



Newsletter

Basque Children of '37 Association UK



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Paul Preston at Kensington and Chelsea Library.

News

Association's annual lecture: Franco, the chameleon

by Isabel Moros

Professor Paul Preston's lecture took place on Saturday 9 October 2010 at the Kensington and Chelsea Library Lecture Theatre in London. Entitled "The Fictions of Franco", it was as illuminating and enlightening as ever. Paul Preston's sense of humour and ability to illustrate his arguments with very clear and incisive examples demonstrated not only his obvious and well recognised knowledge of the subject, but also a very deep understanding of what Franco represented.

His portrayal of the dictator as a chameleonic figure who was able to transform himself time and time again throughout his long life was irrefutable. For Preston, Franco was like the Wizard of Oz constantly creating his own self-image. This wish for reinvention had begun already in his early military career. In 1922 Franco published a book about his time in the army in Morocco. He called it "Diario de una Bandera" (A flag's diary) and this could be seen as a precedent to the book "Raza" written also by Franco but under the pseudonym, Jaime de Andrade. In "Raza", Franco chose not only to reinvent his present, but also his past. He deliberately used an aristocratic name to sign his work, and by doing this, he managed to disconnect himself even from his own father with whom

he had always maintained a complex and difficult relationship. The book became later a film in 1942, directed by José Luís Saenz de Heredia, and Franco used to watch it once a week in El Pardo, crying every time after the screening. He had ended up believing his own fiction.

Professor Preston went on to explain how the Spanish press, for instance, at the end of the Second World War, published a series of headlines and articles announcing that the real hero of the world conflict had been the Spanish dictator and the victory had been accomplished due to his efforts. This distorted vision of reality and of facts continued throughout his time in power.

All the biographies of the dictator, from the very early ones like those written by Millán Astray or by Joaquín Avarrás continued to inflate Franco's image and to portray him as a hero, a saviour of the Spanish nation as well as of Western society.

His third biographer, Luís Galinsoga, even went as far as proclaiming him the sentinel of the west (centinela de occidente), keeping a watchful eye over all of us within our own borders and beyond. As a reward for his account of the dictator's feats, Mr Galinsoga was made editor of the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia*.

In his many reinventions, Franco was able to remain in control, even when he was persuaded to take some kind of early retirement in 1957 (at the age of 65). He was obsessed with his own image and as Paul Preston explained to us, the campaign to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his victory in the Spanish Civil War was used as another method of propaganda. It focused on the 25 years of peace rather than the anniversary of the war. And the great protagonist and promoter of that peace was none other than the dictator himself. The documentary "Franco, ese hombre", directed in 1964 by José Luís Saenz de Heredia was made to commemorate that particular event. Of course, as Preston pointed out, it was also possible to see that behind the title there were the words "Franco, ecce homo". The dictator saw himself as the figure of Jesus, our saviour.

To conclude, Professor Preston's lecture was a rigorous account of the many myths behind the figure of one of the most bloody,

cruel and calculating dictators of the last century. By presenting these myths, he helped us to identify also the new myths which continue to emerge today and which try to dilute the corrosive damage that Franco's dictatorship inflicted on Spanish society as a whole.

Rowley Lodge revisited

by Natalia Benjamin

On Saturday 26 June, a visit to Rowley Lodge, the "Barnet colony", was arranged by member Cliff Kirkpatrick with the present owners of the house, Mr and Mrs Conophy, for those *niños* who had lived there. The day was hot and sunny, with the hint of a breeze, and the guests arrived at 2.30 pm and sat on arrival at two large tables on the patio, rioja in hand. Apart from myself and Cliff, there were 25 *niños*,



Rowley Lodge.

children of *niños* and spouses there, including Koke's sister, Olga, who had been born and brought up in France. Unfortunately, Pili Murga and her sister Mila were unable to come because they now live in Wales.

Photos of the *niños* during their stay in Barnet were brought out and passed round, and several had brought their hexagonal disk with its unique number. The Conophy's two children were there: James is thirteen years old and Danielle is in her second year at Bristol University. She had in fact written to me seven years ago when her family moved house asking if I had any information about it (I knew very little about it then). Both of them were extremely hospitable and very kind to the *niños*.

Rowley Lodge is an absolutely splendid house, and we walked round the outside before being

From the Editor

The story of the Basque children coming to Britain in 1937 continues to arouse interest. Audiences at talks I have given are often deeply moved. Many are hearing the children's story for the first time, and empathize with the struggles the children faced growing up in a strange country and leaving parents behind in a war zone, not knowing when they would see them again. The way in which the British public and members of the NJCSR and the BCC cared for the children's welfare was exemplary (in contrast to the attitude of the British government).

