

# Newsletter

## Basque Children of '37 Association UK

[www.spanishrefugees-basquechildren.org](http://www.spanishrefugees-basquechildren.org)

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April 2006

### News

## Annual General Meeting and members' lunch

On 18 March, the Annual General Meeting and members' lunch took place at the Mall Tavern in Notting Hill Gate. This year, the meeting took place in a private room upstairs.

The Secretary Natalia Benjamin was pleased to report how much had been achieved in the past year.

Highlights of the year had been undoubtedly Steve Bowles' moving and vivid documentary *The Children of Guernica*, which was shown on the BBC at the end of April, and the blue plaque ceremony at Cambridge in May. This had brought together 12 niños and also seven relatives of the original volunteers, not forgetting Professor Eric Hawkins who unveiled the plaque. He, as a recently-qualified graduate, had, all those years ago, given up his time to teach the Cambridge contingent.

The reunion with his erstwhile pupils had been an emotional one, as had been that at the ceremony at Eastleigh Public Library for the opening of our exhibition in July where some *niños* had met a former 17 year old schoolboy volunteer.

The Secretary reported on the numerous requests the Association had received for information and material, and the support it had given to research projects.

Membership had now passed the 150 mark, which was very gratifying. She also detailed the various activities that had been planned to celebrate the anniversary of the coming of the *niños* to this country, and outlined the applications that had been made to the Spanish government for funding of some these initiatives.

But she pointed out that the Committee would welcome more members as there is now a great deal of work to be done and it would be helpful to delegate some of it. In particular, she emphasised that it was to the younger generation that they were looking to continue this work, and hoped candidates would be forthcoming.



At the AGM  
(from left):  
Helvecia  
Hidalgo, Tom  
Webb and  
Carmen Kilner.

The business side finished, the Committee and members present enjoyed a good lunch.

## Horizon 2007

A day school has been organised with the Department of Continuing Education of Oxford University on Saturday 28 April 2007. The title is *Basque Refugee Children and the Spanish Civil War*. There will be three lectures by historians, followed by a round table discussion in which *niños* will be participating.

Although it seems far away, we would advise you to register for this event, as the places get taken very quickly. Further details can be obtained from the Day School Administrator on 01865 270368 or [ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk].

The Basque Government has announced a "Homenaje a los Niños de la Guerra" to be held in the Palacio Miramar, San Sebastián on 29 August this year. The Secretary has written to ask whether the niños in Britain can attend this ceremony, but has not yet received an answer.

Gregorio Arrién is hoping to produce an updated version of his book and has asked the Association to collaborate by lending photographs and other artefacts.

The Association will be producing a book, *Recuerdos*, of reminiscences by niños and others of their stay and life in Britain. Letters have been sent to members asking them for their participation in this exciting project. The

deadline for submission of copy is September 2006, so please get writing! We need a great deal of time to prepare the copy, chose photographs etc, so the sooner we receive your contribution, the better. They can be in English or in Spanish, and from one page to twelve in length.

The Association is also hoping to make a facsimile of the songbook brought out by the NJCSR as a fund-raising enterprise. A Spanish children's choir will make a CD of these songs. Both of these will be on sale to raise funds for the Association.

Finally, the Association would like to arrange a reception next year in London for all the *niños*.

## At the Imperial War Museum

by Jim Jump

Britain's policy of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War deliberately and successfully secured victory for Franco and his fascist-backed rebellion, Professor Enrique Moradiellos told an audience at the Imperial War Museum, London, on 4 March.

Delivering the IBMT's annual Len Crome Memorial Lecture, Professor Moradiellos said that Britain's neutrality was "a diplomatic cloak and shelter" for a fraudulent policy clearly benevolent towards the military insurgents. He



## From the Secretary

When I look back on the three years or so that the Association has been in existence, I marvel at what has been achieved. Many of our aims are being met: we are sent much archival material and are ensuring that it will be kept; we are ensuring that the story of the *niños* is told, that they will not be “los olvidados”, victims of the Spanish Civil War. The Association is recognised as a link on many websites about the Spanish Civil War, and our work is becoming known to the Spanish government.

This does not mean that we should rest on our laurels: there is still much work to be done. Archival material has to be catalogued, more people should give talks on the *niños* to local history societies, work packs for use with the different stages of secondary schools’

**“Many of our aims are being met: we are sent much archival material and are ensuring that it will be kept; we are ensuring that the story of the niños is told, that they will not be “los olvidados”, victims of the Spanish Civil War.”**

history curriculum should be produced... the list is endless.

I am pleased to record that we have now adopted a distinctive logo which graphic designer Dawn Velasco prepared for us. We are grateful to her for producing such a striking marker. It just happens that she has links with the *niños vascos* in that she is married to the son of Juan Antonio Velasco!

In January, I was delighted to receive a visit from María Luisa Cooper (Encinas Vegas) who lives in Spain but was visiting her son for Christmas. She had been at the Caerleon colony and was sorry to have missed the blue plaque ceremony.

In the course of the last six months, I have received a great deal of correspondence from *niños* who live now in Latin America, but who originally were evacuated to Britain. The story of their stay in this country adds to the testimonies that we already have, but their main purpose in writing was to

ask whether we have a list of the colonies that each *niño* went to: because they receive a paltry pension, they wish to claim a pension from the Spanish government under the new law but they have to prove to the authorities that they were “niños de la guerra”. Unfortunately, there is no such list, but I am able to refer them to the Fundación Universitaria Española in Madrid which holds the record cards for each child, together with the names of the different colonies they lived in.

We now have a total of 28 display boards which make up a fine exhibition of the exile of the *niños* to Britain. They are proving to be very popular: they have already been loaned 5 times to universities, civic centres and libraries and we have 4 bookings for the near future. They are of special interest this year and next, as it is the 70th anniversary of the start of the Civil War and of the *niños*’ evacuation to Britain and many events are being held around the country.

I have recently applied for funding from the Spanish government under the aegis of “la recuperación de la memoria histórica” which is a new initiative intended for associations representing “las víctimas de la guerra civil”. By the time the next Newsletter appears, we shall know the outcome. We shall also be putting in bids for help with social and cultural activities. As you will be able to read in this issue, we have various plans for celebrating the 70th anniversary next year, but they need subsidising and unless we obtain funding, we won’t be able to put them into practice.

One of the most exciting projects is the Recuerdos book that we will be producing. I have already received contributions from 10 *niños*, so may I urge you to put pen to paper and let me have your recollections of your experiences in Britain. If it is to be ready by next year, the deadline for copy is September: you will appreciate the amount of work needed to prepare the manuscripts and choose the photographs for publication.

*¡Agur!*

*Natalia Benjamin*

Natalia Benjamin

described Britain’s stance on the civil war as a specific and regional version of the overall policy of appeasement, which also allowed Hitler to annex Austria and dismember Czechoslovakia.

Over 120 people attended the lecture, named after the former president of the International Brigade Association who in Spain became the Chief Medical Officer of the Republic’s 35th Division. They heard Professor Paul Preston introduce Moradiellos, who is Professor of Modern History at the University of Extremadura in Cáceres, as the world’s foremost expert on British government policy towards the Spanish Civil War.

