Gernika, and an assistant. After coffee they had a medical examination and it was proposed to quarantine them for two weeks to monitor their health. They were put to bed on 'a good Spanish supper' of tripe, onions, potatoes and coffee.



On August 25 the boys were treated with a trip to Greenhead Park. The Examiner reporter found them 'terrifically keen' about 'soccer' and said they had been to a Huddersfield Town practice match a couple of days before.

In December, writer 'Rosalind' in the Examiner's 'Woman to Woman' column reported on the staging of the operetta 'La Princesa Carmencita' by the Basque boys and children of Dalton New Church. She told the readers: "Some of them don't even know whether or not their mothers are alive." The boys and their teachers also produced their own newsletter, Ambiente Nuevo which translates as New Surroundings. The first issue featured a dramatic eyewitness account by one of the boys, Amador Diaz, of the [bombing of Gernika](#).

Their homeland now firmly in the grip of General Franco, and facing an uncertain future, the last seven Basque boys parted from their Huddersfield friends at the railway station with tearful goodbyes in June 1939. As war clouds gathered over Europe, concern turned to the fate of Jewish and other refugees fleeing the

Nazis – and to fears that the same bombers that had devastated the Basque childrens' homeland would soon be raining death on Huddersfield itself.



**An account of the Basque Refugees can be found In
Huddersfield Local History Society's Bulletin of May
2013, No. 24.**

HUDDERSFIELD'S international connections over three centuries are the theme that runs through the latest annual Journal from Huddersfield Local History Society. A major essay by Alan Brooke charts how the town rose to the challenge of the refugee children displaced in 1937 by the Spanish Civil War. A group of them found a new home at the Old Clergy House in Almondbury, where Huddersfield Local History Society is supporting the placing of a commemorative plaque.



Old Clergy House at Almondbury showing proposed location of Blue Plaque

Strong links with eastern Germany arising from the 19th century wool trade and spilling over into family ties are charted by David Cockman and David Griffiths. Martha Stocks from Holmfirth died Baroness von Sternburg in a palatial castle in Saxony, while Bretton-born concert pianist Robena Laidlaw attracted the romantic attentions of famous composer Robert Schumann while giving a recital in Leipzig. And a great-grandson of wool-dealer Joseph Brook, of Greenhead – who imported fleeces from Silesia – briefly became German foreign minister in the 1920s.

Earlier in the 19th century, as Pamela Cooksey sets out, Wooldale weaver Samuel Haigh was transported to Australia in 1814 for stealing a few oats. Historian George Redmonds has found that 70

years before that Robert Rockley, of Woodsome Lees, was apprehended while en route from France to Scotland to support the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, led by Bonnie Prince Charlie. David Verguson takes a look at Lindley on the eve of World War One using information about the local men who died while in service overseas.

The 68-page Journal also profiles the history of Huddersfield Music Society which has been bringing excellence in European classical music to the town since 1918 – and this is written by its archivist Hilary Norcliffe.

