



Newsletter

Basque Children of '37 Association UK



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News

Blue plaque at Montrose

by Carmen Coupland

It was a cold and windy day on Sunday 12 October. IBMT members, TUC representatives and BC'37AUK members gathered at Mall Park House for the unveiling of a blue plaque, funded by trade union branches and individuals in Dundee. Mike Arnott introduced the proceedings, followed by Natalia Benjamin, who after recounting the work of the BC'37AUK, described the children's arrival in Scotland. She read a letter from Bilbao, from *niña* Bene Gonzalez, full of gratitude for the warmth she had been shown while living at the colony.

"This", said Mike Weir MP, "was a story of help being given to people in desperate times". Federico Palomera, Spanish Consul in Edinburgh, spoke on behalf of the people of Spain and in the spirit of the law of *La Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*, thanked the people of Montrose for their kindness, saying, "innocence is always the first casualty of war".

Then the Honourable Ruth Melville, Provost of Angus and Tom Borland, son of a *niña* who had been at Mall Park House, unveiled the plaque. The poignant story of Tom's mother, Encarnación Benavente, touched our hearts. She was almost 14 when she arrived in Montrose, so work was found for her in Dundee. In 1941 she married a local man. Tragedy struck on 6 September 1944: Encarna died of tuberculosis when Tom was just two years old.

After this moving event, refreshments were provided by Angus Town Council. We left knowing that the story of the *niños* lives on.

Anniversary lunch

This year the lunch, ably organised by Helvecia Hidalgo and Herminio Martínez, was held on 25 May at the San Miguel, a restaurant on the Fulham Road in London. About 60 people attended. In her speech, Helvecia remembered the first lunch held in 1967, when 176 attended. This had been followed by one in 1977, then in

The Courier, Dundee



Tom Borland, son of one of the *niñas* at Montrose, with Ruth Melville, Provost of Angus.

1979 and thereafter yearly. She said that she had decided that the time had come for her to relinquish the organisation of the annual lunch and she suggested that it should be organised in future by the next generation, the children of the *niños*. Three of these volunteered to carry on the tradition and take over the running of this significant event: Amaya Lopez, David Cabrera and Luis Jarero.

London pupils remember

by Andy Brockman*

On 9 April 1937, the "Kentish Independent and Kentish Mail" reported that The Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society was prepared to accommodate 20 Basque refugee children from Bilbao at Shornells, a large house set in 12 acres of grounds at Bostall Heath to the east of Woolwich. They arrived on 4 June 1937 accompanied by Mr DR Darling, who had worked as a teacher at Stoneham.

In July this year, a group of 10 and 11 year olds at Normandy Primary School in Erith were able to discover the story of the *niños* as part of the "Normans to Normandy" lottery-funded history project. Thanks to the help given us by

Richard Thorpe of La Columna living history group, and Natalia Benjamin of the BC'37AUK, the project team were able to bring the story of the *niños* to life and enable the children to spend a memorable afternoon with Herminio Martínez, one of the *niños*.

Herminio's family had had to build their own farm from scratch in the rural Spain of the 1930s; this intrigued the children. But perhaps the most striking meeting of 2008 with 1937 was the recreation of the *niños*' drawings documenting their experiences of war and bombing. One in the group included the twin towers of the World Trade Centre.

The Spanish Civil War does not normally figure in the primary school curriculum, but the children enjoyed the topic immensely, and most importantly, gained a great deal from it in terms of empathy and understanding. They were brought face to face with the fact that history is not something that happens in books and on film, but to real people, and that the questions posed in 1937, about how to treat refugees and how people's good nature sometimes runs ahead of a government's willingness to intervene, are questions which must still be asked and answered today.

*Andy Brockman is an archaeologist and was Project Manager for the project. He is



From the Editor

When I look back on the last six months, the event which aroused so many emotions was the *Homenaje* offered by the Idi Ezkerra Foundation to the *niños vascos*, especially targeted at those who never returned to live in Spain but made their lives in the country that had sheltered them as children.

Reasons for not returning were varied, the most tragic being that parents had been killed so there was no home to go to. Some refugees married other Basque *niños*, or Englishmen and women, others decided not to return for ideological reasons, vowing never to go back while the dictator was in power. They had left their beloved Basque country "only for three months" and ended up spending a lifetime in a foreign country. That they managed to survive and make their lives successfully is admirable and a tribute to their tenacity. Their resilience and determination are legendary and equal to none.

So it was fitting that there should be a tribute to them at this anniversary time. I feel honoured to have been invited to share in this unforgettable celebration. It was touch and go whether the dubbing into Spanish of Steve Bowles' film "The Guernica Children" would be ready in time to be premiered in Bilbao, but luck was on our side and the new version was able to be shown to much acclaim. But the event that moved me most was seeing the hundreds of red carnations floating in the water at the port of Santurce, in remembrance of the *niños* who left from there and who died in exile.