Moradiellos explained that the non-intervention pact which the Conservative government persuaded France and eventually the other main European countries to sign was applied mainly against the Republic. This was because Hitler and Mussolini flagrantly ignored it, sending plentiful supplies of arms and, between them, 100,000 German and Italian troops to fight on the side of Franco. Such help was never matched by the Soviet Union, the only country which sold significant amounts of arms to the Republic, or by the 35,000 volunteers in the International Brigades.

The policy of non-intervention was also



designed to disguise the pro-Franco sympathies of the government in the face of British public opinion that was decidedly pro-Republican.

Left: Enrique Moradiellos.

## Spanish films at the Renoir

by Marlene Sidaway

On 12 February, the London Socialist Film Co-op showed two Spanish films at the Renoir Cinema in Brunswick Square, London, WC1.

The first, “Behind the Spanish Lines” was compiled by Thorold Dickinson in 1938 and had some fascinating archival material from the British Film Institute, showing life behind the Republican lines during the Spanish anti-fascist war. It was a testament to the bravery and determination of the Spanish people as they coped with bombs and destruction on a scale that had previously been unknown.

The second film “Bars in the Memory” (Rejas de la Memoria) produced by Manuel Palacios in 2004, has caused great controversy in Spain as it uses information only recently disclosed about the horrific

treatment of nearly half a million political prisoners interned in concentration camps after Franco's victory. Much of the work on Spain's new infrastructure had been done by internees, hired out to contractors through the Government and paid a pittance; the days worked counted to reduce lengthy sentences, but many did not survive the harsh conditions and poor diet. It was shocking to learn that the last of the concentration camps only closed in 1961: the interviews with those men and women who had survived – and the relatives of those who had not – were very moving. There were also contributions from several historians and groups dedicated to uncovering the truth about what happened to all those who had disappeared after the war.

There was a lively discussion afterwards, hosted by Professor Paul Preston, who had also taken part in the film, and we were extremely grateful that he was there and willing to take part, in the unavoidable absence of Sam Lesser.

## Exhibition at Nottingham Trent University

by Robert Bates

Monday 20 March 2006 saw the opening of the exhibition on the exile of the Basque children under the heading "The Spanish Civil War, 70 years on", the prelude to a week-long series of events to commemorate the arrival of the Basque children and their experiences in the UK. The exhibition was presented in the 1851 Gallery in the elegant Waverley Building of Nottingham Trent University under the sponsorship of the School of Arts, Communication & Culture.

There were about 50 guests, and we were especially pleased to welcome among the guests a lady who, as Marguerite Scott, had been nurse to the *niños* at the Bray Court colony.

The evening began with an introduction from Professor Marianne Howarth, followed by an eloquent exposition by Natalia of the background to the evacuation, the reception of the children at Stoneham and life in the colonies. Two *niños* were present: Helvecia Hidalgo gave a moving account of her experiences, followed by a robust presentation by Luís Santamaría.

The opening ceremony concluded with an interesting contrast, the experience of a volunteer tutor, Cora Portillo, who then declared the exhibition "to continue to be open" in recognition that many in the audience, including her distinguished son Michael, had already enjoyed looking at the extensive array of display boards concerning Stoneham Camp and the numerous colonies.

Discussions continued vigorously during the buffet session.



Natalia Benjamin (left) and Helvecia Hidalgo at Nottingham Trent University.

The Association would like to thank Mirella Santamaría and the staff of the School of Arts, Communication and Culture for their generous hospitality in organising the exhibition and succeeding events.

forgotten. "You have made an old woman very happy today," Karmeli said to Steve.

## Onwards and upwards

In the wake of the success of "The Guernica Children", Steve Bowles is currently researching a new television documentary project which looks specifically at the bombing of Guernica and the political repercussions of the event.

Steve would be delighted to hear from anyone with first-hand memories of the story. "Picasso's painting of the bombing of Guernica is perhaps the iconic image of the horror of modern warfare, yet the actual story of the events of Guernica is full of half-truths, spin and counter-spin. Next year's 70th anniversary commemoration of the event is the moment to tell the definitive story of what happened," said Steve. You can contact Steve direct on [stevebowles@btopenworld.com] or telephone 023 8039 1199.

## Forthcoming events

### Colloquium

A colloquium on "Los Niños de la Guerra", is to be held on 11-17 May at the Instituto Español Cañada Blanch, 317 Portobello Road, London W10 5SY:

- Thursday 11 May: Opening of exhibition "El Exilio de los Niños en Gran Bretaña", 2.30pm
- Friday 12 May: Talk by Adrian Bell, 2.30pm
- Monday 15 May: Presentation and screening by Steve Bowles of his documentary film "The Guernica Children", 2.30pm
- Tuesday 16 May: Round-table with *niños de la guerra*, question and answer session. Choir will sing songs from the book: Songs of the Basque Children.

## 'The Guernica Children' continues to make waves

Last year Eye Witness Productions produced "The Guernica Children" for the BBC. For the first time on television the film told the story of the four thousand children who were evacuated to Britain in the wake of the bombing of Guernica.

Steve Bowles – the film's producer and director – worked closely with the Association and with Adrian Bell, author of "Only for Three Months" to produce a film that was both moving and authoritative.

The film inevitably generated an enormous amount of interest in the topic. The BBC switchboard had dozens of enquiries from people wanting to know more about the story and the BBC web-site which featured the programme had hundreds of hits from interested viewers.

In February of this year, Herminio Martínez – one of the *niños* featured in the film – organised a showing on behalf of the Association at Holly Lodge Community Centre in Highgate, London.

Somehow a public showing of a film is more powerful than a television screening and it also gave the audience the opportunity to question Adrian, Herminio and Steve about the topic.

In the audience was Karmeli Ibarloza Bilbao who was in the vicinity of Guernica with her mother on the day of the bombing. Karmeli, aged only three, left Spain with her mother who, like so many of her compatriots, made her way to France, and Karmeli eventually came to Britain. By chance she had seen an advert for the showing of the film. Karmeli was obviously very moved by a story that was so close to her heart – a story that is so often



● Wednesday 17 May: Closing of the colloquium.

You are welcome to attend any of the events. Times are provisional, so for more detailed information nearer the time, please telephone Natalia on 01865 459744 or alternatively, telephone the school on 0208 9692664.

## For your diary:

**1 July** – Exhibition of our display boards at the Spanish Civil War event, Festival of Socialism, Wortley Hall, near Sheffield.

**15 July** – Commemoration ceremony at 1pm at Jubilee Gardens, South Bank, London, to honour the International Brigaders.

**23 November** – The Universities of St Andrews and Stirling are holding a joint event on the Spanish Civil War at the National Library of Edinburgh, where there will be an exhibition of our display boards.

## Blue plaques

We are hoping to be able to erect a blue plaque at Elm Trees, one of the Hull colonies. We are very grateful for the work that the late Rob Wardle did writing to the relevant authorities and are now looking for sources of funding.