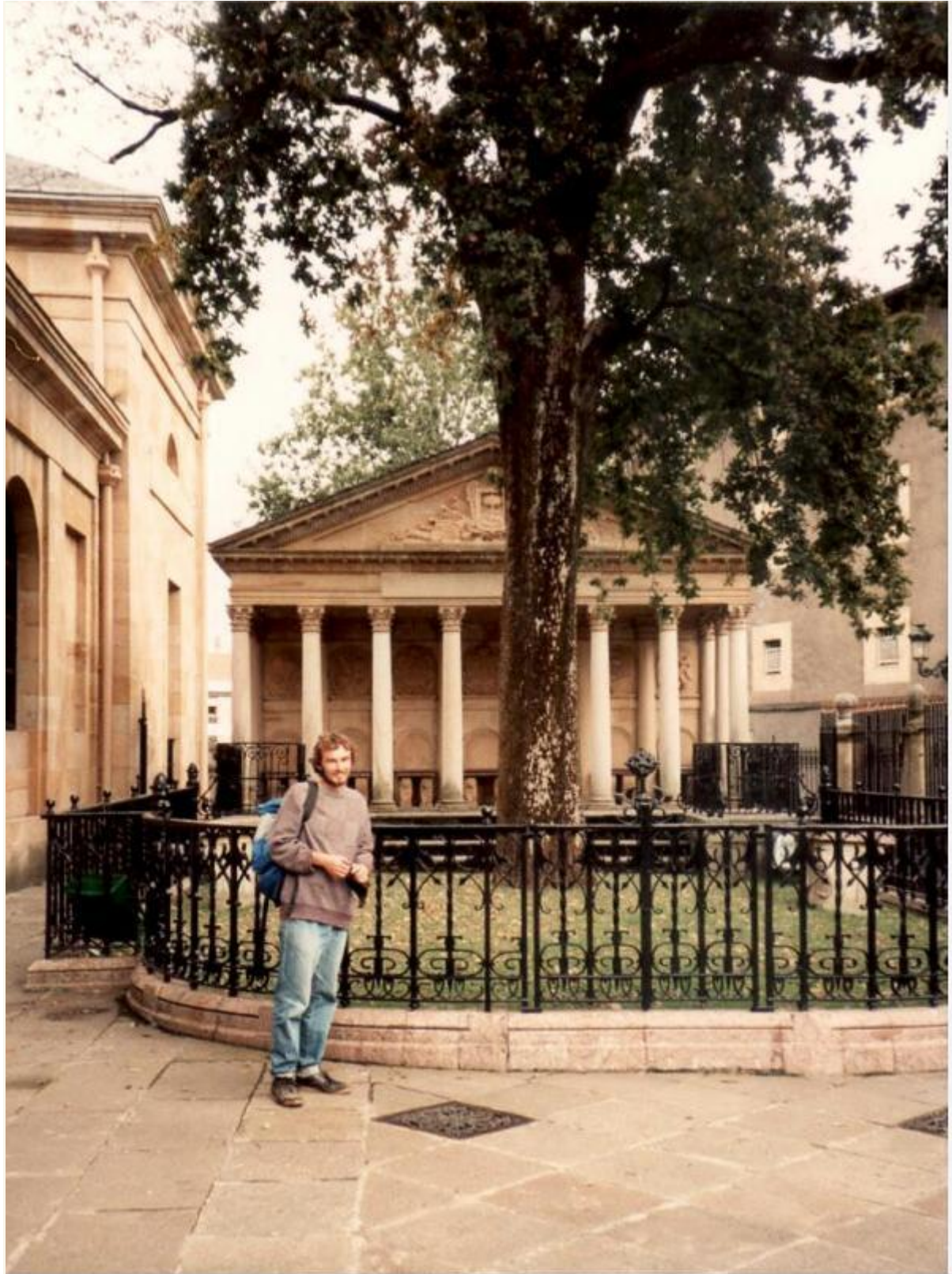
Journal editor and Local History Society chairman John Rawlinson said: “Local history is far from parochial. The articles in this year’s journal show how events in Huddersfield are closely linked to those in the wider world. We’re fortunate in having so many talented local historians to bring these stories to life.”

The 2013 Journal is available from retail outlets for £3.00 or by post for £4.25 (including p&p), either from Huddersfield Local History Society, 24 Sunnybank Rd, HD3 3DE or through the Society’s website:

<http://www.huddersfieldhistory.org.uk>

<http://www.examiner.co.uk/leisure-and-entertainment/nostalgia/huddersfield-family-history/2013/05/15/family-history-huddersfield-local-history-society-journal-86081-33330942/#ixzz2SD9l4hjb>

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The author by the sacred oak at Gernika, 1989

Help Must Be Given To The Basques

We must give thought to the Basques.

The circumstances of the War have placed these brothers in the front ranks of the struggle for liberty, and it is the duty of all anti-Fascists to find a way of helping this noble Basque race which the Fascist hordes wish to subjugate to an imperialist tyranny.

We anarchists are not people who have received the kindest treatment from the Basque authorities. Setting aside the misunderstandings which time will clear up, their attitude towards our comrades has been one of extreme dignation. Nevertheless it is our duty, for the very reason that we think as we do, to show the Basques our typical generosity, for not in vain do we at this moment defend the same cause. Catalonia, which has a racial sentiment similar to that of the Basques, must show in these days of anxiety for our Basque comrades, that its solidarity is not only a rhetorical sentiment, but something more practical and substantial.

We must see to it, then, that men and arms should leave here to go to defend the Basque territory, which is in danger. Let that which has been done for Madrid, be done with ever-increasing interest for the Basque provinces, if necessary. As far as the C.N.T. is concerned, we make a vow that we shall help the Basques with the greatest enthusiasm, with all our efforts, for we know the importance of their cause in the struggle undertaken.

Meanwhile, Comrades, forward! That you may be the example for future days! That Mola and Franco hit the dust of our heroic hand to-day, as did yesterday Zumalacarréqui, Cabrera and other Carlist leaders!

(Solidaridad Obrera, Barcelona.)