So you can see that the *niños* and their story are certainly not being forgotten. Just recently, I was pleased to attend the unveiling at the Montrose colony of the seventh blue plaque that we have erected. These events not only serve to thank the British people for their welcoming of the Basque children all those years ago, they also help

to propagate their story, through press coverage and publicity.

There is still a great deal of work to be done, especially as regards the different colonies. I was intrigued because, whereas all the large towns in the north, Manchester, Bradford, Bolton, Darlington, Durham, Huddersfield, Lancaster, Leeds and Wakefield, had one or more colonies, I couldn't find out anything about a colony in Sheffield. So when I was visiting my daughter there, I spent a morning in the Local Studies section of the Public Library and trawled through local newspapers of 1937, hoping to find some information. I was rewarded, as I found an article on 14 August about the decision of the Sheffield Basque Children's Committee to send 25 children to the Hollowford Hostel at Castleton, which although in Derbyshire, is very near to Sheffield. Later articles showed that "much hostility had been shown by the people in Castleton" and so the idea was abandoned. Then on 20 October I found a short news item saying that 30 boys were to be taken to Frogatt Guest House for at least six months. An internet search revealed that Frogatt was a little village not far from Sheffield. It seems likely then that the "Sheffield" colony was at Frogatt. Hopefully, on another visit, I can find out more information about it. The whole point of this story is to show you how much there is to still be unearthed. Let me encourage you to go to a Local Studies Library near you and look through old newspapers to see what you can discover!

It is the time of year when we plan the programme of events for the Association for the coming year – if you have any good ideas, please let me know.

Saludos y agur,



Natalia Benjamin

▶ researching Shomells colony and the response of the people of south-east London to the Spanish Civil War and would be delighted to hear from anyone who has any information.

Blockade of Bilbao

by Cliff Kirkpatrick

The talk given by Professor Michael Alpert at the Marx Memorial Library on 21 June covered the background and reasons which led the British government to give official consent for 4,000 Basque refugee children to enter this country in May 1937 despite there being no precedent for admitting large groups of refugees. Two main events were cited: the blockade of Bilbao by Franco's warships and the bombing of Guernica. Both had profound effects on a large part of the British public and were instrumental in securing a more sympathetic attitude on the part of the British government as a result of public pressure.

There were still of course elements within the cabinet, notably Sir Samuel Hoare, First Lord of the Admiralty, who did their best to promote Franco's cause. They thought a Nationalist victory probable and did not want to damage future relations with the likely victor. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary at the time, while a firm supporter of the non-

intervention agreement, nevertheless made a very pro-Basque statement at a cabinet meeting on 20 April 1937 and the Royal Navy continued to protect British ships in international waters, escorting them when necessary to within three miles of the Spanish coast where Basque shore batteries were effective in keeping Franco's ships at bay. A number of incidents during April showed how robust a stand the Royal Navy was prepared to take to protect British shipping engaged in legitimate trade.

British public opinion was also strongly influenced by George L Steer's report on the bombing of Guernica which appeared in The Times and The New York Times on the 28 April, two days after the bombing. All credit to Steer and The Times editor for publishing the report in full when normally the paper went to great lengths to avoid or play down anything that might antagonise Hitler and make a European war more likely.

The extent of public revulsion at the effrontery of Franco's navy attempting to stop, search and confiscate cargoes destined for Bilbao and the terror bombing of Guernica by the German Condor Legion with token support from the Italian Aviazione Legionaria was pivotal in persuading the British government to admit the Basque children. Constraints were imposed, principally that no costs would be charged to the public purse, but the important point was that a generally reluctant British

government did concede and let, what was for the time, a substantial number of refugees into the country. The British public, or at least a large part of it, responded magnificently in providing support, although contributions did fall sharply at the end of the civil war when many of the children had been repatriated.

Professor Alpert went into much greater detail than this summary conveys and his talk was extremely stimulating and informative, enjoyed and appreciated by everyone present.

Homage in Bilbao

by Natalia Benjamin

It was an excited group of "British" *niños* who met at Gatwick airport on the morning of Thursday 12 June on their way to Bilbao. They were going as guests of the Idi Ezkerra Foundation to attend a four-day event, *Homenaje a los Niños y Niñas de la Guerra Vascos*, for those *niños* who never returned to live in Spain, who went just for a few months but who stayed for the rest of their lives in their host country.

In all, 55 *niños* with their relatives came, from France, Belgium, Russia, Mexico and Great Britain. It was an emotional time for all: there were moments of crying, moments of laughter, meeting up with old friends and



At the Homenaje in Bilbao: Agustina Cabrera, Mari Sanz and friend (above) at the final lunch and (right) Helvecia Hidalgo with wreath.

relatives they hadn't seen for a long time.

