



# Newsletter



## Basque Children of '37 Association UK

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

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### News

## Lecture by Tom Buchanan: 'Personal memory and public history' of the Basque children

by Nicholas Rankin

The inaugural lecture of the Association, titled "The Basque Refugee Children in Britain 1937-1939: Personal Memory and Public History", took place in London on Saturday 3 October 2009 at the Kensington and Chelsea Library meeting room.

Dr Tom Buchanan said he was honoured to give this first lecture because the Basque children had been the subject of his very first academic article in 1988. He paid tribute to the Basque Children of '37 Association UK which was carrying forward the earlier work by Jim Fyrth and Dorothy Legarreta in preserving memories and source materials for all future historians.

He stressed that this was public history that had to be retrieved from neglect and presented to ordinary people through a range of media including books, films and exhibitions. For those who did not know the history of the Basque children, Dr Buchanan recommended Adrian Bell's book "Only For Three Months" as a good reference point. The key areas that historians still needed to understand were the ambivalent role of the Roman Catholic church; more about the adults who accompanied the children on the *Habana*; the story of all the diplomacy and statecraft behind the evacuations; the range of charitable help in the running of the homes and how the Basque children themselves impinged on British society. Children were at the heart of the story, but



Tom Buchanan delivers the Association's inaugural annual lecture.



Association Secretary Natalia Benjamin opens the exhibition at Ormesby Hall on the nearby Basque children's colony. See below.

children were also a problem for documentary historians because they required a new angle of focus and human sensibility. The memorial anthology "Recuerdos" was both significant and valuable in supplying the personal and emotional experience of children, including their fears, regrets, loss of identity etc as well as vividly remembered odd details.

The Brechfa incident in July 1937 illuminated contemporary attitudes towards the Basques. This former Ministry of Labour camp in a bleak part of Wales was used to house older Basque boys who, after a confrontation with a Yorkshire tourist, broke some windows. According to your political attitude, this was either youthful high spirits or an appalling riot by unbridled foreign hooligans. Newspapers fanned the flames; there were questions in the House. Dr Buchanan explained this by saying that levels of immigration were low at the time and Britain was not at all a multi-cultural society, and rather resisted the flow of refugees.

The 1930s saw an illiberal state, always insisting there would be "no charge on the public purse", forced to behave liberally by public pressure from a thriving civil and civic society whose trade unions, associations and voluntary bodies could be mobilised for charitable ends. Behind it were different attitudes to the Spanish Civil War. On the left hand, taking in Basque refugees was "the British contribution to the defence of Bilbao" as the partisan journalist GL Steer put it, or on the right hand it was an unwarranted intervention in the civil war as the Foreign Office and General

Franco's supporters tended to think.

The 3,800 Basque boys and girls are lumped together, but cannot really be generalized about. They ranged in age from 5 to 15, and came from different backgrounds and had had different experiences. Some had seen the horrors of war, others not. For some the refugee process was all anxiety, for others, an adventure. Some Britons saw them as exotic, others just as ordinary children. They had the status of symbols, as "ambassadors of goodwill", and were always on parade.

Thus incidents of bad behaviour, as when a Basque boy at

Scarborough drew a knife on a cook who had refused him pudding, could be blown out of all proportion by a politicized press. In *The Universe* and the *Catholic Times* such "desperados" threatening life and property were presented as shocking emblems of Republicanism. But 15 out of 3,826 children misbehaving was not many. With hindsight, we are now able to see that these were also troubled or traumatised children who in the great majority managed successfully to negotiate their paths through life. Lively questions concluded an interesting talk, which was followed by tea.

## Hutton Hall exhibition

by Mark Whyman

In June, an exhibition at Ormesby Hall, near Middlesbrough, a National Trust property, rolled back 72 years almost to the month, when 20 Basque refugee children arrived at nearby Hutton Hall, escaping from the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. Their hostess, Ruth Pennyman, was well aware of their plight as earlier that year she had gone to Spain and seen at first hand the devastation in Barcelona.

Although as far as the general public was concerned, the Hutton Hall colony and the Basque children had largely been forgotten, the story was well known to enthusiasts, such as Peter O'Brien (author of a short book about the

## From the Editor

I am pleased to record that the inaugural lecture of the association on 3 October, a most thought-provoking talk given by Dr Tom Buchanan, attracted a large audience, and so we shall have to think of a larger venue as the Meeting Room in the Kensington and Chelsea Library was only just large enough to hold all who came. It seems a good time to have the lecture, as October is rather a fallow period. The only problem is that members receive the association's calendar of events the previous December and may forget about it!