In recent years, many refugees have flocked to Britain, but our own age lacks the generosity that was shown to the Basque children in 1937. The large numbers of refugees that have in recent years sought asylum in Britain seem to trigger feelings of xenophobia rather than compassion. I believe that those of us who are more fortunate can learn much from the humanitarian response of the British public to the coming of the Basque children. This is one of the reasons that I consider my involvement with the Basque refugees so worthwhile.

Soon it will be the 75th anniversary of the arrival in Britain of the *niños* and plans are afoot for a celebration, which should take place at Southampton University over a weekend in May 2012. As soon as arrangements are more definite, I will be writing to you all so that you

have the opportunity to participate in the occasion.

I am presently busy organising a special edition of the Newsletter. This is in response to a plea certain by *niños* who were originally evacuated to Britain but later returned to Spain. They would like to read the articles in our Newsletters but after so many years away from Britain, they have forgotten most of their English. I have cajoled and pleaded with Spanish friends and relatives to join in the venture and help to translate a selection of the articles. We hope to be able to distribute them to these *niños* in January. If you know of anyone who would like to receive a copy, please let me have their full details.

As I close on an uncharacteristically freezing November night, I remember a sweltering day last June when, together with some ten *niños* and their families, I was invited to visit Rowley Lodge, the Barnet colony. It was a magical afternoon; the house was splendid and brought back happy memories to the *niños*. It was extremely generous of the present owners to invite us all and the visit was much appreciated. We hope to organise similar outings to other colonies in future.

It remains for me to wish you all a very happy Christmas.

Agur,



Natalia Benjamin

► shown the inside. The *niños* thought that nothing seemed to have changed all that much and many were visibly moved by the experience.

Then it was teatime, with wonderful canapés, and the *niños* presented Mrs Conophy with a bouquet of flowers and a copy of Adrian Bell's book "Only for Three Months". Cliff thanked the family on behalf of everyone, and I gave Mrs Conophy a copy of my book "Recuerdos", as well as the CD of Basque children's songs and the DVD "The Guernica Children". It was for all of us an unforgettable and nostalgic afternoon.

Here are some of the comments I received about the visit.

● Oh nostalgia! Thanks to the wonderful generosity of our hosts, what a delight to go back to 1937 and the memories that being at Rowley Lodge brought back – happy days!

Mario Zornoza

● I have always thought how fortunate we were to have been given the privilege to live, if only briefly, in such a wonderful home and surroundings. For me, Rowley Lodge was the best colony I stayed at. Nothing seems to have changed in the house or the grounds since we were there so many years ago. When we were invited to look around the house this summer, I was reminded by another *niño* that the smallish room we were in then had been our bedroom, sleeping 16-20 of us on bunk beds constructed of 4" x 2" timber! All the work, cooking, laundry, outside work and gardening was done by us. There was always plenty to do and it was a happy time.

Venancio Zornoza

● Going back to Rowley Lodge, Barnet, in June was a most memorable day for me after 70 years. I'd spent part of my youth there, and saw

some of the young lads (of course, they are old now, like me!). It brought back many fond memories of how we used to play in the gardens. A truly wonderful day, thanks to Mr and Mrs Conophy the present owners and of course the organiser.

Javier Martínez

● A great reception from our hosts and a reminder of a very happy and perfect colonia.

José Armoala

● For me, it was one of the best colonies. I made good friends there with whom I still remain in contact to this day. So when we were invited to afternoon tea, I was really happy to go, not only to see the house again, but also to see other *niños* whom I hadn't seen in years. It brought back lots of good memories that we all talked about. I must thank the new owners of the lodge for having invited us to their home. They treated us with the greatest respect and as if we were members of the family. All in all, it was a great afternoon.

Paco Robles

BBC: "The One Show"

by Peter Wood

On 28 June, the Basque children in Britain was one of the topics on the BBC programme "The One Show".

It first showed a clip of the children arriving at Southampton on the *Habana* in 1937. Then Herminio Martínez gave an account of his adventures in Britain and the help given to the *niños* by the British people.

Southampton University was given an accolade for the backing and the interest that it had shown during the past four years.

Although short, the programme was worth seeing and gave viewers an idea of what went on during the beginning of the fascist push to oppress peoples.

Book launch: Margarita Comas

On 20 May, members were invited to the Instituto Cervantes in London for a book launch of "Margarita Comas Camps (1892-1972) Científica y Pedagoga" edited by María Ángeles Delgado Martínez.

Born in Menorca, Margarita was one of the first women in Spain to be awarded a doctorate in Natural Sciences. Having studied in France and Britain, and being greatly influenced by the New Education Foundation which advocated child centred learning, she became a foremost pedagogue, with ideas well ahead of her time.