As a background to the events, there was a fine exhibition in the Museo Marítimo, *Toda una Vida Siendo Niño*, which was to remain until the end of September. It showed the journeys that the *niños* had undertaken, using photos, letters, drawings and documents from each of the different countries, as well as video testimonies projected on a screen.

The first evening, there was a showing of Steve Bowles' film "Los Niños de Guernica", which had been specially dubbed into Spanish for the occasion, followed by a round table discussion where four *niños* spoke movingly about their experiences, so similar at the beginning, yet so different subsequently.

On Friday morning, all walked to the Doña Casilda Park to the symbolic memorial, the sculpture *Memoria Viva* by Nestor Basterretxea, representing the victims of Franco. Javier Madrazo, Minister for Housing and Social Affairs welcomed everyone and reminded people that it was important not to forget the past in order to avoid it happening again. Wreaths were laid, by Helvecia Hidalgo among others, at the foot of the sculpture and Basque and Republican flags were unfurled. Then those who had lived in San Sebastián before their evacuation were taken to their birthplace for the day by coach.

Saturday was the best day weatherwise, with sunshine throughout the day. Two coaches took the *niños* to Santurce where the *niños'* odyssey had started with that terrible sea voyage. On arrival, all were handed a red carnation and there was a service of remembrance for all those *niños* who had lost their lives. Juanita Vaquer was invited on stage, and she recalled her childhood as the daughter of a *sardinera*, and, her voice breaking, asked that the *niños* should not be forgotten. Then everyone was invited to cast their flowers into the water for those who never returned.

On the final day, everyone gathered at the Palacio Eskalduna for the keynote event: tribute was paid to the *niños* by the people of Bilbao, with speeches, poems and songs from a wonderful Basque choir conducted by a young Englishman! Finally, all the *niños* came up on to the stage. This was their moment: some of

them spoke spontaneously to the audience with great feeling. Carlos Pascual, whose photo as a little boy had figured in all the posters, tried to address the audience but was completely overcome by emotion. Herminio Martínez reminded us of the importance of remembering, of keeping up the fight, because today many children are suffering, in Palestine, Darfur and the Congo. He spoke warmly about Euskadi, the country they had to leave but where they still have their roots. The *Homenaje* closed with a splendid lunch, where there was much singing. People had the feeling of having taken part in an unforgettable gathering, full of affection and deep emotion, the memory of which will remain always in their hearts.

In brief

Glasgow to Barcelona 1938 and 2008

A cycle ride in July and August from Glasgow to Barcelona (via Portsmouth and Bilbao) commemorated Ray Cox and Roy Watts, two International Brigade members of the Clarion Cycling Club who died fighting for the liberty of the Spanish people. The Clarion Cycling Club 1895, together with the International Brigade Memorial Trust and the Basque Children of '37 Association UK, organised a re-enactment of a 1938 bike ride by two other Clarion Cyclists, Ted Ward and Jeff Jackson. The event received extensive coverage in regional and national TV, radio and newspapers.

Film on niños on Spanish TV

The film made by Roberto Menendez mostly at Eastleigh entitled "Los Niños de Guernica Tienen Memoria" was shown in Spain on La Sexta on Monday 28 April.

Jubilee Gardens memorial day

It was a fine day and a larger than usual crowd gathered at the Jubilee Gardens International Brigade memorial on 19 July for the annual commemoration organised by the International Brigade Memorial Trust. They included veterans Jack Jones, President of the IBMT, Sam Lesser, Chairman, Jack Edwards, Bob Doyle, and centenarian Lou Kenton. There

followed a speech from the Spanish Ambassador, Carlos Miranda, who laid a wreath on behalf of the embassy. Other wreaths were laid by, among others, Natalia Benjamin of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK. The meeting was wound up by the singing of "The Internationale".

Sussex and the Spanish Civil War

It was standing room only on Saturday 21 June, writes Mike Anderson, as Jack Jones, International Brigade veteran, welcomed nearly 150 people who had come to Lewes to hear the story of Sussex and the Spanish Civil War. Among those who took part were Jim Jump, who read poems written by his father James, a journalist who had left Worthing for Spain and came back to marry his mother, Cayetana, one of the *señoritas* on the *Habana*. Many of the Basque *niños* were sent to colonies in Sussex, at Worthing, Brighton and Blackboys, near Uckfield. Bill Thornycroft, from Worthing, now in his 80s, told the audience how as an 11-year-old schoolboy he had witnessed the arrival in Southampton of the *Habana* with the 4,000 refugee children. His brother Chris, fearing that his mother would try to dissuade him despite her being an outspoken opponent of Franco and deeply involved with the Basque refugees, had gone off to fight in Spain secretly.