What stands out for me during these past six months is the topic of Spanish nationality. On 10 June I was privileged to be invited to an event at the Spanish Embassy in London: the granting of Spanish citizenship to the surviving British veterans who joined the International Brigades. Seven members were there, the oldest being 101 and the youngest 94. In a very moving ceremony at which he presented the Brigaders with Spanish passports, Ambassador Carles Casajuana said that Spain wished to pay tribute to a group of outstanding men and women who 70 years ago had decided to give up their comfortable life and go to Spain to fight for democracy and freedom. It was a humbling experience to see these men and women in the twilight of their lives represent the 2,500 volunteers who went to Spain.

I have been told by the Spanish Consulate that some eight children

and another eight grandchildren have already successfully applied for Spanish citizenship. But remember that this opportunity is only available until December 2010, so if you are intending to apply, don't leave it too long as you will certainly have to provide copies of key documents which you may not have, and it takes time to obtain these from Spain.

Lately I seem to have been travelling quite a lot, in England and in Spain, giving talks to local societies or participating in conferences. I see these activities as a means of propagating the story of the Basque children, so that people should be made aware of the tremendous sacrifices made by families when they agreed to send their children out of the danger zone "only for three months". Sometimes after I have spoken, people come up to me and tell me how their (English) families were involved in helping with the *niños* and this adds an extra dimension to their story.

Very soon, the 75th anniversary will be upon us. Planning takes a long time. We can't possibly hope to emulate the Southampton 2007 event, but we must recognise the anniversary somehow. If you have any ideas please do get in touch.

Agur,

*Natalia Benjamin*

Natalia Benjamin

► Hutton Hall colony), Liz Hayward (Education Officer, National Trust) and Mark Whyman (editor of "The Basque Refugee Children" in "The Last Pennymans of Ormesby: The Lives of Jim and Ruth Pennyman", 2008). The three put together the exhibition, with considerable help from Natalia Benjamin. She opened the exhibition with a general talk on the Basque children refugees coming to Great Britain, followed by a shorter presentation by Peter O'Brien just on the Hutton Hall colony and its links with Ormesby Hall, placing it within the context of the other colonies throughout the country.

The exhibition was made up of display boards, photographs and a number of artefacts from the archive of the Association, including a replica of the costume used by the *niños* for concerts held to raise much needed funds.

The opening was attended by descendants of the late Fermín Magdelana, one of the *niños* from Hutton Hall and in its seven-week run was attended by some 400 people. Among the comments in the visitors' book, one could read "very interesting and moving – I didn't know anything of this", "I enjoyed the lay out of this exhibition", "a revelation", "it's sad that not many local people know this fantastic part of their local history."

## Aniversario: Save the Children

por Herminio Martínez

A mediados de junio se me invitó a asistir como uno de los *niños de la guerra*, a la

conmemoración, en Madrid, del 90 aniversario de la fundación de Save the Children – España.

Antes de aceptar, quise hacer algunas indagaciones sobre Save the Children. En su libro "Only For Three Months", Adrian Bell cuenta que cuando se estaban haciendo las gestiones para que viniéramos a Inglaterra en mayo de 1937, el gobierno británico consultó con Save the Children, y que según Mr Golden, entonces secretario de esta organización, no debiéramos venir: no convenía separarnos de nuestras familias y sería preferible dejarnos morir con nuestros padres, etc.etc. No obstante, Save the Children sí nos ayudó por medio de los Cuáqueros. Me enteré de que Save the Children hoy día hace una buena labor prestando ayuda a los niños en todas partes del mundo.

Esta organización la fundó Eglantyne Jebb en 1920 y los derechos de los niños, por los que ella abogaba, formaron la base de la declaración de las Naciones Unidas en 1989 como los "Derechos del Niño" de la Convención de la ONU.

Llegué a Madrid el martes por la tarde. En seguida comenzaron entrevistas para la radio, la prensa y la televisión. Fuimos invitados cuatro personas, de distintos países y con distintas experiencias en nuestra niñez: un señor mayor, judío alemán, que ahora vive en Israel, una joven de Bosnia, un joven negro del África y yo. El miércoles por la mañana, hubo un acto en el centro de prensa y televisión al que asistió la vice presidenta del gobierno, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega.

Por la tarde, nos llevaron al museo Reina Sofía y nos ofrecieron una visita a la sala

donde está el "Guernica" de Picasso. Luego, en el auditorio del museo, cada uno de nosotros tuvo que dar un pequeño discurso. Mi tema fue lo esencial que era seguir haciendo esfuerzos para educar a los niños víctimas marginadas, pero que no bastaba con esto, sino que es esencial evitar que ocurran barbaridades como en Palestina, El Congo, Darfur etc. Hay que hacer presión sobre nuestros gobiernos para que la ONU sea más decisiva con estos problemas.