## Reviews

### Radio waves

*The Basque Children of '37. Written and produced by Simon Evans, narrated by Michael Portillo. Broadcast on Radio 4 at 8pm on 7 November 2005. Reviewed by Martin Murphy:*

This programme tells a story which is familiar to all the members of our Association but is still largely unknown to the public at large. Simon Evans, the producer, has served history well by recording for posterity the voices of some of those survivors who as children seventy years ago lived through the experience of siege, evacuation and exile. The voices include those of Koke Martínez, Bene González, Flori Díaz, Mercedes Porras, Mari Sanz, Herminio Martínez and Miguel San Sebastián, all of whom recall the past with dignity, restraint and even humour. Within the time limits allowed him, Simon Evans has produced a fair and moving record.

The narrator, Michael Portillo, begins by describing the scene in the Oxfordshire village of Aston in July 2003 when a group of

veterans were reunited at their former colony for the unveiling of a plaque on the house where his mother worked as a volunteer. But he goes on to set this little colony in the much wider political context of its time, against a background of shifting government policy and volatile public opinion. It is a surprise to learn that opposition to the evacuation of the children from Bilbao was not confined to bureaucrats and British supporters of Franco: a representative of the Save the Children Fund, Mr Golden, declared that he would rather see the children “die in their own land than rot slowly in England, where they would deteriorate physically, mentally and morally”. Mr Golden underestimated the resilience of children in general, and these children in particular.

The witnesses we hear include not just the evacuees but also some of those who remained behind in Bilbao and some who returned there in 1939 to endure the grim aftermath of the war. In Britain the children became pawns in a propaganda battle. Franco was emerging as the victor, and the Conservative government was anxious to ensure that he remained neutral in the coming conflict with the Axis powers. The continuing presence of the refugee children in Britain was an embarrassment to these appeasers. As early as August 1937 a Spanish Children's Repatriation Committee was formed in opposition to the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, and one of its leading members, Arnold Wilson, the Conservative MP for Hitchin, argued in a letter to *The Times* that there was no need for the children to remain in Britain now that the situation in Bilbao was “completely normal”. Some of the interviewees in this programme tell how they returned at the supposed request of their parents, only to find that no such request had been made. The campaign in Britain for the children's return was backed by some sections of the Catholic press here, perhaps as a result of pressure from the Vatican, which recognised the Franco régime in August 1937. But as Wilfrid Roberts acknowledged, this attitude was not universally shared by the Catholic community in this country. The fact that 400 children were able to remain in Britain was due to the persistent and courageous advocacy of Roberts and his colleagues.

## Testimonies

*Hijos de la Guerra: testimonios y recuerdos by Jorge M Reverte and Socorro Thomas.*

**Reviewed by Natalia Benjamin:**

This is not a story of the Spanish Civil War, rather a book of the testimonies of different people who were children at the start of the conflict. Coming from all parts of Spain, it mattered little which side their parents were

on, each one suffered the same dramatic effects that the war indelibly impressed upon them: death, imprisonment, hunger, betrayal. The common denominator was fear. The authors state that their intention is to “transmit the message to the new generations that there is nothing glorious about war, even less so when it is a civil war.”

The authors offer a moving, at times spine-chilling, account by their witnesses. These reflections are recalled today by old men and women who were then between 5 and 12 years old. Some were luckier than others and were able to stay with their parents, others' parents were shot for being “reds” or masons, and those with no relatives had to be looked after by charitable institutions. This is a book that needs to be read: as the authors conclude, it is “una bofetada y un homenaje simultáneos al ser humano.”

## Accounts

Abridged version of accounts for the year ended 30 November 2005 adopted at the Annual General Meeting on 18 March 2006:

	2004	2005
<b>Receipts:</b>		
<i>Subscriptions, donations and book sales:</i>	£1,765	£2,219
<i>Grant from Basque Government:</i>	–	£1,114
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>£1,765</b>	<b>£3,333</b>
<b>Expenditure:</b>		
<i>Blue plaques:</i>	£222	£1,499
<i>Display boards:</i>	£294	£138
<i>Newsletter:</i>	£80	£162
<i>Postage, copying etc:</i>	£496	£929
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>£1092</b>	<b>£2,728</b>
<b>Surplus for the year:</b>	<b>£673</b>	<b>£605</b>
<b>Bank balance:</b>	<b>£739</b>	<b>£1,344</b>

Copies of the audited details may be obtained from the Secretary.

## Obituaries

We very much regret to announce the deaths of the following:

- María Angeles Olozaga
- Rob Wardle
- Luís Sobrino
- Ana María González.



*Some of the niños by the gatehouse of Buscot Park, Lord Faringdon's estate.*

# In a country churchyard annexe

by Adrian Bell

Among the graves that surrounded All Saints' Church in the Oxfordshire village of Faringdon there was no signpost directing you to the churchyard annexe, but the vicar was helpful: it was only a short distance back up the hill, he said, and he would take us there. Natalia and I explained that we'd come in search of a memorial stone that had been set there to commemorate Arturo Barea and his Austrian wife, Ilsa, who had lived in exile in Britain since March 1939, the month in which the Spanish Republic finally collapsed.

The vicar was surprised: he didn't know of any such stone; nor was he aware that one of Spain's most celebrated novelists of the 20th century might have been buried in this patch of rural England. It would help to locate it,

he said, if we knew when Barea had died. We told him that Barea had died in 1957 and his wife some years later in Vienna, but the information we had was that the stone had been placed by a friend at the head of the graves of Ilsa's parents. They, too, had found refuge in Britain after the Nazis had occupied their homeland, and had lived with the Bareas until they died, within a few months of each other, in 1948.

The stone was visible from some distance off – a solid, rough-hewn lump of pinkish granite that contrasted with the polished, grey-white headstones of Faringdon's native parishioners. It carried no epitaph, simply their names – Arturo Barea and Ilsa Barea Pollak – and their dates. Surprisingly, both the stone and the Pollaks' graves appeared well tended.

Arturo Barea is best remembered for

his trilogy of autobiographical novels that are collectively known as "The Forging of a Rebel". Written in the early 1940s and skillfully translated by Ilsa, they were first published in English. By the end of that decade they had been translated into nine European languages and at that time Barea stood fifth on the all-time list of most-translated Spanish writers, but it was not until three years after Franco's death that they were finally published in Spain.

A Castilian edition had been published in Buenos Aires (and had circulated clandestinely in Spain), which was not surprising since Barea was enormously popular in Argentina. From 1940 right up until his death he worked for the South American section of the BBC's World Service and, under the pseudonym of Juan de Castilla, broadcast a weekly chat

## In a country churchyard annexe

▶ about life in England. It was a job for which he was suitably experienced: throughout much of 1937 he had broadcast nightly as "the voice of Madrid". He described his BBC broadcasts as "little stories from my village", and from 1947 to 1957 "my village" was Eaton Hastings, five miles from Faringdon, and where the Bareas rented Middle Lodge, a house on the edge of Buscot Park owned by Gavin Henderson, the second Lord Faringdon.