Viva la República

Billed as a celebration of the Spanish Republic 1931-39, with music, film, poetry and dance, the Viva la República lived up to expectations, with over 300 attending the event at the Yaa Asentawaa Centre in west London, writes Pauline Fraser. Children stole the show, whether singing with the choir of the Instituto Español Vicente Cañada Blanch or dancing with the Grupo de Baile del Centro Gallego. *Niños* and their descendants played a large part in proceedings, with Koke Martínez and Herminio Martínez reading or rather, in Koke's case, singing poetry. Rob García, son of a *niño*, and his duo partner in Na-Mara, Paul McNamara, performed songs from the Republic and a new song especially written for

▶ the *niños*, "Solo Por Tres Meses". Steve Bowles gave an illustrated talk about the bombing of Guernica, with clips from his film, "The Guernica Children". Viva la República was a first for organisers Jim Jump and Manuel Moreno of the BC'37AUK, but such was its success, it promises to become an annual event.

Award for Chairman

On 13 May at the Spanish Embassy in London, Manuel Moreno, Chairman of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK, received the *Orden del Mérito Civil* from Spanish Ambassador Carlos Miranda, on behalf of the Spanish government and King Juan Carlos.

In his speech before family and friends, including republican exiles, the Ambassador stressed how he had learnt about another aspect of the Spanish Civil War: the exiles in Britain and the depth of feeling that they and so many British people had against fascism at the time. The Spanish government's law of *La Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* ensures that they will not be forgotten: much had been achieved in Spain today which they all fought for.

Carlos Miranda went on to say that Manuel Moreno's involvement with the Basque children, the international brigaders, the mosaic on Portobello Road, London, the commemoration in Jersey to the Spanish slave labourers and other activities was helped by many people in Britain. However, Manuel had made "an exceptional effort in recuperating facts from the past of the Spanish exile and bringing them to the present day... He has not been the only one to do so, but certainly the most tenacious, nor has he been the only one to help me, but one of those who has done so the most..." The Ambassador ended by stating that he believed there were many there who could associate themselves with that accolade: "Manuel represents all of those who have fought to keep alive the memory of their struggle for democracy and that of our ancestors".

This was followed by a warm speech by Manuel, in which he talked about the important changes in Spain, the effort made by so many over the years both in Spain and in Britain to free Spain from dictatorship, and the importance to him of his Spanish Republican parents to his understanding.

See the Association website [www.basquechildren.org] for the full texts of both speeches.

Noticeboard

Books

The Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración has just published two books of interest to our readers:

- "Agur Euskadi, Hasta Nunca" by Luis Santamaría.



BC'37AUK Chairman Manuel Moreno and partner Alison Askew at the Spanish Embassy with his award.

- "Aventuras en la Nostalgia – Exiliados y Emigrantes españoles en Londres" edited by Lala Isla. They will be reviewed in the next Newsletter.

Archival material received

- Photos and programmes (Luis Calvete)
- Photos and life story (Luis Naya)
- Various documents (Helvecia Hidalgo)
- Memories (Len Palmer).

Adiós

Carlos Miranda

Carlos Miranda was appointed Ambassador to Spain in London in July 2004. From 2006, he participated in numerous commemorative events involving Spanish Republicans. Indeed, for many events it was the first time that there had been official Spanish representation, for example, the slave labourers in Jersey, the 70th anniversary of the International Brigades, the dedication of the mosaic in Portobello Road. He hosted a reception for Spanish Republicans who had fought for the British in the Second World War. In his speeches, he honoured the memory of the Spanish Republicans in exile and paid moving tributes to them. He said that they had contributed towards building the democratic Spain of today, a Spain with a constitutional monarchy, a Spain with freedom of expression, a Spain with elections. Their sacrifice and suffering had not been in vain.

Carlos Miranda's support for the Association has been invaluable: in 2007 he was instrumental in gaining a large grant for us from the Spanish government to help defray the cost of the 70th anniversary celebrations in Southampton. He was present at the event and unveiled a plaque, making a fine speech where he not only thanked the British people for their generosity in welcoming the Basque children, but also paid homage to their parents for giving up their children.

We congratulate the Ambassador as he moves to Brussels for his new post as Spanish Ambassador to NATO and wish him all the best.

Bernardo Fernández

Although many of the *niños* already knew Bernardo through his involvement and association with the Centro de Mayores in London, I first met Bernardo in 2005 in Cambridge, having invited him as a representative of the Spanish government to the unveiling of a blue plaque in the Basque children's colony there. He wrote me a very friendly letter saying how moved he had been by the event and offered his services to the Association. Thus began a fruitful friendship.

It was Bernardo who secured for us our first grant from the Spanish government, for the publication of the Newsletter and the production of the CD "Songs of the Basque Children." He arranged for us to hold our AGM in the Consejería de Trabajo in Peel Street, a vast improvement on previous venues. He was always ready to help and offer advice and was a good friend to us all. Unfortunately for us, Bernardo retired in May. We wish him well on his retirement and thank him for all the interest and help that he has given to the Association over the years.