## Jubilee Gardens memorial day for the volunteers

by Cliff Kirkpatrick

The annual IBMT ceremony at Jubilee Gardens was held this year on 4 July. It was a specially extended meeting with tributes paid to Jack Jones who died on 21 April and also marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War. Not surprisingly, attendance was exceptionally high.

Various speakers, including the Spanish Ambassador, Carles Casajuana, spoke of our debt to the brave volunteers who went to Spain. Wreaths were laid honouring the International Brigaders whose numbers are rapidly declining and who were represented at the gathering by Sam Lesser, Jack Edwards and Lou Kenton. These three, together with Bob Doyle and Jack Jones, had been at last year's ceremony but sadly, Bob and Jack both died earlier this year.

The tribute to Jack Jones given by Sam Lesser was particularly moving. Sam was

followed by the writer and broadcaster Robert Elms who spoke warmly of his association with Spain.

He struck a chord with the crowd when he said, "The reason I really wanted to come here today was because I wanted to bring my son to see some real heroes. We have a celebrity culture that puts people on pedestals, who aren't fit to be anywhere near the men and women we are honouring today."

## Conferences

### 'El Exilio en Primera Persona'

by Nigel Dennis

The 70th anniversary both of the end of the Spanish Civil War and the beginning of exile are being marked in a series of international conferences being held in different cities in Spain this year. One of these conferences took place from 5 to 8 October at the Universidad de Deusto, which has campuses in both Bilbao and San Sebastián.

Rather than encouraging a general, miscellaneous approach to the phenomenon of exile, this conference chose to focus on one particular aspect of it: "El exilio en primera persona" (first-person exile). This meant that the emphasis was placed firmly on different types of personal testimony concerning the experience of geographical displacement: letters, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and oral reports as well as poetry and novels in which there is a clear indication of the writer's own subjective perspective. Given the conference venue, special attention was devoted to Basque writers: one of the sessions held in San Sebastián was held entirely in Basque. More than 30 specialists from several different countries attended the conference and those attending were able to hear a considerable variety of papers concerning the whole range of ways in which this exposure to exile was expressed in the first person.

Natalia Benjamin was among the speakers at the conference. Basing her remarks largely on the personal accounts gathered in her edited volume "Recuerdos: Basque children refugees in Great Britain / Niños vascos refugiados en Gran Bretaña", Natalia gave an excellent overview of how the *niños* and *niñas* remembered their arrival in the UK and their subsequent experiences in this country. For many people present, even for academic specialists in this area, this was the first time they had heard about this subject and there was considerable interest in obtaining copies of "Recuerdos". Clearly, the significance of the evacuation of Basque children to the UK

## Annual reunion

*This year, the children of the niños were in charge of finding a venue and choosing a suitable menu for the annual reunion lunch. Amaya López, David Cabrera and Luis Jarero worked together to organise the anniversary lunch which took place on 24 May. (Pictured right are some of the niños.) They chose l'Albufera restaurant in the Meliá White House Hotel in Albany Street. It was a good choice: in fact the copious tapas alone would have been enough. The table arrangement was better than in previous years and allowed people to circulate freely. After the meal there was dancing.*



in 1937 is gradually being recognised in academic circles.

### 'Children, the Innocent Victims of War'

by Martin Parsons

The 3rd International Conference on War Children entitled: "Children, the Innocent Victims of War" was held at the University of Reading from 9-11 September 2009.

Delegates attended from all over the world and gave papers on a wide range of topics from war children prior to the Second World War, the Basque refugees, to the present-day situation in Africa. As well as leading academics in the field giving papers, seven undergraduates and two PhD students gave presentations.

It was announced that copies of the academic papers and theses presently housed in Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands and written in English would eventually be placed in the archive at Reading, thus making it the European centre for research. Other organisations were invited to send copies of their papers as well.

It is hoped that conferences such as this one, having a central archive, will enable the wider dissemination of material relevant to the topic.

● Dr Martin Parsons is Director of the Research Centre for Evacuee and War Child Studies, Reading University.

## Projects

### Oral history

by Padmini Broomfield and Alicia Pozo Gutiérrez

The Southampton University "Los Niños" oral history project is progressing well with 12

interviews in the UK and another six in Spain recorded by our volunteers.

By focussing on a life-story approach, this project is succeeding in going beyond the story of evacuation, to memories of life in Spain before and during the civil war and the impact of living through yet another war (WWII).

Interviews are revealing how these early experiences affected the *niños'* later life trajectories of education, working lives, bringing up families and their ongoing relationship with Spain.

