



Newsletter



Basque Children of '37 Association UK

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No. 17:

Special 75th Anniversary edition

November 2012

75 YEARS



HABANA in Southampton dock, 23rd May, 1937

From the Editor

The contents of this Special Edition of the Newsletter focus on the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the *niños vascos* in Britain which took place this year. It has been compiled so that you may all have a souvenir of the commemoration and of this remarkable period in modern history. The main event was undoubtedly that organised by the Association and Southampton University in May and we are able to reproduce here the speeches of all the protagonists of this memorable occasion. We have also included some of your reactions to the event and articles that participants have written about their impressions of it all. Throughout the year there was a whole series of other events and publications to mark the odyssey of the niños, and reports of these are included too.

Natasha Benjamin

The Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Arrival of the Niños Vascos Southampton, 12 May, 2012

Introduction (from the commemorative programme)

Welcome to our celebration of the 75th anniversary of the arrival of Basque refugee children to our shores! We are glad that so many of you, including thirty who are *niños de la guerra*, are coming, and hope you will have a wonderful time at this two day event organised jointly by the Basque Children of '37 Association UK and the University of Southampton. As you can see, we have prepared a wide ranging programme

It is never far from my mind however, that the Basque children were deprived of a normal childhood with parents and family. It is almost impossible for us to imagine the trauma they experienced leaving their parents behind in a country ravaged by civil war, and going, alone, to a foreign country whose language they couldn't speak. Of the 4000 children who came in 1937, 250 remained in Britain at the end of the Second World War. That they were able to survive and make their lives successfully in a foreign country is admirable. Their courage and determination are equal to none. This is surely one of the compelling reasons to pay homage to them today in the series of events that we have put on here at the University of Southampton.



This plaque was designed by Herminio Martínez for the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the *niños* in Great Britain, and is situated at the entrance to Southampton Library and Art Gallery.

Basque Children of '37 Association UK

Commemoration of 75th Anniversary of the Arrival in Great Britain of 4,000 Basque refugee children 12 May 2012

Programme of Events

- 10.00 - 11.30 REGISTRATION in Garden Court
Coffee, visit BC'37A exhibition, buy goods
in shop, visit Hartley Library exhibition
- 11.50 - 12.00 *Pasacalles* by *dantzaris*, leading to
Nightingale Theatre
- EVENT BEGINS
- 12.00 - 13.00 Introduction: Professor Adam Wheeler,
Deputy Vice Chancellor
- 13.00 - 13.30 Welcome: Helvecia Hidalgo,
Honorary President BC'37A
Address: Carles Casajuana, Spanish
Ambassador
Address: Idoia Mendia, Basque government
Short talk: Adrian Bell
Four *niños* speak: Vicente Garcia, Herminio
Martínez, Paco Robles, Juanita Vaquer
About the Basque Children of '37
Association and Handing over the Archives:
Natalia Benjamin, Secretary BC'37A
Receiving the Archive: Professor Chris
Woolgar, Head of the Special Collections,
Hartley Library
Book launch: Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez and
Padmini Broomfield
Vote of Thanks: Manuel Moreno, Chairman
BC'37A
- 13.30 *Dantzaris* lead back to Garden Court.
Opportunity to socialize, see exhibitions,
buy goods
- 14.00 - 15.30 ANNIVERSARY LUNCH in Garden Court
- 16.00 - 16.45 ENTERTAINMENT BEGINS
Folk duo: na-mara duo (voice and guitar):
Roberto Garcia and Paul MacNamara
(www.na-mara.com)
- 16.45 - 17.30 *Dantzaris: Kezka Dantza Taldea*
(www.deporeibar/dantzak)
- 18.30 Closure

Basque Children of '37 Association UK

'When history meets memory and the arts: The story of Spanish Civil War evacuee children in film' 12 & 13 May 2012

Programme of Events

- 12 May**
- 18.30-20.00 Screening of *Ispansi*
(Españoles) followed by
Question and Answer session
with film director Carlos
Iglesias
- 13 May**
- 9.30-10.00 Registration and coffee
- 10.00-10.15 Welcome and introduction
- 10.15-10.45 Talk by Carlos Iglesias, director
of *Ispansi* (2010) (screened the
previous evening)
- 10.45-11.15 Trailer and talk by local film
director Steve Bowles, who
produced: *The Guernica
Children* (2007)
- 11.45-12.15 Presentations by Southampton
students who have worked with
the story of the Basque evacuee
children as part of their Film
Studies course
- 12.15-12.45 Trailer and talk by Luis Argeo,
director of: *Corsino*, by Cole
Kivlin (2010), based on the life
story of a former child evacuee,
taken to France and resettled in
Texas, USA.
- 12.45-14.00 Lunch
- 14.00-14.30 Trailer and talk by Izaskun
Arandia and Matt Richards on
their animated documentary
film project: *To Say Goodbye*,
produced with voice recordings
collected during the HLF
project *Los Niños: Child exiles
of the Spanish Civil War*
- 14.30 - 16.00 Round table
- 16.00 Closure of Symposium