She published the book: "The Co-education of the Sexes" in 1931 which was revolutionary in the transition towards a more egalitarian society. In it not only did she say that boys and girls should be taught together in the same class but that all subjects were appropriate to both sexes. She was a fighter for the rule of democracy and when the Civil War began, she was active in working with children.

In 1937, Pablo Azcárate, the Spanish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, wrote to the Duchess of Atholl telling her that Margarita Comas had been appointed to collaborate with the National Joint Committee and local committees regarding the education of the Basque refugees in the different colonies.

Two of the contributors to the book, Charly



From left to right George Barton Steer (son), Iñaki Azkuna (Mayor of Bilbao), Sophia Steer (granddaughter), Aintzane Aguirre (daughter of José Antonio de Aguirre (the first Lehendakari) and Nick Rankin (Steer's biographer).

Ryan and María Luísa Penelas Guerrero gave presentations and it is clear that Margarita Camps was a most interesting woman whose contribution to Spanish education is only now being recognised.

IBMT commemoration

The annual commemoration of British volunteers of the Spanish Civil War took place on 3 July at the International Brigades Memorial in London's Jubilee Gardens. This year's commemoration focused on the volunteers who were captured and spent time in Franco's jails or prisoner-of-war camps. Family members spoke, and Paul Preston introduced the guest speaker, Miguel Caminal of the Catalan government's Memorial Democratic agency. The moving ceremony ended with representatives of different organisations laying wreaths honouring the brigaders.

Bilbao honours journalist who helped Basques

by Nicholas Rankin

GL Steer, the man who reported the bombing of Guernica, and helped in the evacuation of 4000 Basque children to England, has had a street named after him in Bilbao. On 8 October 2010, neighbours from the regenerating barrio of Atxuri saw the official inauguration of Calle George Steer Kalea by the Mayor of Bilbao, Iñaki Azkuna, in the presence of the reporter's son and granddaughter.

In his speech, the Mayor said that Bilbao was honouring the memory of a young and idealistic foreign correspondent because he had been a servant of the truth, which is an integral part of

freedom and democracy. In reporting what really happened in Gernika on 26 April 1937, the 28-year-old journalist George Steer had helped to unmask the dishonest propaganda of the oppressive Franco regime. Sr Azkuna said that George Steer had been a friend to the Basques and a supporter of their government led by José Antonio de Aguirre, and he asked the people who lived in the neighbourhood to look after the street "to keep the memory of Steer always in our hearts".

George Lowther Steer was working as a freelance correspondent in Bilbao for "The Times" and the "New York Times" in 1937. The besieged Basque Republic, Euzkadi, having been granted autonomy by the Spanish Republic, was at that time fighting for its life against the military rebels led by Generals Mola and Franco. When the German and Italian aviation who were helping Franco's forces dropped the bombs that destroyed 85% of Gernika and machine-gunned its inhabitants, George Steer visited the burning town and wrote an account which was translated around the world. In Paris, the newspaper reports prompted Pablo Picasso to start work on his enormous black-and-white canvas, "Guernica".

In a brief but heartfelt speech, the reporter's 70-year-old son George Barton Steer said that his father did not like war but felt that he had no choice but to take part in the struggle of his times. Accompanied by his daughter, Dr Sophia Steer, he thanked the Basque people for their friendship and loyalty to his father's memory and said he wished that his father could have lived to see the renaissance of the Basque country.

The street naming in Bilbao was not the first honour GL Steer has received in the Basque country. On 26 April 2006, Gernika-Lumo unveiled a bronze bust of the reporter in front of the old church of San Juan, which was burned down in the 1937 bombing.

George L Steer was the last journalist to leave

Bilbao when it fell to Franco's troops in June 1937, and he later wrote a book, "The Tree of Gernika: a field study of modern war", which many experts consider the best first-hand account of the Spanish Civil War in the Basque country. It was translated into Spanish by Basque exiles living in Venezuela in 1963 and smuggled into Franco's Spain, clandestinely. Other Spanish editions appeared in 1978 (Felmar) and 2002 (Txalaparta), and it has also been reprinted in English by Faber Finds. <http://www.faber.co.uk/work/tree-of-gernika/9780571255139>
See Colin Carritt's review on page 5.

Talks given

Oxfordshire colonies

On 2 November, Natalia Benjamin gave a talk on the Basque Refugee children in Britain to the Companions group at Iffley, Oxford, and on 18 November she gave a talk to St Andrew's Church Lunch Club, Summertown, Oxford focusing in particular on the Oxfordshire colonies.