The interviews have often been emotional, as *niños* find themselves narrating memories and experiences in a personal and reflective way. A recurring theme is emerging as the *niños* recognise the need for this chapter of history to be preserved for the future and are pleased to have the opportunity provided by this project to name and express their gratitude to all those who helped them during the traumatic early days.

We are getting round to all those who responded to our call to participate and would welcome others who have not yet contacted us.

## Sutton schools

London Borough of Sutton's Local Studies and Archives Service has been working on a Big Lottery funded project exploring the impact and ongoing legacy of 20th century conflict on people in the UK.

Working in partnership with a local secondary school, Overton Grange, we took as our theme "refugees", looking at the experiences of people who have come to Sutton since the 1930s. We started and focused on the Basque colony but came up to date talking to the staff at the Refugee Network, holding interviews on Sutton High



Street and at Speakers' Corner in London.

There was an exhibition organised and created by the young people involved in Sutton Central Library in July and as part of Archives Awareness Month there is to be a follow up exhibition (3-30 November) from the Basque Children of '37 Association UK, telling the story of the children's exodus from the Basque Country, their arrival in Southampton and eventual dispersal to all parts of Britain, with special emphasis on the Carshalton colonies.

The young people have learnt that archives are not boring places, but full of real and fascinating stories. More importantly, they have learnt that the impact of war reaches far beyond politics and economics.

– "War can start off with intentions of change but always ends up a disastrous waste of lives, time and ideals." (Female student, 15yrs)

– "War affects everyone – not just political leaders and soldiers etc. but civilians. I have learnt a lot about how it affects children especially." (Male student, 17yrs)

● For more information, please contact Kath Shawcross, archivist; tel: 020-8770 4745.

## Talks given

● Peter O'Brien gave talks to the Rotary Clubs of Middlesbrough and Guisborough on 23 and 30 September on "The Basque Refugee Children of Hutton Hall".

● On 12 May, Natalia Benjamin gave a talk to the U3A group at Ulveston in the Lake District entitled: "You can't help liking them: the Basque children in Great Britain". She also gave a talk on the *niños* on 5 June at Ormesby Hall, Middlesbrough, on 9 September at the conference on war children at Reading University and on 24 September at St Andrew's Church, Botley, Oxford, on "The Basque children in Oxfordshire".

● Susana Sabín, who is hoping to finish her doctoral thesis this year, presented papers at three conferences this last year: "Conmemoraciones? Memoria y memorialización de los niños vascos refugiados en el Reino Unido" on 14 November 2008 at the conference "Memoria y Exilio" held at the University of Alicante; "Con el alma aferrada a un dulce recuerdo" on 3 April at the international conference in Southampton University: "Coming Home? Conflict and Return Migration in 20th Century Europe" and "Reflexión sobre su condición de miembro de la segunda generación del exilio" on 29 May at the UNED conference in Madrid: "La Segunda Generación de Exiliados de la Guerra Civil Española".

● Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez, together with Padmini Broomfield, presented a paper "Análisis comparado de narrativas del exilio de primera y segunda generación" at the same UNED

conference in Madrid. They also presented "The experience of exile" on 3 July at the "Voice in oral history" conference at Glasgow University.

## Information wanted

### World War II veterans: Manuel Moreno writes...

You may know that many Spanish Republicans who came to Britain continued their fight against fascism by joining the World War II campaign. I am researching the history of the Spanish Republicans in exile in the UK with specific reference to their active service with British forces, the French Foreign Legion and the Free French during World War II. If you know of anyone, family or friend, who served with the services and can help any way with information, memorabilia etc, please let me know. Tel: 07977-922 298; email: [manuel@moreno-wines.co.uk].

## Odds & ends

### Emails

Can all members please communicate their email addresses to the Membership Secretary, Gerald Hoare, at [membership@basquechildren.org]. It appears that many of them are out of date.

### Erratum

In Newsletter No.11, page 8, column 5, it was stated that "Amistad" was produced by the *niños* in The Culvers. In fact it was produced by the Basque Boys Training Committee. The *niños* at The Culvers had their own bulletin: "Basque Home News", run by the Carshalton Basque Children's Committee.

### Fiction

The novelist Elizabeth Taylor and her husband "adopted" a Basque boy refugee from the High Wycombe colony and wrote a short story based on that experience. It can be found in the collection "Hester Lilly and other Stories" (Virago, 1969) and is called: "Plenty good fiesta".

