

June 2016

Dear the Basque Children of '37 Association,

Thank you very much to Adrian Bell and Carmen Kilner, who last month made the trip to Leeds to talk to us in our 6th form intellectual discussion group, Tertulia. We learnt about Basque Refugees who fled their homes due to the outbreak of conflict at the start of the Spanish Civil War. It was extremely interesting to learn a bit about the history of the Basque Country, including the political disruption at the time. Through learning about the Basque refugees, Adrian Bell told us about both the rising tensions between the Republican and Nationalist supporters within Spain, and also Europe's stance of 'non-intervention', and the way in which this affected the Spanish children. I found this particularly fascinating as we learnt how the British public, without government funding, were able to support and accommodate the evacuees - showing the power of community and charity. This message has poignancy today, I think, as we can learn that as a united force anything can be achieved. Furthermore, the Basque history can be related to today's refugee crisis, and Adrian and Carmen imparted a vital lesson that charity and compassion can go a long way to help those in need.

Not only did we learn about the history of the Basque Country, but also about individual stories of refugees. These individual accounts brought into sharp relief the suffering, but also the hope that came out of the evacuation to Britain. I found it particularly touching that children who lived through this experience together are still close friends in adulthood. What was supposed to be 'only for three months' turned into a lifetime of friendships, and Carmen showed this to us by talking about the Basque Children of '37 reunions.

I would like to thank Adrian and Carmen for allowing us to learn more about the culture and history of Spain, which has deepened my understanding and love of the country. Despite going to Vitoria-Gasteiz twice for the Spanish exchange, I had little idea of the monumental impact of the Spanish Civil War. The Tertulia has also prompted me to explore individual stories of Basque Refugees for my Extended Project Qualification, as I aim to write a creative writing piece based on this historical event.

On behalf of students from The Grammar School at Leeds, I'd like to thank you for broadening our understanding of the culture and history of Spain, and for giving us an insight into the lives of the Basque children of '37.

Yours sincerely,

Cara Balen and students from The Grammar School at Leeds