Education pack project

Carmen Kilner gave talks on the education pack project and showed the documentary "Los niños de Guernica" in Eibar on 21 June, in Bilbao on 22 June, in Vitoria on 23 June and in San Sebastián on 24 June.

Research

Spanish Republicans in Britain continue the anti-fascist struggle in WW2

by Manuel Moreno

Garbo? Narvik? La Nueve? No. 51, Pioneer Corps, Operation Fortitude? Crete, Paris, Pocklington? North Africa, Pas de Calais, Normandy? What is the connection between all of these? The Spanish Republicans exiled in the UK who continued the fight against fascism (1936-1945).

Small in number, they were very experienced in fighting, on the land and on the beaches, on the water and in the air, in winter and in summer, in the country and in the cities, in intelligence and in deception. They came from the fields, factories and mines to fight to preserve the gains of the 2nd Republic: the vote, distribution of land, improved wages and conditions, education, health, culture... They were fighting against privilege, economic class in town and country, the military, the church. This they did for nearly 3 years in Spain, the

▶ country that continued the fight the longest against fascism. They only lost because Hitler and Mussolini gave Franco military aid and finally because of the British government's policy of non-intervention.

Half a million Republicans fled, mainly to France. Amongst them were many in the Republican military who were placed in concentration camps in France under terrible conditions. Some were invited to join the French Foreign Legion (FFL) in Algeria. When France fell to the Nazis in June 1940, Spaniards escaped to Britain in small groups from France and also from Algeria with the FFL under Leclerc. This group became known as "La Nueve". Others joined the British forces, with the army, the navy, the Pioneer Corps and other regiments. Some were selected by the British army to start the Commandos and others joined the War Office. Some trained the Dad's Army at Osterley Park. One, called Garbo, worked with the British Secret Services.

They were few, hundreds rather than thousands, yet all reports show that the British and French thought them very tough, brave and political. They were well equipped physically and mentally for the fight, having fought for three years against Franco's fascist forces and the Germans and Italians. They were here as Allies to join the British, to continue the fight against fascism, to beat it and return home. They were mainly communists, socialists and anarchists and all staunchly Republicans and Anti-fascists.

With the British army and FFL they fought bravely in 1940 at Narvik, Norway, suffering heavy losses. The Pioneer Corps, with "S" on their sleeve denoting "Spaniard", trained to become support staff for the Normandy landings and D-Day. The Commandos, No 51, fought in the Middle East sabotaging enemy lines. "La Nueve" fought with General Leclerc during the D-Day campaign and liberated Paris! The Spaniards were the first to enter, joining the resistance fighters, the maquis, many of whom were Spanish. They drove in proudly and bravely, bearing Nazi helmets they had taken from the Germans.

And Garbo, who was this Garbo? This is one man who saved D-Day! A Spaniard, Juan Pujol, who was named Garbo as he acted so well as a double agent with the Secret Services, having 24 agents under his command in Britain as double agents, who tricked and deceived the Abwehr German secret services in Madrid and Berlin into believing that the Allied invasion was to occur at Pas de Calais and not Normandy. Part of Operation Fortitude, it is recognised by historians that this saved D-Day and thus possibly the allied western front. Certainly it saved many lives. Yes, Garbo was a Spanish Republican. Oh, and about those 24 double agents? None existed. It was all a fabrication.

These men were few, they continued the fight against fascism, most of them for 10 years from 1936 to 1945, fighting and achieving well beyond their numbers, only to be abandoned in 1945 by

the Americans and British. Most remained in Britain, defeated, defeated by their own side!

I am undertaking a study of this part of the Spanish Republicans in the UK. If you have any information, material, documents, contacts or fathers/grandfathers who fought with the allies in Britain please contact me.

manuel@moreno-wines.co.uk or telephone 07977922298.

Disertations

Two dissertations about the *niños* were written by undergraduates from the Universities of Sheffield and Bristol. They were able to come and consult our archives in Oxford. Susana Sabín Fernández has just handed in her PhD to the University of Southampton. The title is "Memory and Memorialisation of the Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War in the UK."

Did you know?

"Searchlight on Spain"

by Gerald Hoare

The destruction of Gernika on 26th April 1937 made terribly clear the fate that overhung Bilbao, and the Basque Government at once took steps to secure the evacuation of women and children, especially the latter. France, where already many Spanish refugees had found shelter, promptly agreed to take a further unspecified number. In Britain, approach was made to a voluntary committee that had been set up as a result of the visit to Madrid in November 1936 of six MPs (which became the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief). Early generous offers of the Salvation Army to provide places for 400 children and of the Archbishop of Westminster to find places for 1,200 in Catholic homes were helpful factors in enabling this committee to secure government sanction for receiving the 4,000 children they were asked to take.

