

A Tribute to Herminio Martinez from the Association.



Herminio was a long standing member of the committee of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK (now BCA'37UK) and later went on to become one of our trustees.

He played a key role in the association as the only *niño*. He always attended meetings fully prepared and engaged actively in all discussions. As those of you who knew him might expect, he was not averse to fighting his corner if he did not agree with something or someone. He was a man of strong convictions, principles and opinions that he was not reticent about expressing, nor was he easily swayed once his mind had been made up - not always the easiest person to work with! On the other hand he could also be a most charming and generous man who was always passionate about the work of the association.



He supported us in many ways - by giving talks, often accompanied by a reproduction of Picasso's Guernica, he organised a poetry reading, he also designed several of our plaques, the most impressive perhaps being the one erected at our 70th anniversary commemoration at Southampton when the plaque was placed on the wall of the City Art Gallery.

Herminio was invariably willing to give talks, to help researchers and to give press interviews - though woe betide any reporter that had not done his homework on the Spanish Civil War - he didn't suffer fools gladly. His remarkable memory for detail and understanding of the historical context of the evacuation of the *niños vascos* to Great Britain in 1937, meant that his talks and interviews were always full of factual interest and not solely based on reminiscences. He was an experienced and eloquent speaker who was able to portray a vivid sense of time and place.

He was a man of many talents and interests: he was an able watercolourist (we will miss his Christmas cards); he produced beautiful and delicate woodwork; he appreciated other arts including poetry and literature in both Spanish and English. He and his dear wife Verena's homes bear witness to their artistic gifts including Verena's beautiful textiles; their homes also display their shared interest in ceramics.

Herminio believed very strongly in the value and power of education. He was aware of the complete lack of it during his early years in Bilbao and grasped greedily at the opportunities available here for self education through evening classes . He went on to gain an Honours degree in Spanish and French from Birkbeck College and later studied for a master's degrees in Spanish literature.



This appreciation for education must have contributed to his willingness to speak at schools, where he was very popular. At meetings and events up and down the country his unsuppressable passion for this chapter of history would come over clearly whenever he spoke. He also continued his own education by trying to attend any and all talks or events relating to the Spanish Civil War or the Basque Children.

Although his relationship with the other Basque children was not always smooth, he was capable of giving thoughtful and generous help to other niños when needed, and did not fail to attend any of their annual meals or, as a final gesture, to attend their funerals.

A big man in so many ways. He will be missed.

Natalia Benjamin and Carmen Kilner. (Past and present secretaries of the Association)