In England Barea maintained only a limited contact with the many other Republican writers and intellectuals who'd been similarly driven into exile. He was, however, at home in English literary circles, or among the Middle European refugees whom he met through Ilsa when she worked at the BBC monitoring centre during the war. And unlike a number of other Spaniards who'd arrived in England at the same time, such as Luis Portillo and Pepe Estruch, he had no links with the Basque children who were still left in England – he did not teach in any of the remaining colonies, for instance, as they did.

And yet, there was a coincidental connection with the Basque children. Like a number of those children, he benefited from Lord Faringdon's Republican sympathies. Half a mile down the road from Middle Lodge there is a gate-house into Buscot Park. It was here in 1938 that Lord Faringdon provided accommodation for the 40 Basque boys who formed Poppy Vulliamy's colony. They were amongst the last contingent to leave the Eastleigh camp, and had lived a somewhat nomadic life since. Poppy took them from Eastleigh to another set of borrowed tents in another farmer's field, outside Diss in Norfolk.

Then, with the arrival of autumn, she secured a house – a redundant vicarage out on the marshes near Great Yarmouth. It was a roof over their heads, but with neither gas nor electricity, and with earth latrines that the boys had to dig at the bottom of the garden, it was little else. In the freezing winter of 1937-38, as the boys were breaking up what little furniture there was for firewood, Poppy sought out better accommodation. The account she gave to me ran:

"So I wrote to Lord Faringdon, and I said – I was very cheeky – I said, 'Call

yourself a socialist. Why are you living in that great big house all by yourself? Why don't you share it with my Basque boys?'

"He wrote back and said, 'How many Basque boys are we talking about?'

"And I said, 'Forty.'

"He wrote back again and he said, 'You'd better come up and we'll talk about it.'

"So I went up to see him in the House of Lords, and I was so nervous. He was in all his robes."

Lord Faringdon stopped short of sharing Buscot House with 40 Basque boys, but he offered them the gate-house and had a set of prefabricated garages erected in its garden to serve as dormitories. And he gave them the run of the park and its lake.

On our way over to Faringdon in our search for the Bareas' memorial we stopped at the gatehouse – to this day it is still known as "Basque House". The prefabs have long gone, but otherwise the house looks the same and the view down across the lake looks just as it did in the photographs Poppy took of her boys nearly 70 years ago.

The stone in memory of the Bareas had been placed in the Faringdon churchyard annexe after Ilsa's death in 1977 by Olive Renier. She had met them, and the Pollaks, when she and Ilsa sat together through their long shifts at the BBC monitoring centre in 1940, and befriended them in their first years in exile. Years later she wrote:

"I put up a stone, but could find no words to express my feelings for those four people, whose fate (though they could be said to be among the fortunate ones) was symbolic of the giant lost causes of our generation – the fate of Spain, the fate of the Jews, the fate of social democracy in Germany, in Italy, in Europe as a whole."

Here was an epitaph that might equally have been spoken for the Basque children, and the private erection of that memorial stone a quiet gesture symbolic of the thousand acts of kindness that supported them through their time in England.

There is a coda to that morning in Faringdon. A few weeks later Natalia wrote to say th she had had a visit from Martin Murphy, a retired academic from Oxford, to whom we were indebted – he'd first brought to our attention the story of Arturo Barea's connection with Faringdon. He confessed that it was he who continues to clean the moss from the memorial stone and the weeds from the Pollaks' graves.

## The Culvers' Staff

This number of the *Basque Home News* would not be complete without special mention of the staff, without which all the resources and aspirations of the committee would amount to nothing, and the colony cease to exist.

For nearly two years we have been understaffed, but at the moment we are more favourably placed in that we now have a "team" who have common ideals and the spirit of collaboration which makes for complete harmony by unity of purpose.

Mrs. Somerset, Scotswoman, with many of the characteristics of her race, is not only an efficient matron in the general sense, but also fulfils her office in a material sense. Her previous experience at Wickham Market colony has proved to be of great value in tackling the great diversity of problems to be dealt with daily and hourly in a children's home. It does need great tact, understanding and perspicuity, especially with regard to the complex natures of Spanish children. They will not mind hearing about their complexities, for they are rather proud of them, as also they are of "maytron" too.

Miss Vulliamy, resident secretary, friend and co-worker of Mrs. Somerset, in this as in Wickham Market colony, shares responsibilities with all the staff in that at times she undertakes the duties of all. Her versatility is such that she is able to deputise for any member of the staff if called upon. Her first-hand knowledge of Spain and Spaniards gives adequate basis for the application of her ideals in the treatment and guidance of "los peques" (little ones).

Now we have Mrs. Temple with us, she has joined the staff quite recently. Nurse Temple takes the title from some fifteen years' experience as a nurse in general hospitals. She is responsible for the health and welfare generally of all children; she is also responsible for the children's wardrobe and bathing arrangements, but like all other members of the staff is well able to deputise for any other member.

Nurse was a little startled at first by the boisterous life of a children's Home, but has now become used to the children and they to her, and she has already made her weight felt, in that she has effected some changes and they are for the good of the children.

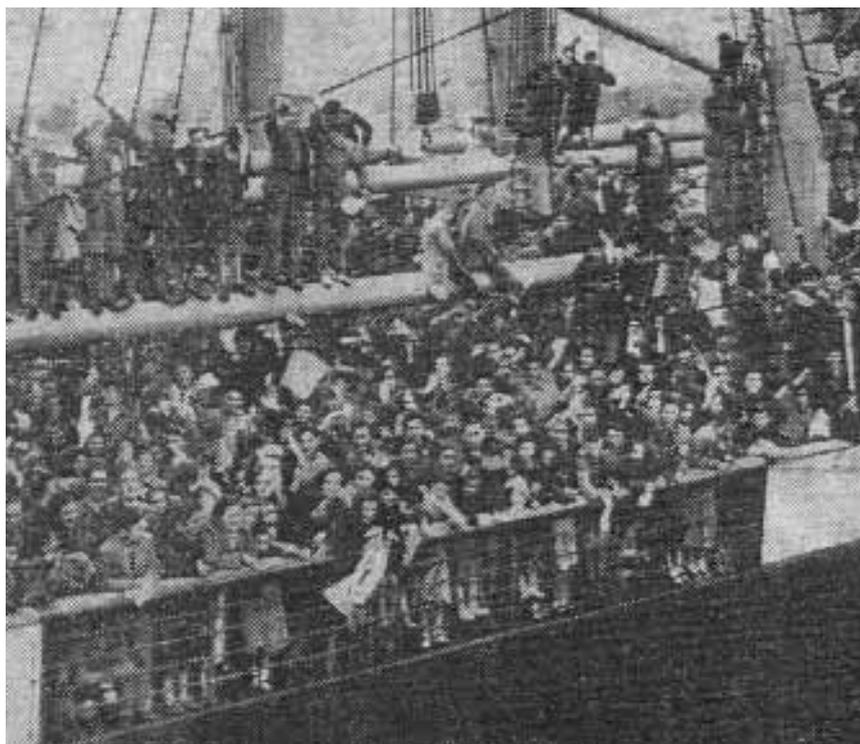
It is perhaps appropriate to speak of the remainder of the staff as the Spanish group. Mari Cruz and Pepe are much more than teachers educationally. Both are idealists in different ways, and both are jealous custodians of Spanish prestige.