Projects

Sutton Library Services

The London Borough of Sutton's Library Services in partnership with a local school. Overton Grange Secondary School have received a lottery funded grant to investigate the experiences of children from the Basque region that came to the borough in the 1930s. The title of the project is "Same Faces, Different Lives".

Children from the school will investigate this important part of their local heritage, comparing the experiences of the Basque children with those of refugees and economic migrants who have come to the borough during the 20th century. They will explore identities, feelings and emotions: how did it feel to be away from their family in a strange country? How did they keep in touch with home? How did the community react to having the children here?

The project runs until July 2009. The leaders are looking for people who may remember those times, or have heard their relatives talking about their experiences. If you think you can help,

please do get in touch with Jane Allen, Principal Librarian, Sutton Central Library, St. Nicholas Way, Sutton, SM1 1EA; tel 020-8770 4622; Email [jane.allen@sutton.gov.uk].

Talks given

- On 11 September, Martin Murphy presented a paper entitled: "The Exiles of Eaton Hastings: Parramon, Garfías, Barrea" at a conference on "Geography and the Spanish Exile" held at the University of Birmingham from 10-12 September.
- On June 14, Natalia Benjamin gave a talk on the *niños vascos* at the Oxford University Languages Centre to final year students of Spanish.

Research

- Bill Williams from Manchester University has written a book: "Jews and Other Foreigners: Refugees from fascism in the Manchester area". He has placed a draft copy in the Manchester Central Library, and is in the process of shortening the book. There is a very interesting chapter on the Basque children in the various colonies in the Manchester area. If you would like more information, please contact him at [billwilliams31@btinternet.com].
- Peter O'Brien is still working on the history of the *niños* at Hutton Hall and will shortly be interviewing one of the *niños* who lived there.
- Susana Sabín-Fernández is now in her third year at Southampton University working for a doctorate. The topic is "Memory and Memorialisation of the Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War in the UK". She has written two draft chapters and hopes to complete it this year. She now has to collect and analyse the data: she will shortly be contacting *niños* and *niñas* for their testimonies.
- The University of Wales has commissioned Hywell Davies to write a book about the Basque children in Wales. If anyone has any information, please get in touch with the Secretary in the first instance.
- Mark Whyman has written a book: "The Last Pennyman of Ormesby, the Lives of Jim and Ruth Pennyman" (Bargate Publications, 2008). Chapter 6 is entitled: "The Basque refugees at Hutton Hall".

The Guernica Children

Southampton

There will be another chance to see Steve Bowles' award-winning documentary "The Guernica Children" on the big screen at the



When the Basque children came to Woodberry

by Leonard Palmer

I was born in Hackney, East London in August 1922. My father was a relatively well paid craftsman, a strong and active trade unionist and supporter of the Labour Party.

My interest in politics started around 1934-35 when I was 12 years old and Italy had invaded Abyssinia. I was appalled at the use of poison gas by the Italians against the Abyssinians and also at the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations. When I was 14, I joined the Edmonton Labour Party League of Youth. The cause of the Spanish Republic became an increasingly important topic within discussions of the League and I became actively associated with all aspects of the Spanish Republic's battle for freedom. The Spanish Civil War completed my politicization and sent me to the left of British and international politics.

I avidly read every bit of information in the newspapers about the war in Spain. If I remember rightly, except for the Daily Herald (partly owned by the TUC) and the News Chronicle, a paper with Liberal tendencies, most papers supported Franco. They presented the war in Spain as a battle against "communism", even though there were no communists in the democratically elected Republican government in February 1936.

In 1937, 4,000 refugee children from the Basque region of Spain arrived in Britain and a small number were eventually accommodated in a large detached house called Woodberry at Theydon Bois on the edge of Epping Forest, about 12 miles north from the centre of London and about 7 miles

from Edmonton where I lived at the time.

The Edmonton Labour League of Youth helped to raise money for Medical Aid for Spain. For 1 penny, I used to sell small pieces of ribbon, about 1" long and ¼" wide in the colours of the Spanish flag, and on Sunday morning I collected the regular donation of 6 pence from five families.

I vividly remember a concert at Edmonton Town Hall in aid of the Republic in which a group of young Basques performed national dances. These were in some respects similar to English morris dances with the performers using batons. At the conclusion of their performance, the dancers went down on one knee with their batons intertwined above their heads, and one of them removed his traditional Spanish beret and tossed it into the audience. It was a very emotional ending to a very moving experience.

The arrival of the Basque children refugees at Woodberry added a new dimension to Sundays. I would usually arrive with my friend about 2.30pm and leave about 5pm. The children were always pleased to see us for, although I was only 15½ years of age and pocket money was not very plentiful, we always took chocolates and cigarettes with us. To youngsters living in a foreign country with hardly any luxury in their life, our small contribution was always very much appreciated.