## Forthcoming events

### Oxford

Day School in Oxford: La guerra civil española y las mujeres en el cine; Saturday 30 March 2010; contact OUDCE, Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA or [ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk] or tel: 01865-270 380/368

### London

On Sunday 14 March the London Socialist Film Co-op will be showing two films at the Renoir

Cinema. These are: "The Brits who fought for Spain" and "The Long Road to Spain". Doors open at 10.30am and the film starts promptly at 11am. The Renoir is in Brunswick Square, the Brunswick Centre, London WC1N 1QE. The nearest tube station is Russell Square.

## Book reviews

### "A Suitable Climate: The Basque Refugee Children at Hutton Hall" by Peter O'Brien (Peter Tuffs, 2009)

Reviewed by Cliff Kirkpatrick



Several general histories have appeared in print telling the story of the Basque refugee children who came to this country in May 1937. As important as these books are – and they have all made significant contributions to our overall knowledge of the subject – the way

forward now, I believe, is for detailed studies to be carried out of the various colonies on a regional, county or individual basis. Peter O'Brien's softcover book of 80 pages released in May this year is an outstanding example of a single colony study. Painstakingly researched, this is a highly readable and informative account of the Hutton Hall colony just outside Guisborough, which will appeal not only to those with an interest in local history but to a wider readership as well.

The book is in two parts. Part 1 covers the history of Hutton Hall. Part 2 deals with the children's experiences after arriving in Britain and settling in that colony.

Central to the story is the remarkable woman Ruth Pennyman whose strength of character, determination and sheer ability made the Hutton Hall colony such a success. The author, without hesitation, considers Hutton Hall to be a model establishment and places it alongside Langham, Cambridge and Bray Court as deserving of acclaim.

Much of the information in the book comes from material in the Pennyman Archive as well as from the Basque Children of '37 Association UK archive. Of particular interest is the information provided by former *niños* and surviving volunteers. The book contains many interesting photographs and reproductions of letters, postcards and other documents.

Peter O'Brien is to be congratulated on producing an important addition to the growing list of publications dealing with the Basque children. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book and would recommend it to others as a worthwhile and satisfying read. The initial print-run quickly sold out but it was reprinted in

August and copies can be bought direct from Peter O'Brien at 3 Belle Vue Grove, Middlesbrough TS4 2PU. The cost including postage and packing is £7.50.

**“Guernica” by Dave Boling (Picador, 2009)**

Reviewed by Steve Bowles

A heady mix of love and war is a good basis for any novel and Dave Boling’s book “Guernica” is no exception to this. The story is centred around the fictitious character of Justo Ansoategui and his family who live on the outskirts of Guernica.

The first half of the book paints an idyllic picture of small-town life in the rural Basque Country. But eventually that idyll is consumed and destroyed by the dark clouds of war culminating in the destruction of Guernica (and Justo’s family) on that fateful day in April 1937.

The story then switches between Guernica, Britain (following the story of the Basque children evacuated on the *Habana*) and the French Basque Country during the Second World War. Into the mix Boling adds appearances from Picasso and Aguirre.

Purists may question some of the historical accuracy of the novel (especially when it comes to the story of the Basque children in England) and others will be uncomfortable with his leanings towards Basque nationalism but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. To date the book has been published in 13 languages (including Spain) and was selected as one of Richard and Judy’s “summer reads” here in Britain which pushed it to number four in the UK best-seller list.

The fact is that the book is superbly written; by loosely tying fictitious characters to real historical events, Boling effectively makes an important story accessible to the general public. I thoroughly recommend it.

**“Aventuras en la Nostalgia” edited by Lala Isla (Misterio de Trabajo e Inmigración, Madrid, 2008)**

Reviewed by Pilar P Soliño

No son escritores y sus historias no salen de la imaginación. Sus aventuras en la nostalgia son un relato colectivo, escrito con la humildad del que escribe pensando que su historia es del montón. Nada más lejos de la realidad, el lector se descubrirá sonriendo ante las tiernas e inocentes tribulaciones de este grupo de emigrantes y exiliados que hoy tienen Inglaterra como su hogar o, al menos, como uno de sus dos hogares.

Desde el joven que se encontró sentado al lado de Agatha Christie al asistir a una pantomime en el trabajo en sus primeras Navidades en el sur de Inglaterra hasta aquel otro que dejó su trabajo en la oficina de Correos de Oviedo para venirse a trabajar de jornalero, lo que inmediatamente le reportó un sueldo

Gerald Hoare shows off his newly acquired Spanish passport and birth certificate.



# All about my mother

by Gerald Hoare

Many of you must be wondering: “Who is Gerald Hoare, the Association’s new Membership Secretary, and where did he come from?” Well, this is my story.