For three years they were the mainstay of the colony, indeed for a time they constituted our only staff helped by several senior girls then living in the colony. The children are most fortunate in having in Pepe and Mari Cruz a big brother and sister.

In common with all the other members of the staff and in keeping with their sympathies, they have dedicated themselves to the welfare of a handful of refugee children, rather than to take advantage of opportunities for self advancement offered them. Their sacrifice is in itself an example for "los peques."

The well-being of the Home is in safe hands whilst we are able to preserve our unique team of workers, and the continuance of it assured while we retain their services.

*We thought our readers might be interested in this article about the staff at the Culvers (Carshalton) colony. It appeared in 1942, in the five-year commemorative issue of Carshalton Basque House News.*



Arrival of the Habana in Southampton in May 1937.



## Basque Children of '37 Association UK

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- Membership Secretary: Carmen Kilner. Tel: 020-8224 7959.

### How to support the Association

*Niños* and their spouses/partners and widow/ers are honorary members. Annual subscriptions (which are renewable in May) for other family members and supporters of the Association's aims are:

- £10 for individuals ● £25 for institutions.

Contact Membership Secretary Carmen Kilner for membership application forms.

Our aims are:

1. To reunite the *niños* of the Spanish Civil War who were exiled in Great Britain in 1937 and who did not return to Spain or who returned later, that is, those who had the common experience of being evacuated.
2. To preserve for descendants and future generations, through the collection of oral and written testimonies, the memory of the *niños'* experience of the period and their subsequent life in Britain.
3. To place the experience of the exile within its rightful historical context, so the *niños* should not be "*los olvidados*".
4. To provide a forum for discussion and to promote dialogue between *niños*, researchers and interested persons.
5. To encourage the collection and preservation of archives (photographs, films, songs, posters, oral testimonies, artwork etc) to be used for educational and historical purposes, eventually to be deposited in a specific library/archive in Britain.
6. To locate commemorative plaques and to ensure their preservation and maintenance; to organise the setting-up of other dedicated plaques to commemorate the experience.
7. To liaise and collaborate with related societies of *niños vascos* in other countries.
8. To facilitate and support research into the history of the evacuation of the *niños vascos* who were sent to Britain.
9. To inform members about new developments in the knowledge of the period through publications, bibliographies, web pages etc.

# El Barbas

by Herminio Martínez

Después de estar en varias colonias, me encontré en Brampton cerca de Carlisle con nueve años cuando en septiembre del 39, estalló la guerra. Se cerró la colonia y cuatro de nosotros con la Señorita Lolita, fuimos a vivir en una granja por dos meses. De ahí, a mi hermano y a mí, y a otro muchacho Ramón, nos mandaron a Margate al sur del país, para repatriarnos.

Margate era el infierno. Fue en el invierno del 39/40, un invierno muy severo con muchísima nieve. El viaje fue larguísimo y llegamos a la colonia tarde cuando todos estaban acostados. Nos dieron un tanque de cacao y nos llevaron al cuarto donde íbamos a dormir. Había nieve por todas partes, incluso encima de las camas. Los que habían salido en la última repatriación, no se si de rabia o lo que fuera, habían roto muchas de las ventanas.

Por la mañana, bajamos a desayunar. El comedor era inmenso. Estaba lleno de críos haraposos, sentados a la mesa en bancos de madera. Era como una escena de las de Charles Dickens. Había varios amigos con quienes había estado en la colonia de Swansea.

Sentado a una de las mesas había un hombre con barba. Nos habían reservado plazas junto a él. Desayunamos: dos rebanadas de pan con margarina y un tanque con lo que parecía café. Al hombre le llamaban 'El Barbas'. Fue muy atento con nosotros y solíamos sentarnos a la misma mesa que él.

Esa colonia era un desastre. Eramos unos noventa, casi todos chicos. Como el último grupo repatriado había tenido problemas al pasar por Francia, creo que ya no hubo más repatriaciones. Allí, nos quedamos estancados. Pasamos mucho frío y hambre. Por fin, tuvieron que cerrar la colonia.

Llevo 65 años pensando quién sería aquel pobre hombre que compartía la misma miseria que nosotros, tan humilde, tan bueno y tan humano. Había muchachos que eran malos. Parecía que estaban trastornados. Muchos ya no eran

## Noticeboard

### Books

Available from Natalia Benjamin (Secretary):

- "Only for Three Months" by Adrian Bell, £8.50 including p&p.
- "Leah Manning" by Ron Bill & Stan Newens, £4.50 including p&p.

### Renewal of annual subs

Just a reminder that your annual subscription is due on 23 May. Forms are included with this Newsletter: please remember to fill them in and send by the due date.

*Note: niños and their spouses pay no membership fee, but still need to subscribe and register so that they can receive the Newsletters and details of the Association's activities during the year.*

### Archival material received

- Book: "The Guernica Children" by Dorothy Legaretta, donated by Vicente Cañada
- Book: "Los Niños Republicanos" by Eduardo Pons Prades, donated by Martin Green
- Newspaper cuttings and photos about the colonies of Great Rollesby, Caerelon, the Oaks, Carshalton, Camberley, Southampton, Eastleigh, North Stoneham, Bray Court, Hull, Street (donated by Colin Chambers, María Luisa Encinas Vegas, Gerald Hoare, Janis Peckham, Miguel Angel Cubero Elduque, Marguerite Bates, Ana María Preddy, the



Carved wooden stool: See "Archival material received".

Librarian at Clarks Museum, Street).

- Terry Bowater sent us a lovely carved wooden stool, which had apparently been in his house for years. It had obviously been made by the boys in one of the Hull colonies, since inscribed on the top are the words: "Basque Chicos Hazeldene Hull 1937-38". (If anyone knows more about the history of this stool, please contact us.)

### Research

- Meirian Jump has finished her undergraduate dissertation at Oxford University on the Basque children in Oxfordshire.
- Johanna Gelber is preparing an MA thesis for the Georg-August University of Göttingen. Her

subject is: "Guernica's Children: the Imagination of the Spanish Civil War and the British Public."

- James Oldridge is preparing a PhD thesis for the University of Wolverhampton entitled "National, Class and Political Identity amongst Spanish refugees in Britain from 1936."
- Dr Bill Williams, lecturer at the University of Manchester, is writing a book on the rise of fascism in the 1930s in the Manchester area. One chapter will be devoted to the Basque children.

### Talks to be given

Natalia Benjamin (Secretary) will be giving talks about the exile of the niños to the Probus Club, Fernham (24 April), The Thame Historical

## El Barbas

► niños. Algunos ya tendrían sus 17 años, posiblemente más. No había orden, mandaban los que más podían.