I remember a young Basque girl called Teresa Gonzalez: she was about fourteen years of age with very dark hair, flashing eyes and a very attractive personality. Her *pièce de résistance* was to stand on a table and give a demonstration of flamenco dancing, imitating

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Woodberry – Leah Manning House – at Theydon Bois.



Basque Children of '37 Association UK

- Honorary President: Helvecia Hidalgo
- Chair: Manuel Moreno
- Secretary: Natalia Benjamin, 8 Hernes Road, Oxford OX2 7PU; tel: 01865-459 744; email: [secretary@basquechildren.org]
- Membership Secretary: Carmen Kilner; tel: 020-8224 7959; email: [membership@basquechildren.org]
- Other committee members: Jim Jump, John Kilner, Herminio Martínez and Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez

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. These may also be found on the website.

Our aims

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, letters, documents, films, songs, posters, oral testimonies, artwork etc) to be used for educational and historical purposes, eventually to be deposited in the Special Collections Division of the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton.
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.
10. To advance the education of the public, students and academics in the subject of the exile of 1937.

Newsletter

- The BC'37AUK Newsletter is published twice a year and is sent free to all members. Back numbers can be downloaded from the BC'37AUK website: [www.basquechildren.org]. The deadline for the next issue is 28 February 2009.
- Editor: Natalia Benjamin (see details above for BC'37AUK Secretary).

► Phoenix Film Society in Southampton at 8pm on 3 December.

The film has been updated to include material from last year's 70th anniversary commemoration. The Director and some of the *niños* involved will be present to talk about their story and the making of the film. The Phoenix Film Society is located in Building 32, University Road at the University of Southampton. Tickets cost £5, but there is an additional charge for temporary membership of the Society. *Niños* and their guests go free. You can phone 087 0765 0763 or e-mail: [enquiries@thephoenix.org.uk] for more information or to reserve tickets.

London

The London Socialist Film Cooperative will be showing "The Guernica Children" together with the UK premiere of "Madrid Before Hanita" on Sunday 8 March 2009 at 11am at the Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1. There will be a discussion afterwards with the Directors.

Book reviews

"Odisea en Albión: Los republicanos españoles exiliados en Gran Bretaña (1939-1977)" by Luis Monferrer (Madrid, Ediciones de la Torre, 2008)

Reviewed by Manuel Moreno

This is the book we've all been waiting for. It's a weighty book and what is important about it is that it brings together all the most crucial aspects of the Spanish Republican exiles in Great Britain.

It starts from the *niños vascos*, then the Spanish Republicans in the British army and in the secret service, those in British concentration camps and the forced labourers on the Channel Islands under the Germans. It moves on to cover political and economic migration after the Second World War and the various political and cultural activities of the Spanish exiled community and the economic migrants from a poor Spain, ending with the 60s and 70s and the last years of the Franco dictatorship.

Monferrer has in general researched the subject well, his sources and bibliography are comprehensive; however, although he includes an index of people, there is not an index by subject matter.

What may be a revelation to many is the depth of military and artistic activities which the Republican community continued to engage in, keeping alive their progressive cultural traditions and anti fascist aspirations for a free and democratic Spain. Of interest to many will be the references to the *niños*, yet in this case as in many others the book lacks sufficient explanation and analysis between events, as in

the case of Guernica, as well as the impact and significance for British government policy on immigration of children, defence and the British anti fascist movement. There is also an insufficient number and range of interviews with Spaniards here in Britain.

But this volume is an excellent start to "our story" and should excite further reading and study.

"Perfect Cadence" by William Sandiford (Bakewell, Ashridge Press/Country Books, 2008)

Reviewed by Colin Carritt

William Sandiford's novel, "Perfect Cadence", a first novel I think, is a good story. The plot centres on the impact of the civil war on a refugee family. But it is not essentially a war story and the second strand of the novel clearly derives from Sandiford's love of classical guitar and the craft of guitar making.

Nine year old Mikel Aguirre and his younger brother Gorka are caught up in the terrifying events of the Nationalist drive on Bilbao and their parents manage to get them on a ship to England for safety. Mikel makes his home there, marries and has a son. Shortly after his son is born, Mikel is recruited by M 15 and returns to Spain where he is soon arrested and thrown in to one of Franco's prisons. The story then follows the progress of the son, Javier, who develops a passion for the guitar and the novel concludes with father and son coming together in a bitter twist of fate. To tell more of the plot would be to spoil it for the reader, but it is a clever idea and I congratulate the author on the concept.

It is clear that Sandiford condemns outright Franco's actions both during and after the war, nevertheless, I found his narrative sometimes a little over-dramatic, a feature that damages the historical context. But if you can bear with, or even relish, these characterisations, "Perfect Cadence" is a good read. Oh! and please, Mr Sandiford, in your next novel, do refrain from starting every other sentence with the exclamation "Oh!"