Doctors sent over to Bilbao by the committee to examine the children for selection prior to evacuation found the food shortage still very severe and air raids so constant that children could only be examined by night. (There is some disagreement about this.) A final raid carried out during their embarkation killed eleven and prevented over one hundred others from joining the ship. The full 4,000 therefore never reached Britain.

The above information comes from the book "Searchlight on Spain" by the Duchess of Atholl, published by Penguin in 1938. I have wondered for some time why such an odd figure of 3,889 children was evacuated on the *Habana*. The air raids now explain this. It is also interesting to note that whilst the French government maintained the children allocated to France at its expense, the British government, allegedly obeying the adopted policy of non-intervention, would not maintain those allocated to the UK. It

was left to the generosity of the British people to provide food, shelter and accommodation.

Forthcoming events

Oxford day school

A day school on the theme: "Spain: Confronting the Legacy of Civil War and Repression" is to be held at Rewley House, Oxford, on Saturday 5 March 2011. Contact OUDCE, Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA or ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk or Tel: 01865 270 380/368

Oxford course

The course: "Democracy and Dictatorship: Spain in the Twentieth Century" will be taught by Tom Buchanan. There are six meetings, from Wednesday 9 February to Wednesday 16 March 2011. Time: 11.00 am – 12.30 pm. Location: Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford. Contact: see above.

AGM and Association lunch

The AGM of the Association will take place on Saturday 26 February at the Consejería de Trabajo e Inmigración, 20 Peel Street, London. All members are invited to attend the AGM and lunch. The lunch is a convivial occasion and we have the opportunity to talk informally. Details will be found on a separate piece of paper: please return the slip at the bottom of the page promptly to the Secretary, so that she may know how many people to expect.

Donations

Gramophone records

From Joanna Matthews, daughter of Wilfred Roberts MP, two 10" double sided gramophone records of the Basque Children's Choir singing eight folksongs made by Parlophone in July 1937, also a recording made by Paul Robeson of the song "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child". (See article: "The Basque Children's Choir", page 7)

Pastures new

Jim Jump

It is with great pride that we wish to inform our readership that Jim Jump has been appointed as Secretary of the International Brigade Memorial Trust. Jim has been a member of our association almost since its inception and has been a very valued contributor in many areas of our activities, not least on the committee. We are sure that Jim's calm demeanor, intelligence, good humour and tolerance will enable him to fulfill the demands of his new post with the IBMT, and we all unite in wishing him well.

Publications

- Peter O'Brien: "The day Ruth came to the rescue", *Now and Then*, December 2009, issue 62.
- Peter O'Brien: "The Hutton Hall Colony of Basque Refugee Children", *Guisborough Life*, Autumn 2009, issue no.36.
- Natalia Benjamin and Mark Benjamin: "From Bilbao to Hexham: Basque refugees in Hexham", *Hexham Historian*, October 2010, No 20.
- "Fleeing Franco" is the title of the book written by Hywel Davies about the Basque children in Wales. It will come out next February and will be reviewed in the next Newsletter.

Books for sale

- "Basque History of the World" by Mark Kurlansky
- Luis Cernuda: "El hombre y sus temas" by Rafael Martínez Nadal
- "A Guerilla Diary of the Spanish Civil War" by Francisco Pérez López
- "Los Niños Perdidos del Franquismo" by R.Vinyes, M. Armengou, E.Belis
- "Los Años de Miedo" by Juan Eslava Galón
- "Comrade in Spain" by Jason Gurney (2 copies)
- "1936 Memoria de la Guerra en Euskadi" by Iñaki Berazategi, Javier Domínguez
- "The Guernica Generation" by Dorothy Legarreta
- "Magalida Comas Camps" ed. by Maria Ángeles Delgado Martínez
Please contact the Secretary, Natalia Benjamin, on 01865 459744 or [secretary@basquechildren.org].

Book reviews

"The Royal Navy and the Siege of Bilbao" by James Cable (Cambridge University Press, 1979)

Reviewed by Tom Webb

I have always been interested in the part played by the British Navy and this account covers a short period in a small area off the northern coast of Spain from March to June 1937. It concentrates on two events in May, just off the coast near Bilbao.

The book is useful as it links the naval actions with the simultaneous preparations being made by the refugees in Bilbao.

The British Navy, generally represented by a major warship (*HMS Hood* or *HMS Royal Oak*) accompanied by two "F" Class destroyers, was employed in protecting shipping carrying humanitarian supplies and

refugees. On 23 April the nationalist cruiser *Almirante Cervera* stopped three British cargo ships from entering Bilbao. Signalling delays were engineered to give time for *HMS Hood*, to arrive and train its 15' guns on the *Almirante Cervera*, which having only 6' guns, withdrew from the scene.