El Barbas hacía lo que podía, y sabía hacer. Comenzó unas clases en las que nos leía y explicaba poesía, a quiénes quisieran asistir. Recuerdo que uno de los poemas era de de Antonio Machado, sobre el destierro del Cid. Yo escuchaba fascinado. Era la primera vez que oía poesía. Todavía recuerdo "Al destierro con doce de los suyos, polvo, sudor y hierro, el Cid cabalga". Se acabaron las clases cuando una bestia prendió fuego al armario donde se guardaban los libros, y se encendió la sala.

Tenía en la memoria que el apellido de El Barbas era Landa. Siempre pensé que tenía que haber sido uno de los intelectuales que pudo salir de España.

Hace unos meses, uno de los que estuvo en Margate conmigo, me dió un recorte de "El País", que trataba de una entrevista con Carmen Landa en Madrid. No aclaraba lo del Barbas. Escribí a Carmen para ver si sabía quién era El Barbas. Me contestó, muy amable, y me dijo que El Barbas era su tío Ruben Landa. Salió de España para Rusia para dar clases a los niños evacuados. Luego vino a Inglaterra, y después, se fue a México, ejerciendo también de profesor. Murió en México en 1978.

Carmen me mandó un libro que trata de su madre, "Matilde Landa". Explica muchas cosas. Es una biografía terrible y

**"El Barbas nos leía y explicaba poesía, a quienes quisieran asistir... Yo escuchaba fascinado. Era la primera vez que oía poesía."**

triste de Matilde Landa, su vida antes de la guerra civil, su encarcelamiento en la prisión de Las Ventas en Madrid, su condenación a muerte, y luego su transferencia a una cárcel para mujeres en Mallorca. Las monjas carceleras hicieron todo lo posible para que renunciara a sus ideas comunistas y para que se bautizara. La acosaron de tal manera que acabó suicidándose. Se tiró de una barandilla al patio. Sobrevivió unos tres cuartos de hora. La bautizaron e hicieron todo lo que tenían que hacer para que muriera Católica.

Es una biografía en la que resalta la nobleza de esa mujer. Deja a uno devastado y con rabia de lo que fue capaz la iglesia en aquellos años. Pronto saldrá una biografía de Ruben Landa.

*Nota: Carmen López Landa murió en Madrid el 20 de enero 2006. En "El País" del 25 de enero hay un artículo largo sobre la vida de Carmen: "Niña de la Guerra – una vida llena de tragedias".*

## From the maestras

# From wartime memories to an English paradise

This article was written by Peque (Cecilia) Gurich who was a maestra at Langham, Colchester. She was the mother of Secretary Natalia Benjamin; the printed article was found, together with seven others, only a month ago in her sister's attic. Unfortunately, the articles have no references, so we don't know what newspapers they appeared in. This one was obviously written soon after her arrival in Britain in August 1937.

Perhaps it will interest our readers to hear a description of our experiences in the cruel time through which we all have passed during the war in Spain.

The frequent air raids obliged everyone to leave their homes whenever bombardment took place. When it is day time, and it is light, bombardments are not so horrible as in the night, when the flames of the incendiary bombs make the town like an inferno! It is terrible to see a narrow street with rows of houses all on fire, and to hear the cries of the people overcome with fear.

Since the first bombardment the people in Madrid have slept fully dressed waiting for the sound of the alarm given by the sirens, and they run panic stricken from one place to another, without any sense of direction, guided only by their instinct of self preservation.

The women rescued their children, together with their more valuable belongings, in little carts drawn by a donkey. All traffic stopped. People slept in all the stations of the underground on mattresses on the floor, so that there was no room to move, and often no one could get out all day, and people went mad to think of their impotence against chemical warfare. People remarked that war was better in the old times when men fought hand to hand.

The neighbours of the upper flats came down to sleep in the lowest part of the house, and slept on mattresses on the floor. An incendiary bomb fell in the house where I was living, but fortunately we were in the cellars, and the bomb only destroyed two rooms as the fire was put out on time.

The bombardments were repeated



sometimes 15 or 20 times a day. It was a sad sight to see how the poor people tried to rescue everything they could, sometimes even furniture which cost them so much labour and sacrifice.

As soon as it was dawn, all the women took their places in the queues, and all maids of every house got up early, so that at one or two o'clock in the night they were already waiting their turn; sometimes the poor wives of working men with a few months' old baby in their arms, not having any relative or servant with whom to leave the child. Time passed and the queue grew longer; the women cried and lamented over their sorrows.

But suddenly several aeroplanes appeared and descending as low as possible and proud of their work, dropped bombs of varying weights. The queue broke up in a moment: cries were heard and pictures seen impossible to describe. Another day without food- everything was rationed. The next day the same queue. That day there happened to be no more aeroplanes, but as food was more and more scarce, when the shop had supplied the first dozen, there was no more left and the immense queue broke up and once more groans were heard and sad faces seen.

Supplies were terribly scarce, since the few there were went to the troops at the front. The most peculiar foods were eaten. We ate fried orange peel and rice boiled in water. In Madrid, several animals from the zoo were eaten.

At the present time in Barcelona people continue sleeping fully dressed: there are many refuges built, so the stations of the underground are used less.

When I went on board the English destroyer *Grenville* and ate well for the first time for months, it seemed like a dream, and then I thought that English people ate too often, but when I arrived in Marseille and saw all the normal life, without fear of air raids, I thought I was in Paradise: and since coming to England I have found normal life and people who welcome us with affection. So we are still in our English paradise.

## Letter from North Stoneham

The following letter was written to her family soon after arriving to North Stoneham Camp by Ana María González, the late mother of our Membership Secretary, Carmen Kilner.

Querida mamá, abuela, hermanos y tíos, ¿Cómo os encontráis? yo relativamente bien, solo relativamente.

Seguimos como os dije anteriormente viviendo en tiendas de campaña estilo de película, esto ya está mejor organizado que al principio, de todas maneras, extraño mucho la comida.

Aquí la comida es casi siempre cosas frías: embutidos, carne congelada, queso, chocolate, leche y pan con mantequilla a todo pasto.

Tengo bastante trabajo aunque vosotros creáis lo contrario. Lo que más trabajo me produce es la tienda de campaña que continuamente están pasando revista y nunca puede estar arreglada.

Echo mucho de menos la cama del Marqués de Rodas a pesar de estar estropeado el furgón. Echo mucho de menos la cebada con leche, los platos de arroz con alcachofas, los garbanzos, pero lo que más echo de menos es vuestra compañía. El otro día nos han dado noticias de los frentes vascos pero más me agrada poder leer en los periódicos la marcha de la guerra.

Aquí no ocurre nada interesante porque estamos en el campo completamente aislados de la ciudad y no nos permiten salir.

¿Cómo estáis por ahí? Si es verdad que han llegado aviones supongo que estaréis bien y no habrá ocurrido novedad alguna. Si queréis escribirme, podéis hacerlo a las señas que os envié en carta anterior; pues aunque marchemos de aquí al lugar donde vayamos me la enviarán.