"The Return" by Victoria Hislop (London, Headline Publishing, 2008)

Reviewed by Colin Carritt

This is a story of love and loss in Spain during the civil war. It is bittersweet and it is no fairy tale. But then Victoria Hislop knows her subject and she doesn't pull her punches. A member of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK, her research into the events in Spain from 1936 to 1939 and the exodus of refugees to France and to Britain in the aftermath is impeccable. She spares us nothing as she lays bare the full horror and unspeakable cruelty of the Nationalist onslaught. And yet she is never voyeuristic or sensational. She just tells it as it is.

Sonia is middle class, middle aged and a

home counties English woman; her marriage to James, a *nouveau riche* banker is clearly not going anywhere. To escape her stifling marriage she joins a class, learning salsa and Latin American dance. Then, with Maggie, a slightly bohemian school friend, she heads off to Granada, where she becomes captivated by the flamenco culture. A chance visit to a local cafe, full of old photographs of *gitano* guitarists and dancers intrigues her further. Falling into conversation with the elderly café proprietor, she learns about the history of the café and the family who ran it for generations.

The tragedy of divided loyalties, betrayal, revenge and loss, through the years of the civil war and beyond, are recounted through the old man's emotional narrative. Of course, like all good stories, there's a twist at the end and I must reveal no more of the plot. The story line is simple enough and it's an easy and effortless read, except for the harrowing history of Franco's invasion and the international isolation of the Second Republic.

Sometimes, the weight of factual information can overwhelm the love story at the heart of the novel. Victoria clearly feels the need to tell all in what sometimes veers dangerously close to polemic. Given the lack of understanding about the forty years of fascism in Spain, perhaps that's no bad thing. Perhaps what those of us who have laboured to tell the world, Victoria can achieve through a simple and poignant love story. "The Return" educates and entertains in equal measure and in following the acclaim of her first novel, "The Island", is sure to be an outstanding success.

Exhibitions

Imperial War Museum, London: "Through My Eyes: Stories of Conflict, Belonging and Identity"

The story of the Basque children in Britain continues to spread. At the Imperial War Museum in London an online exhibition was launched on Thursday 19 June which includes a strong element on the *niños vascos*.

The virtual exhibition forms part of the "Their Past Your Future" project which is funded by the National Lottery. The aim is to produce a web-based learning resource based on individual testimony. The exhibition illustrates the way in which various 20th century conflicts have made people rethink or reaffirm their own sense of identity and belonging. It includes film interview material recorded by Steve Bowles at Eye Witness Productions and photos and other visual material supplied by the Basque Children of '37 Association.

You can see the exhibition at [www.throughmyeyes.org.uk].

Barbican Art Gallery, London: "This is War!"

Photographic exhibition of the work of Robert Capa and his companion Gerda Taro, including

many photographs from the Spanish Civil War, with some recently discovered ones taken by Robert Capa. From 17 October until 25 January 2009.

For sale

All goods are available from Tony Armolea: 85 Summerleaze Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8ER; tel: 01628 781525; email: [sales@basquechildren.org]. Please note that we have opened a branch of the shop in Spain, and if you live there, you can order more easily from: [tienda@basquechildren.org]. Prices include p&p.

Books

- "Recuerdos" edited by Natalia Benjamin, £15.
- "Only for Three Months" by Adrian Bell, £11.
- "Leah Manning" by Ron Bill & Stan Newens, £4.50.

The following two poetry books can be ordered via the IBMT website: [www.internationalbrigades.org.uk]:

- "Poems from Spain", an anthology edited by Jim Jump, £13
- "Poems of War and Peace/Poemas de guerra y de paz" by James R Jump, £12.

CDs & DVDs

- "The Guernica Children", Steve Bowles' documentary film, now available in a bilingual English/Spanish edition, £15.
- "Songs of the Basque Children", songs from the book used by the *niños* when performing, plus the reissue of the original 1938 Parlophone recording, £9.50.
- Southampton Anniversary Event, £4.
- Danzaris at Southampton, £4.
- **NEW** CD-EP "Solo Por Tres Meses", written and performed by Na-Mara, a duo composed of musician Roberto García (son of *niño* Fausto García) and Paul McNamara, it includes their song about the story of the *niños* leaving Bilbao. A limited number of the EPs are available for sale and all proceeds will go to the Basque Children of '37 Association UK, £4.50.

Commemorative envelope

- Franked envelope with special stamps marking the anniversary of the arrival of the Basque children, £6.

Obituaries

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

- Alfredo Ruiz
- Laura García (Williams)
- María Teresa Gomez Sobrino (Wilcox)
- Alfonso Ruiz
- María Teresa Encinas Vegas (Cooper)

Personalities

Remembering Leah Manning

by Natalia Benjamin

In April 1937, conditions in the Basque country were dire, with bombs dropping almost daily; food was scarce and children were starving. In spite of the fact that France had accepted many refugee children, the Foreign Office refused to do so. Nevertheless, the Duchess of Atholl, President of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, asked Leah Manning, of Spanish Medical Aid, to go to Bilbao to organise an evacuation of children to Britain from the war zone. She arrived on 24 April. Two days later, Guernica was bombed and the town almost totally destroyed. It was thought that Bilbao and other large towns would suffer the same



Leah Manning with some of the niños.

fate, and under pressure of public opinion, the Basque government appealed to foreign nations to give temporary asylum to the children.