In 2005 I telephoned the Association to introduce myself having just learnt of their existence through the internet. My call has led me on a journey of discovery about my mother whose maiden name was Rita Victoria Gómez Mateo. She was born in San Sebastián, Guipuzcoa, Spain, in 1912 and by the age of 22 had become a teacher. In 1937 she was working at a school in Orío, not far from Guernica. The horrors of the bombing, as you all know, led to the exodus of so many children and my mother was one of the maestras who accompanied the evacuees on the *Habana*. She was affectionately known as “Señorita Rita” and according to Mr EK Ormrod, who was a helper at the camp in Southampton, and was himself known as “Kingston”, she was a “tower of strength” and he always remembered her “cheerfulness, ability and courage” and that he would always be sustained by the memories of a “beautiful and charming lady”; quite a testament for “Señorita Rita!”

From the tented camp my mother went to Moor Hill House in Southampton and was there until it closed, with most of the children having returned to Spain and some of them having been dispersed to families in the UK. My grandmother Eulalia, who had travelled independently through France to Southampton, was also at Moor Hill. She was repatriated at the end of 1939 and here

my mother’s story gets somewhat fuzzy. I am not sure if she could or couldn’t go back to Spain but the end result was that she stayed. She lived for some time in Southampton and later in Witney in Oxfordshire. It was there that she met my father and they married in 1942 and moved to London when the war ended.

Unfortunately for my mother she lived on the “wrong” side of London to many of her Spanish friends and colleagues and I remember as a child being taken to Fewcett Street, Fulham, to see my “aunties” Teresa, Lolita and their mother Ramona.

The difficult thing for me was that my mother would never talk about her experiences and would shut off every time I asked: “What happened?” This, according to Natalia Benjamin, was not an unusual experience as many did not want to remember. I wonder if any of the *niños*, apart from Josefina Stubbs and her sister, remember my mother. I would be keen to find out.

When my mother died prematurely, she left a scrapbook that had been compiled by two brothers – the Sillence brothers – who had been helpers at the camp at Eastleigh. The scrapbook contained a wealth of information and photographs and it was this that I wanted to give to the Association. I was to be informed that this scrapbook was already in existence: unbeknown to me this was a second almost identical scrapbook and had found its way to Natalia from Spain!

However, all this has led me to offer my services to the Association as Membership Secretary as a mark of respect for my mother, “Señorita Rita”.



## Basque Children of '37 Association UK

- Honorary President: Helvecia García Aldasoro ● Chair: Manuel Moreno
- Secretary: Natalia Benjamin, 8 Hernes Road, Oxford OX2 7PU; tel: 01865-459 744; email: secretary@basquechildren.org
- Membership Secretary: Gerald Hoare; tel: 01282-770 655; email: membership@basquechildren.org
- Treasurer: Carmen Kilner; email: carmen@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 Gerald Hoare 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](http://www.basquechildren.org). The deadline for the next issue is 28 October 2009.
- Editor: Natalia Benjamin (see details above for BC'37AUK Secretary).

► semanal más alto que su salario mensual en España, pasando por el niño que se vino a Inglaterra en el *Habana* y acabó casándose con una niña de la guerra que había sido enviada a Francia o aquel otro que, tras emigrar a Latinoamérica, acabó mudándose a la capital inglesa ya de mayor sólo unos meses después de venir a Londres por primera vez a visitar a una hija.

Este libro no pretende ser un trabajo documental o literario sobre la emigración o el exilio sino ser un medio de expresión para personas anónimas que tienen sus recuerdos como elemento común, tanto aquellos tiernos de infancia como los más trágicos alrededor de la guerra civil, y que nos llevan de la mano a recorrer parte de la historia española y británica durante buena parte del siglo XX. Esto lo entiende bien la coordinadora de la obra, Lala Isla, que animó a los autores a plasmar en papel las memorias que cada viernes contaban durante el History Talk del Kensington and Chelsea Community History Group. El resultado es este libro publicado por el Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración del Gobierno de España.

### "Ghosts of Spain" by Giles Tremlett (Faber and Faber, 2006)

Reviewed by Tom Webb

The book was written by an English author for English readers. The writer has lived and worked in Barcelona and Madrid for 20 years as *The Guardian's* correspondent in Spain.

Tremlett draws on personal experience to cover wide-ranging topics, historical, cultural, political and economic, brought together in a flowing descriptive style of a true hispanista. These answer many of the questions that we have about Spain and its people.

The "transition" is given good coverage, concluding that the Spaniards mostly got what they wanted. In general, age-old conflicts were settled with words rather than violence. A stable working democracy was put in place, in which silence played a key role. The book recounts some of the obstacles and changes during the 30 years following Franco's death and the influential part played by King Juan Carlos. The recent recovery of bodies from civil war graves has brought about a degree of openness in debate, both nationally as well as among local people not previously seen.