Nada más por hoy que muchos besos y abrazos de vuestra

Ana María

***“When I went on board the English destroyer ‘Grenville’ and ate well for the first time for months, it seemed like a dream, and then I thought that English people ate too often...”***

by Peter Wood

Husband of María Carmen (Andrés Elorriaga)

The small Spanish child stood in the corner of the room holding her arms out level with her shoulders; she had been there since the teacher had found her bed wet, yet again. It seemed like hours as her sleepy head drooped lower. "Get those arms up, head up," came the voice from the other corner.

Her many aunts, uncles, friends, her brother and small sister, all had been replaced by

***"She had even been taken to secret meetings by her father, where they had all sung stirring songs, and she had proudly given the salute with her tiny fist. Her father had been adamant that she was never to give that salute or talk of these meetings outside."***

unfriendly people in a foreign country who cooked and ate their food in a vastly different way to which she was accustomed. Here in the

# The penance

Convent, if you had not finished the main meal, they heaped the dessert on top of what was left. The fish never quite mixed with the semolina pudding – but one ate it because there would be nothing else until teatime.

Miserably she thought back to happier times with her mother and father in Spain, sitting in the señora's shop making them laugh by knitting with two six-inch nails that her father had given her, and chatting away like a girl three times her age.

Of the three of them, Andrés her older brother and Rosa her baby sister, she had been sure that she was her parents' favourite child. She never cried, not even when she had cut her hand so badly on her father's chisel and it would not stop bleeding. Even when her mother had chased her down into the dock area amongst the cheering sailors, giving her a sound beating for drinking all the vinegar that she had been sent out to buy. As she told her mother at the time, "It was only a sip, and then another sip, and it was all gone!"

She had even been taken to secret meetings by her father, where they had all sung stirring songs, and she had proudly given the salute

with her tiny fist. Her father had been adamant that she was never to give that salute or talk of these meetings outside this special meeting place, and that it was to be their special secret. This salute was to be remembered years later when it became the sign of extremism, but at that time it was the symbol of the fight against the usurper. Just six years old, she was accepted as part of this group.

"Head up, arms out," came the voice again. María decided against putting her tongue out. Instead she tried to remember what had happened before she found herself so sick on the ship. She could remember the sailors on that ship seemed to always have tears in their eyes, and treated them with great kindness and gentleness.

"Head up, arms out," the voice was sleepier now and María knew that she herself would not be able to stand there much longer. Slowly, María felt herself crumple, and although she tried to stand up straight, she could feel herself easing down on to the hard wood block floor, and then blessed sleep engulfed her.

## The priests who accompanied us to Great Britain

by Herminio Martínez

I was contacted recently by Don Watson from North Shields who very kindly sent me a copy of an article he had published in "North East History". Apart from the general experiences we lived through, he deals in particular with the colony in Tynemouth.

He also writes about the priests who came with us and who were sent to those colonies run by the Catholic church. I was never in one of them, but several hundred of us were. The case of Father Orbegozo I found very sad. He was still at St. Joseph's in Darlington in early 1940. He was writing desperately to his diocesan bishop, pleading that he be allowed to remain in Britain rather than having to return to Spain. Clearly he had problems with the English language. I reproduce one of his letters to Bishop McCormack:

"I understand well the advice and desire of your Lordship about my returning... I cannot dare yet to return to Spain according to the information I have lately received; therefore I pray my Lord

again and again for God's sake have mercy on me. After a short time I will be able to do something with children and even adults."

Bishop McCormack's reply states curtly: "Answered. Go to Spain".

The priests, as well as the teachers who came with us, had good reason to have fears about returning to Spain. Franco had passed a law permitting him to jail or execute Republican supporters and sympathisers. This law remained effective until 1965. Within a month of the fall of Bilbao, 1,000 Republicans and Basque nationalists had been executed and some 16,000 were imprisoned. This was not all. These ferocious reprisals continued unabated. The new Falangist mayor boasted that Bilbao was "redeemed for

***"The Catholic church in Britain simply did not want us and shunned the priests who came with us."***

ever from the red scum in the service of Moscow and the Vizcayan scum in the service of separatism". The bishop of Vitoria had circulated a letter in which he stated that those responsible for the evacuation of the children had committed "un crimen espantoso" and those who had helped "contubernio con los enemigos de Dios y de la patria". It is known, or rather, we know, that quite a number of Basque priests were executed and many more imprisoned. One of the priests who accompanied us was sentenced to death in absentia. Some of the priests who came with us went to America rather than return to Spain.

The Catholic church in Britain simply did not want us and shunned the priests who came with us. Gregorio Arrién writes of the priests: "Pasaron grandes dificultades, siendo objeto de un cierto rechazo de parte del clero y algunas fuerzas católicas de Gran Bretaña, mayoritariamente favorables a la causa de Franco. Los obispos no les querían tener mas tiempo, forzándoles a marcharse a su tierra."

# Niños in the North East and Cumbria

Below is a summary of a talk given by Don Watson at the AGM of the North East Labour History Society, Newcastle upon Tyne, on 25 May 2005.

Around 400 Basque children were looked after in the North East of England and Cumbria, most of them for up to two years. Some stayed at Brampton near Carlisle, in "The Larches" on the Allendale Road in Hexham, Northumberland, and at 40 Percy Park in Tynemouth. Another colony was at Hutton Hall near Guisborough in Cleveland. About half of them were taken care of by the Catholic Church in children's homes and convents in Newcastle-on-Tyne, Carlisle, Spennymoor and Darlington.

The biggest single colony was at Brampton, within the constituency of Wilfred Roberts M.P. – a prominent member of the Basque Children's Committee and committed supporter of the Spanish Republic. The children were put up in an old workhouse converted by local trades unions and church members. It accommodated up to 60 children, who must have had an impact on the small town. Elsewhere sympathisers let out properties to the local Basque Children's Committees: large houses in residential areas in Hexham and Tynemouth, and Hutton Hall was a small stately home in its own grounds.

The hostel at Hexham had to close after a few months due to lack of local financial support: there was some political opposition to the Basque evacuation in the town, which was prosperous and with little labour movement influence. This was in marked contrast to the hostel at Percy Park Tynemouth. Here Nell Badsey, the hostel manager, cleverly countered initial opposition by some local residents by using the local press to describe what the children had gone through at home and the amount of local support she was getting for them. The boys here took a full part in local football and sports events through the Scouts and the YMCA, so that after a year a newspaper described them as having settled in so well they were "as much a part of the area as Percy Park itself".

Len Edmondson, a member of the Independent Labour Party in 1937 and involved with the hostel in Tynemouth, recalls that the Basque children's supporters often had a hard job to convince the public that the children were not getting a penny from the British government. Just the opposite: all the money for food, coal, clothing, and everything else had to be raised through the efforts of the local



volunteers. Apart from Hexham these efforts were successful, because the sources of financial and other support for the colonies were many and varied. In North Shields for example, the Methodist Ladies Sisterhood performed plays to raise funds, and Nell Badsey, manager of the hostel in Tynemouth, was always full of praise for the consistent funding she received from the Northumberland and Durham miners' lodges. Supporters in the local committees included local clergy, trades unionists, and political activists from the Liberals to the Communists, frequently people involved in other areas of Republican solidarity work. They also included humanitarian people with no background in any political causes.