This action was repeated on 6 May, by *HMS Royal Oak* which intervened so that the refugee ship *Habana* could leave Bilbao with refugees for France. Better known of course is the participation of *HMS Royal Oak* and the destroyer *HMS Fearless* in escorting the *Habana* to Southampton with 4,000 *niños vascos* on 21/22 May 1937.

The Royal Navy continued to escort other refugee ships from other northern Spain ports to France until the end of September.

This is a useful book. However, the inclusion of a coastal map with one or two diagrams would have made the movements of the warships easier to follow.

"The Tree of Gernika" by GL Steer (London, Faber and Faber, 2009)

Reviewed by Colin Carritt

In his introduction to the first ever re-print of George Steer's "The Tree of Gernika", BC37A:UK member Nicholas Rankin quotes George Orwell. "It goes without saying that everyone who writes of the Spanish Civil War writes as a partisan." Steer identifies closely with the characteristics of Basque nationalism as it was in the thirties; conservative (small 'c'), religious, progressive and egalitarian. He describes the people (very British, stoic, yet with a hint of Iberian fire). He finds them hard working with a deep sense of conscience, of doing the right thing, a clear sense of law and order, and above all with their deeply religious and Catholic convictions.

The book begins with a detailed study of the months leading up to the aerial bombardment of Gernika. Steer describes the meticulous organisation of the Basque government in the face of Franco's hostilities and the dire situation of the population many of whom were close to starving. He explains the efforts of the government to ration supplies and ensure fairness. His narrative is never sentimental and usually compassionate. Occasionally there is a note of cynicism and sometimes he can be a shade patronising.

He is angry at the craven policy of non-intervention and he describes in meticulous detail, the *cinturón*, the "ring of steel" defence structure in the mountains around Bilbao, and he charts the inevitable slow and painful retreat, hill by hill, village by village. And then the bombing of Durango. Just down the road from Gernika, Durango was bombed on 31 March and 248 civilians were killed. The Fascist press said "the reds" had done it,

but Steer meticulously unpicks the evidence and finds, unsurprisingly, that the destruction was the work of German and Italian aircraft.

The bombing of Durango did not receive the international attention and condemnation it deserved but it was not long after, on 26 April 1937, on a clear, bright, sunny, spring morning, that the bombers returned to unleash their terror on Gernika. The first Condor Legion plane to attack Gernika dropped six bombs on the railway station and the square. "Market day journeys and shopping exploded into carnage, a muddle of blood and bricks, severed limbs and broken glass, dust and screaming. This was just the prelude, and fifteen minutes later successive waves of attacks came from Heinkel and Junker fighters. The raid lasted over three hours. There were no Republican planes and no anti-aircraft placement to counter the attack. Gernika was a helpless target and as its people ran into the sunlit fields the German fighter planes came dancing down after them." George Steer watched men digging people out of ruined houses: "families at a time, dead and blue black with bruising." Steer tried to get closer in to the town centre but "the streets were a carpet of live coals; blocks of wreckage slithered and crashed from the houses; and from their sides that were still erect the polished heat struck at our cheeks and eyes."

What had made Gernika uniquely so catastrophic was the first use of Thermite incendiary bombs. George Steer's reportage and Pablo Picasso's iconic painting together ensured that the world would never forget the atrocity of Gernika. Following the destruction of Gernika, Steer concludes his book by charting the slow and depressing collapse of the *cinturón* and then the increasing vulnerability and eventual fall of Bilbao itself.

"The Tree of Gernika" was written immediately in the aftermath of the civil war, and it remains, to this day, the best contemporaneous account of the conflict in the Basque region.

Forsale

All goods are available from Tony Armolea: 85 Summerleaze Road, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8ER; tel: 01628 781525; email: [sales@basquechildren.org]. 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. ▶



Basque Children of '37 Association UK

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- 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: John Kilner and Herminio Martínez

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. The deadline for the next issue is 30 April 2011.
- Editor: Natalia Benjamin (see details above for BC'37AUK Secretary).



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.

CDs & DVDs



- "The Guernica Children", Steve Bowles' documentary film, now available in a bilingual English/Spanish edition, £15.
- 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.



- "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.