The author gives a well thought out depiction of three geographical areas of Spain with their differing histories, cultures and languages – the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia – and their relationships with central government.

Tremlett's account of the early days of the Spanish film industry and the influence of well-known writers and directors is interesting; he credits the famous international architects like Norman Foster and Richard Rogers with recognising that Spain was the best place in Europe for exciting new buildings.



This book is a good read for those of us with an interest in Spain and its people.

## 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.

### Commemorative envelope

● Franked envelope with special stamps marking the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Basque children, £6.

### Books

- "Recuerdos" edited by Natalia Benjamin, £16.10.
  - "Only for Three Months" by Adrian Bell, £11.10.
  - "Leah Manning" by Ron Bill & Stan Newens, £5.
- The following book can be ordered via the IBMT: [www.international-brigades.org.uk].
- "Poems of War and Peace/Poemas de Guerra y de Paz", by James R Jump (International Brigader who married one of the *señoritas* on the *Habana*), edited by Jim 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, £4.50.
- Danzaris at Southampton, £4.
- Montrose blue plaque, £6.50.
- 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, £6.

## Obituaries

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

- Maisie Armolea
- Primitiva Clements (Rojas Mendizabal)
- Gordon Cox
- Antonina Lepera Sagarduy
- Joaquín Sánchez

# How I befriended Pirmin Trecu and other Basques

by Fay Jacobsen (née Donaldson)

On 12 May Natalia Benjamin spoke to our local branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A) in Ulveston about the Basque refugee children who came to this country in 1937. I had no idea how many memories this talk would evoke or how powerfully they would affect me.

We lived in Abbey Wood, south London, directly opposite the woods. In 1936 at the age of five I asked my mother why the colour of our milk bottle tops had changed. (I was especially interested in these, as I had learned at school how to use them to make pom-poms). Ours was a very politically active and aware household, and it was carefully explained to me that our milk supplier, the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS), was charging a ha'penny more for each pint of milk and this would help to bring to safety children who were being bombed by the fascists. I knew who the fascists were and had had that reinforced by a Unity Theatre pantomime the previous Christmas in which Hitler and Mussolini featured as the "wicked uncles" in *Babes in the Wood*.

Some time after this, either for a May Day or a march demonstrating against the Spanish Civil War, I remember Mum dressed me in Basque national colours with my head swathed in red ink-stained bandages to join the march in a pushchair. A woman confronted us and accused Mum of exploiting, for political purposes, a child who couldn't possibly know what the issues were. I can remember clearly feeling very angry, as I knew well what was happening to the Basque children.

A few months later, some Spanish children came to Abbey Wood and lived in Shornells, a guesthouse owned by the RACS about a half a mile away through the woods. My mother took us up to introduce ourselves to the adults in charge. Subsequently my older boy cousins and I would walk up the hill to the house and, while my cousins played football with the older boys, I made friends with the youngest child there, Pirmin Trecu. He came to our house to play and have tea quite often and once accompanied us on a seaside holiday. For this we had to get the sanction of a Miss Duffy, who seemed to be viewed by the Spanish children with an awe verging on terror. I don't recall there ever being a language barrier between us children.

Our family left Abbey Wood for the Isle of Sheppey soon after the blitz began, and we lost contact with Pirmin. But in 1950, when I

had moved to London to begin my nursing training, Mum sent me a cutting from the *Daily Worker* about Pirmin's success as a dancer with Sadler's Wells Ballet Company. I wrote to him care of the company and found that he was living within walking distance of our nurses' home! So our friendship was renewed.

Through Pirmin I was introduced to some of the Basque community, which centred on a house at 12 Upper Addison Gardens, Notting Hill. Here Pirmin's sister Eli lived with her husband Fernando and their children. It was a large house, three stories and a basement I think. It must have been a grand house before the war and probably is again. The rooms were very spacious and subdivided by wooden partitions into at least two sections. Thus a family could live in one sectioned room with a degree of privacy. (Finding anywhere to live in London at that time was a problem.) Cooking was done in a primitive improvised kitchen on the landing and was shared by several families. The owner and his family lived in the basement.

Despite of the cramped conditions, I was always welcomed there with great warmth and hospitality. The food was wonderful and someone always seemed to be strumming a guitar. It was a joy and a privilege to be part of the social events of this Basque community. The spontaneity, the accordion music, the rhythmic hand clapping, the foot stamping, the guitars, the *olé's* – they were all very exotic to an unsophisticated, country girl. I widened my circle of friends there and met, amongst others, Vale and Rafa Flores and Herminio Martínez.