The colony committees encouraged the children to exhibit their traditional music, song and dance, frequently in national costume, at fund-raising concerts and meetings or simply at village occasions and other local events. Some of the children were present at political meetings too: they were on the platform at the Newcastle May Day rally in 1938, supporting Labour and Communist speakers at an International Brigade memorial meeting in Blyth Miners Welfare Hall, and on the platform in Bedlington, where Labour MPs attacked the British government for supporting non-intervention. In this way, true to the trades union and Republican sympathies of their parents, the presence of the children was part of the political campaign for the Republic and against Franco's war on the civilian population.

In the North East, as in the rest of the country, joint work with the Catholic Church

did not last long. The refugee children were a propaganda setback for Franco's supporters and, through the Vatican Secretariat, pressure was exerted to repatriate them as soon as possible. In the North East, the children from the Catholic colonies had returned to Spain by May 1938 but most of those looked after by the local Basque Children's Committee remained. The North East committees were intent on ensuring that when children were repatriated, it would be to conditions of safety and at the genuine request of their families. Some harsh exchanges between Catholic spokesmen and Basque Children's Committee members took place in the local newspapers, and showed in fact that they represented the two sides in the civil war.

At the start of the Second World War most of the *niños* in the North East had been repatriated to Spain, but a few remained here permanently. They included a *señorita* at Percy Park, Carmen Gil, who married one of the Labour Party activists on the hostel committee. Carmen now lives with her family in Salford. Nell Badsey adopted one of the boys from Percy Park, Angel Perez Martínez, and as Angel Badsey, he worked until his retirement in the Sunderland shipyards. Just two examples, as Adrian Bell puts it, of those for whom "three months" meant their adult lives.

*I would be delighted to hear from former refugees who were looked after in any of these "colonies", or from their own children and families. You can reach me at [donwatson@btinternet.com] or through the Basque Children of '37 Association UK.*

# Dancing through 70 years of exile

by Pirmin Trecu

Strange as it may seem, and as far as I know, there is no record whatsoever, in current bibliography, of the 21 Basque refugee children in the colony in Shornell's, Woolwich, Kent. And yet, after having spent 12 days at the Stoneham Camp, it is there that we were taken under the patronage of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society who used to own the mansion called Shornell's.

By the year 1939 most of the children were repatriated so that only my two sisters and I remained in the house as our parents were exiled in Mexico. As for the three of us, our parents had made all the arrangements to have us shipped to Mexico, our bags were all

**“Pepe Estruch, the famous Catalan theatre director offered me the opportunity to attend Croydon Art School where I was lucky enough, and I shall always be thankful for to him.”**

ready, but unfortunately, World War II had just begun, I remember it clearly. In a sense, I feel as if I have never ceased unpacking my tiny and shabby suitcase. I was nine years old at the time.

During WWII, bombing in the area was almost continuous, given that just below the woods where the house stood was the Woolwich Royal Arsenal, that is to say, the biggest arsenal in Great Britain. I cannot help thinking, without some sense of relief, that by the age of 10, I had already outlived two wars: the siege of Bilbao and that of London.

What is more, it does not require much historical knowledge to assert that it must have been the same pilots who kept bombarding us in Bilbao who were now bombing us in Woolwich, since, as it is well known now, Goering used the Spanish war to train the German pilots for the future world war. In the meantime, while I kept skipping the falling bombs, I was attending Saint Stephen's Primary School in Welling, which was about five miles there and back every day, despite the fact that I was given

some money for the bus. I preferred to keep that money for myself to buy something to eat!

In 1944 the Basque Children's Committee decided to send my sister Lore and myself to the colony in Carshalton, for, by that time, we were the only Basque children living in Shornell's, as my elder sister Eli had gone to London. Once in Carshalton, Pepe Estruch, the famous Catalan theatre director offered me the opportunity to attend Croydon Art School where I was lucky enough, and I shall always be thankful for to him, to meet a very exceptional teacher called Reginald Marlowe. After the school day was over, he used to take a small group of students for the Grand Tour in London, that is to say, to the major museums, to the concerts and... to the the New Theatre – now the Albery Theatre- located in St. Martin's Field in the West End, to a double ballet bill that included Frederick Ashton's *Les Patineurs* with Harold Turner and *Giselle* with Margot Fonteyn, both by the Sadler's Wells Ballet. I was 14 at the time and I had never had such a, how can I express it, let us say liberating sensation (as a counter experience of the two wars), in all my life. I can still hear myself saying: “That's what I want to do!”

In the days following the rapturous ballet experience I could not concentrate either on my art studies or anything else, I was so wrapped up in a calm and constant state of awe from which I did not want to wake up. In a matter of days I had almost literally devoured the few, yet wonderfully illustrated, ballet books — all written by Cervi Beaumont – at the Croydon Public Library. Instead of going to the Art School I would go straight to the library in order to enter the ballet world still more through the illustrations in the books where I first read about Ninette de Valois. Margot Fonteyn, Robert Helpman, Michael Soames, Frederick Ashton...

Given my sudden change of mood, Reginald Marlowe suggested that I should write to Ninette de Valois, Director of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, asking for an audition, despite the fact that I was 14 and that I had never done any ballet in my life. However, or should I say, most fortunately, I was given an audition and ultimately admitted, on the basis that I had a perfectly built body for ballet and the necessary artistic character,



Pirmin Trecu in 1957 in “Imperial Ballet” by Balanchine.

with a free tuition scholarship to the Sadler's Wells Ballet School. In 1947 I signed a contract to become a dancer for the second company with whom I danced all over Great Britain as well as the USA, where we performed in 74 cities in just six months. I had major roles in Andrée Howard's *La Fête Etrange*, John Cranko's *Harlequin in April* and *Reflections*, Frederick Ashton's *Les Rendezvous* and *Capriol Suite*; I danced the role of the Prince in *Nutcracker*, the poet in *Les Sylphides*, to name just a few.

It was in 1945, a few months before the Sadler's Wells became the Royal Ballet, that I joined the first company at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden where I played the

**“It does not require much historical knowledge to assert that it must have been the same pilots who kept bombarding us in Bilbao who were now bombing us in Woolwich.”**

principal role in Leonide Massine's *The Three Cornered Hat*; Elihu in *Ninette de Valois' Job*; Frederick Ashton's *Symphonic Variations*... We danced all over the world until, in 1960 I had a severe injury in my left knee after which I decided to give up dancing.

After that I opened my own school in Oporto where I trained three leading ballerinas for the National Ballet of Portugal. I retired in 2004 and came back to my home town in Zarautz, Gipuzkoa.

When we boarded the *Habana* in Santurce we were told that our stay in England would last, at most, three months. It took a little longer for me to return, nearly 70 years.