Leah Manning started a frenetic campaign aimed at the British government to allow Basque children to come to Britain. She bombarded influential people with telegrams: Walter Citrine of the TUC, the Basque Ambassador, Atlee, Lloyd George, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. Her actions made her very unpopular, especially with the British government in London, but on 15 May, her interference paid off and it reluctantly agreed to provide temporary residence in Britain for 2,000 children. The

Basque people had to be persuaded that evacuation was the safest precaution, so to reassure the families, Leah Manning broadcast almost every evening on the Basque radio and published a daily "Letter to Mothers" in the local paper.

The children were due to leave on 20 May. Only two days previously, Leah Manning had managed to convince the British government to accept twice the number of children. In her autobiography "A Life For Education", she graphically describes the departure: "The quay was a black mass of

parents, defying bombs, as the children, some happy and excited, some in tears, were taken aboard in orderly companies. Head to tail, the *señoritas* laid out our precious cargo – on the bulkheads, in the swimming pool, in the state rooms and along the alleyways." (p.131)

On their arrival at Southampton, Leah Manning sent a wireless message for a priest from Southampton to come and celebrate Mass. She wrote: "For the moment, my work ended on that bright May morning. I had endured the siege, and disappointment after disappointment, but I had never wavered from my original intention. I had brought away 4,000 Basque children, in family groups and with their escorts, to a place of safety." (p.131)

But her work with the children didn't finish there. She was at the camp at North Stoneham when the news came that Bilbao had fallen, and she spent most of the night comforting and cuddling troubled children. The following letter was sent to her later by some of these children: "We have been given shelter by a second mother, this second mother we do not know how to thank for her attentions and kindnesses shown to us; this all the more so since we are here only temporarily so that when we are installed permanently, we just cannot imagine how wonderful it will be. For all this and to our second mother and to the committee we give our most grateful thanks." (p.134)

Had it not been for Leah Manning's rather unorthodox way of campaigning, it is unlikely that the government would have changed its mind. Leah Manning was instrumental in obtaining permission for and organising the evacuation of 4,000 Basque children to Great Britain and it is thanks to her tireless energy and insistence that they were able to escape the hardships and deprivation of life in Bilbao and find a safe haven in Britain.

When the Basque children came to Woodberry

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the use of castanets, which she did not possess.

A good looking young man that I can vividly recall was Ramón de la Cal, a real charmer with the girls. Ramón, along with another Basque refugee, Martín Oviedo spent a weekend at my home in Edmonton. We travelled by bus to my home, arriving late Friday evening. Martín told me his father owned a factory, called Astra, which manufactured small arms such as pistols. He had been in Guernica at the time of the aerial bombardment by the Germans, but his father had driven him and his family out of the town to safety.

One of the children for whom I had strong, fond and poignant memories was Pili Cortés. Pili was 14 years old and I would have been coming up to 16. She was a girl whose company I found very attractive and was probably my first "love". On my visits to

Woodberry, I would spend time talking to her. It was purely a platonic relationship, there was no kissing, cuddling or holding hands. Then calamity struck, Pili was going to leave Woodberry and join a family living near Acton, in west London. The father of this family was an engine driver, active in ASLEF and a member of the Communist Party. One afternoon I cycled from Edmonton to Acton to see Pili, right through the busy heart of London. The family were very friendly and I told them of my involvement in trying to help the Spanish Republic. I was invited for tea and left in the dark at around 7pm to cycle home. I never saw Pili again and I heard through the grapevine that she had died in France from starvation. I still find my thoughts about Pili very upsetting, even at the age of 85½ years, and Pili was only one of many thousands who suffered at the hands of the Fascists at the end of the civil war. Another Basque I can vividly remember was

Jesús Alcón. He was a thickset young man with rugged features and I have vague recollection that he had slightly wavy hair. Jesús had a genial personality and he was one of the children with whom we would always have a conversation. He had a perpetual smile on his face despite the situation he was in, and he was as solid as a rock. I have learned that Jesús remained in England, his first wife died and he remarried.

I can also recall another Basque, Luis Sanz. Tall and slim, he was a very intelligent young man who went to university in England. He was another person with whom we would always have a conversation during our visits to Woodberry. I think he became a maths teacher. Sadly, I discovered that both of these had died.

I have often thought about how different the world might have been if the forces of democracy had been willing and powerful enough to defeat Fascism in Spain in the 1930s and how many millions of lives would have been spared in the subsequent conflict in Europe.