The Flores family spent a couple of holidays at my mother's house in the Kent countryside. They kept in touch with Mum at Christmas each year, even after they returned to Spain, until she died in 2003. Last year, when I met the man who collects my grandson from school twice a week in Finsbury Park, I discovered that he was one of Vale and Rafa's sons!

I lost touch with all my friends when I married, became immersed in having a family and subsequently moved away from London, but now here we are again. Sadly some are no longer with us. Knowing of my past connection with the Spanish community, my younger daughter sent me a link to The Guardian website where Pirmin's obituary was printed. That made me sad. Others too are dead, but my hope is that I will be able to exchange news and views with those who are still around.

# Good food and a beautiful house: the Shornells colony

by Andy Brockman

When the fascist forces occupied Zarautz, a coastal town west of San Sebastián, in the autumn of 1936, the three oldest Aldabaldetrecu (known later as Trecu) siblings were lucky. Their father, president of the local co-operative, had managed to escape and was with the army putting his skills as a cabinet maker to use making ammunition boxes and other military paraphernalia and their mother, thanks to a sympathiser in the local police, only faced house arrest rather than anything worse.

Elisabete Trecu (Eli Sánchez as she became) was 11 and in an interview with Natalia Benjamin and myself she recalled vividly some of the difficulties the family faced prior to their decision to allow the children to be evacuated on the *Habana*. "We weren't allowed to speak Basque and Basque was like breathing to us," Eli said. She went on to describe having to hang fascist flags from the balcony of their house and time visits to the dance in the town square so that they left before being forced to sing *Cara al Sol*.

Eventually, having twice faced the midnight knock on the door from soldiers searching for their father, the family found themselves in a requisitioned house in Bilbao thanks to a prisoner exchange conducted in part by the Royal Navy.

The family would not be safe for long. With Bilbao about to fall and having seen refugees from inland, including the bombing of Guernika, Elisabete, Lore and Pirmin Trecu found themselves aboard the *Habana*. "To me it was passages, passages," Eli recalled, "what can you imagine? It was thousands of children. I don't think we even ate."

In the months which followed Eli never forgot what her father had said to her in Bilbao: "Stay together, never part, always stay together whatever happens", an instruction he was to repeat in the autumn of 1937 when as refugees living in Paris, he and their mother were able to visit the Trecu children at their new home in the colony at Shornells in Abbey Wood, south east London.

Shornells was a large country house conference centre owned by the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society. In 1914 the society had housed Belgian refugees and now in May 1937 the RACS informed the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief that it would take 20 Basque children. They duly arrived on Friday 4 June, including, as the local press noted, two pairs of sisters and a brother and two sisters, the Trecus.

Until now Shornells has not been one of the well-known colonies, in spite of the fact that Pirmin Trecu, who became a dancer with



*Shornells, in Abbey Wood, south east London, was one of the longest lasting colonies.*

the Royal Ballet, had been one of the most well known of the *niños vascos*. However thanks to the recollections of Miren Solaberrieta Mendiola in "Recuerdos", Eli's interview and other research, it is moving out of the shadow of the better-known colonies such as Carshalton and Caerleon.

It is now clear that Shornells was one of the longest lasting colonies, with the Trecu children remaining there, apart from a period of evacuation to Canterbury, until

1944, when Eli matriculated from school. It is also unusual in that the girls at Shornells were very quickly enrolled at the local school, St Josephs Convent, a fact which was announced in the local press as early as 11 June 1937. Also associated with Shornells was Mr DR Darling, a Spanish-speaking teacher who had been at Stoneham and whose name crops up in connection with other colonies.

Even so, much more remains to be discovered about Shornells, but Eli's vivid recollections and those of the other residents of Shornells, plus the increasing amount of archive material which is coming to light lend the hope that a longer and more detailed study will be possible in the very near future.

## Stop press

Since this article was researched we have been contacted by Arkaitz Uribe in Spain who is hoping to find out about his grandfather and his grandfather's brother who were at Shornells:

– Iñaki Uribe Zubia, 11 years old in 1937 and his brother...

– Koldo Uribe Zubia, 8 years old.

The boys came from Bilbao and were repatriated to Spain in December 1939.

● If you have any information about the Uribe brothers, Shornells, Mr DR Darling or any of the incidents mentioned in this article please contact Natalia Benjamin or Andy Brockman: [andy.archaeology@virgin.net].

● Andy Brockman is Research Director of the Digging Dad's Army Project. He and Natalia would like to thank Eli and Ramón Sanchez for their kindness and hospitality during the research for this article.



*Eli Sánchez: From Zarautz to Bilbao and from Southampton to south east London.*