Obituaries

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

- Jesus Murga
- Alvaro Martínez
- Antonio Lobato
- Jim Fyrth

Thanks



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The Basque Boys' Training Committee

by Natalia Benjamin

In July 1939 there were one hundred and fifty Basque boys between the ages of 14 and 18 whose parents were dead or missing, in prison or in concentration camps, or being subjected to political victimisation. The Basque Boys' Training Committee was established to take on the responsibility of maintaining them until they were able to support themselves. The committee aimed to provide each of the boys with a training in industry or agriculture that would enable them in the future to become independent and self supporting. The Home Office allowed them to be placed in work provided that in every case the following conditions would be observed: that there was no displacement of British labour and that the conditions and wages of their employment would not be less favourable than those accorded to British employees in the trade. With the help of the Trade Unions and sympathetic persons and organisations, work was found for a number of boys, in offices and

hospitals, machine shops and garages, with building contractors, in cabinet-making works, as electrical engineers and on farms.

The policy of the BBTC was to place boys in good working-class homes which would enable them to improve their knowledge of English and adapt more easily to British life. They were placed in groups to enable them to keep in regular contact with each other. The BBTC was desirous that Spanish language and culture should not be forgotten, so it set up a lending library of Spanish books, held regular boys' meetings and produced a magazine. This was called *Amistad* and came out at monthly/two monthly intervals.

The Chairman of the committee was Robert Willis, Secretary of the London Trades Council, and it included among its members Leah Manning and Dr Richard Ellis. A general statement was sent out to elicit offers of financial help, placements and suitable opportunities for boys in industry as apprentices or trainees. The accompanying letter ended with the stirring appeal: "The

fathers of these boys made a heroic stand in the Spanish people's struggle for freedom. Those of them that are alive today face a future of terrible hardship and uncertainty. Will you acknowledge their heroism by joining with us now in building up a happier future for their sons?"

In the tenth number of *Amistad* of May/June 1941, Ronald Thackrach, then the Chairman of the Basque Children's Committee, announced that lack of funds meant that it was no longer possible for the committee to employ staff solely to look after the interests of the older boys. A co-ordinating committee of representatives of the BCC would henceforth take an active interest in the boys' welfare. From then on too, *Amistad* would be published under the auspices of the Basque Children's Committee, with the *niños* taking entire responsibility for producing it, sending it out and raising the necessary funds. But in the relatively short time that the BBTC was in existence, it provided valuable support to still vulnerable young Basques.

The Basque Children's Choir

by Natalia Benjamin

Very soon after their arrival in Britain, a choir of *niños* was invited to make a gramophone record of eight national folksongs. In the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief's Bulletin No 8 which appeared in July 1937, there was a short item entitled: "Basque Children's Gramophone Record". It stated that the Parlophone Record Company had made two gramophone records of "delightful Basque folk songs" sung by the Basque Children's Choir. They were 10" double-sided records and could be bought for 3/- each at the NJCSR headquarters at 53 Markham Street, London, or from any gramophone dealer (R2307-8).

Neither artists nor manufacturers were retaining any fees or profits and the review in *The Gramophone* on August 1937 read: "Parlophone has made these records with the generous idea of devoting the profits to the Basque Children's Fund, a project which commends itself to everybody." All of the songs on the recording are in Basque. The reviewer goes on to say that the traditional melodies are for the most part sad, simple and tuneful, but that some have a fairly gay and quicker section to lighten them. "The most attractive if all is Itxasoan on R2368. The recording of the singing – mostly in unison but with occasional almost unpremeditated two

parts – brings over much of the poignancy of the occasion and the rich dark colour of the children's voices."

At the beginning of December 1937, Wilfred Roberts, the Hon Secretary of the NJCSR, wrote to the members, drawing their attention to the need to continue fundraising for the Basque children. In a section of this letter under the heading "Gramophone Records", he states that the demand for the records is steady but relatively slow. To try and increase sales, the letter contained a sample leaflet advertising the records, and members were encouraged to insert a copy in all their correspondence.

List of songs

Zeuretzat Cixitza, Ene Ama, Lenago II, Ene Aberi, Txeru, Itxasoan, Ator Ator Mutil, Gabou Gabian

The English and Spanish, as seen by those in the Street colony

What the Basque bairns think of us (*The New Leader*, 3 September 1937)

At the Basque children's colony at Street, Somerset, a class of a dozen or so of the older boys was asked to write an essay on "The English".

All were impressed by the blue eyes and fair hair of the average Englishman, contrasting them with their own brown eyes and dark hair. They were amused at the Englishman's passion

for washing himself "three or four times a day". Because a party of Woodcraft folk came dressed in "shorts", they generalised that all English girls are "sportswomen". They have since adopted this fashion themselves and rather scandalised the señoritas who are in charge. They greatly envy the bicycles of the people who work in the shoe factory nearby. They spend hours cajoling their English friends to lend them their bicycles; some of them have denied themselves visits to the cinema and sweets in order to save money for a bicycle of their own. They conclude that the English are a nation of cyclists.

All showed great insight in distinguishing between the English Government and the English people. The English people, they said, are kind and friends of the Spanish workers. They know that it is the pennies of the English workers that are making it possible for them to be at Street. They are thrilled by the kindness of the ordinary working people in the village. Some of them who have been out for tea express great surprise that the working men here are able to have cake for tea. This is regarded as the greatest luxury.

And what we think of the children (*The New Leader*, 7 January 1938)

I shall never forget the Christmas treat for the Basque children at the ILP home at Street. Father Christmas and Christmas trees are strange to the children; they were told that it is a game the English play.

They squatted on the floor round the lighted tree. The room was thrown in darkness, and



A recent visit to Hutton Hall: a personal reflection

by Cliff Kirkpatrick

Since becoming a member of the Association in 2007, visiting as many Basque children's homes as possible has been high on my "things to do" list. I was sorry not to have been able to attend the Hutton Hall exhibition that was held in June 2009 but, at the instigation of Natalia Benjamin, was pleased to have reviewed Peter O'Brien's excellent book, "A Suitable Climate: The Basque Refugee Children at Hutton Hall", which appeared in the November 2009 Newsletter. Peter and I have exchanged a number of letters and emails and recently my wife Janet and I managed to fit in a visit to Middlesbrough. We went by National Express bus from Victoria on 12 October and stayed two nights in a basic but clean and comfortable hotel. We hired a car the following day and arrived at Peter O'Brien's house shortly after 10am. We were immediately put at our ease by Peter and his wife Jean: for me it was good to put a face to someone I had only previously corresponded with.

Peter had arranged to take us to Hutton Hall and we were received by the owner Joan Wilkinson, a devout Christian, who

epitomised northern friendliness and overwhelmed us with her endearing nature and generous hospitality. Her father had bought Hutton Hall shortly after the end of World War II and she and her husband Leslie were married in the Chapel there. Today they live and work extremely long hours on a farm close to the Hall. This didn't stop Joan from being a superb host and after a brief time chatting we all went in my rental car the short distance to Hutton Hall. I had been looking forward to seeing the house but the experience far exceeded my expectations.

Hutton Hall is an imposing edifice built for Joseph Whitwell Pease MP, a prominent Quaker, industrialist and at the time Liberal Member of Parliament for South Durham. There had been an earlier and less grand Hall which was demolished in 1868 when the present building was fully functioning and in its heyday, Hutton Hall would have been magnificent. Its former splendour is still evident, but it is now 144 years old and long before the Basque children were cared for there it had fallen into a serious state of disrepair. Much has since been done and the estate has a warm, lived-in feel about it. Joan kindly showed us around the gardens and parts of the house converted into

modern flats in which her children and their respective families live. It was particularly moving for me to see features within the house, such as a picturesque tiled fireplace, that would have been there when the Basque children were being cared for. After an hour or so we went back to the farmhouse for tea (I was asked if I would like a pint of tea!), sandwiches, quiche, trifle and other offerings, all home produced, including the most delicious beetroot in vinegar I have ever tasted. Joan showed us some photographs that Leslie had taken of Hutton Hall blanketed in snow. They were fantastic and she insisted on taking us to the spot from where the pictures had been taken, which she said provided the best view of the house. This unexpected excursion was well worthwhile and on returning to the farmhouse, Leslie, whom we hadn't met until then, had just returned and gave both Peter and me some of the photographs of Hutton Hall which Joan had shown us earlier.

Some of the Hutton Hall *niños* had lived for a while at nearby Ormesby Hall, the home of Ruth Pennyman who had been so involved with the Basque children. We spent a pleasant half hour being shown around privately by Liz Hayward, Education Officer of the Hall, as that day it was closed to the public.

The next morning Peter, quite unexpectedly, turned up at the bus station to see us off, giving me a beautiful signed card with a photograph taken by a friend of his of Roseberry Topping, a local landmark that the Basque children who lived at Hutton Hall would have known.

Altogether, the trip is something we shall remember with enormous pleasure, having made new friends and seen two extremely important buildings that played significant roles in the story of the Basque children.

The English and Spanish, as seen by those in the Street colony

► Father Christmas – a Spanish speaking member of staff – came in. Each child had a really good gift. It was a delight to see their faces.

When the ceremony was over, a boy jumped on to a table and spoke in Spanish. He referred to the ILP and there was vast handclapping. Then suddenly the children

burst into song – the "International" and Spanish workers' songs. I shall never forget the thrill of it – the children standing round the tree with the light on their upturned faces, arms round their toy and dolls, their bodies swaying to the rhythm of the music – these little "aliens" with their shrill voices singing their own songs in a strange land, among people who cannot even talk to them much.

A little bit of Spain tucked away at the foot of the Mendip hills.