Basque *niños* present

Vicente Cañada
 Pedro Ruiz
 Ma Victoria Domínguez
 Paco Robles
 Juanita Fernández (Vaquer)
 Herminio Martínez
 Agustina Pérez (Cabrera)
 José Armolea
 Vicente Romero Olabarria
 Valentín Bollada
 Feliciano Martínez (Sanchez)
 Tere Novatorska (Berrio)
 Bautista López
 Antonio Muñecas
 Marcelino Guerrero
 Helvecia García (Hidalgo)
 Josefina Antolín (Stubbs)
 Ma Luisa Martínez (Toole)
 Venancio Zornoza
 Ma Carmen de Andrés (Wood)
 Félix Urrutia
 Teresa Urrutia
 Carmen Uribe-Echevarria
 Moisés Moragrega
 Miren Sesumaga
 Kerman Iriondo (Imanol)
 Manolita Abad
 Eloisa Rodríguez (Crowley)
 Benita Mendiola (went to Russia)
 Eladio Hernández Zapata Arguda (went to France)



Bautista Lopez and Josefina Molina



Paco Robles and Antonio Muñecas

Dignitaries Present

Spanish Representation

His Excellency the Ambassador of Spain: Mr Carles Casajuana
 Minister-Councillor for Cultural and Scientific Affairs of the
 Spanish Embassy in London: Mr Fidel López Álvarez

Basque Government Delegation

Spokesperson for the Basque Government and Minister for
 Justice and Public Administration: Mrs Idoia Mendia
 Secretary General for External Affairs: Mr Guillermo Echenique
 Head of the Cabinet of the Minister for Justice and Public
 Administration: Mrs Mariví Talavera
 Head of Human Rights: Mrs Inés Ibañez de Maestu
 Head of Communication: Mr Aitor Guenaga
 Coordinator for European countries, Turkey and Russia: Mrs
 Ainara Jauregi

English Representation

His Worship the Mayor of Eastleigh: Mr Rupert Kyrle
 The Mayoress of Eastleigh: Mrs Karen Kyrle
 The Sheriff of Southampton: Councillor Derek Burke:
 Mrs Christina Burke
 Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of
 Southampton: Professor Adam Wheeler



(l to r) Agustina Cabrera, Juanita Vaquer,
 Ma. Louisa Toole, José Armoléa



Martin Murphy, Nick Rankin, Joanna Matthews

Welcome by the Honorary President of the Basque Children of '37 Association: UK, Helvecia Hidalgo

I would like to welcome you all here today and thank you for coming to help commemorate our 75th anniversary. I can't believe how the years have flown since we arrived in Southampton when I was 14 years old!

Firstly I would like to welcome the dignitaries:

the Spanish Ambassador – because he represents a democratic Spain;

the group from the Basque government – because in 1937, together with Leah Manning, they organised our evacuation;

the Sheriff of Southampton and the Mayor and Mayoress of Eastleigh – because they represent the people of Southampton and the people of Eastleigh, who welcomed us to Britain and who showed us so much kindness, humanity and generosity. These volunteers, together with Scouts from all over the surrounding areas, helped to prepare a camp for 4,000 people in only a few weeks.

We also welcome Adrian Bell, to whom we also owe a debt of gratitude, because he was the first British historian to tell our story, with his wonderful book *Only for Three Months*

Amongst our other guests, I would like to extend a special welcome to Joanna Matthews, whose father, the MP Wilfrid Roberts, did such tremendous work on behalf of the Basque Children and for Spanish Relief. Another special guest, following or should I say dancing in the footsteps of Pirmin Trecu, a Basque *niño* who became a leading soloist with the Sadler's Wells Ballet, is Itziar Mendizabal, a principal ballerina with the Royal Ballet. We are delighted that she could join us today.

Welcome to all my fellow *niños vascos*. We all share so much and have always been like a family for each other, fights and all!

Welcome to those who stayed here,

to those that have returned from Euskadi for this event,

to those who have come from as far as the USA

to all those adults who came with us from Bilbao, and those who helped us in Britain.

Welcome to them, their families and their friends and to all who have come here today, for whatever reason

We hope that you will learn a little and enjoy yourselves a lot. Thank you!



Spanish Ambassador, London
Carles Casajuana

Honorary President BC '37 A
Helvecia Hidalgo

Minister for Justice, Basque
Government
Idoia Mendia

Address by the Spanish Ambassador in London, Carles Casajuana

We are here today to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the arrival of the exiled Basque children to Great Britain in 1937, to render homage to all those children who are no longer with us, and particularly to express our gratitude to the city of Southampton and to the English families who, with great solidarity, fostered the 3,826 children who left Spain on 21 May 1937.

The steamship *Habana*, built to carry 800 passengers, arrived in Southampton on 23 May. The children were accompanied by 95 teachers, 15 priests and 120 female volunteers and were dispersed to various colonies around the UK, staffed and financed by individual volunteers, church groups and trade unions, to whom we give thanks today for such a generous gesture.

In the summer of 1937 the process of repatriation began and many children were reunited with their parents, and by the end of 1940, most of the exiled children had gone back to Spain.

Over 250 children settled permanently in the UK. Some of these children and their descendants founded, years later, The Basque Children of '37 Association. Through this institution they have kept alive the memory of that sad event due to the horrors of Spanish Civil War. About 50 of those children are still alive and some are with us here today.

The Basque Children's Association has reunited and kept in touch not only with the exiled children but also with their descendants. It has compiled and preserved archives of written documents and oral testimonies of the exiled children's ordeal. Most of these archives will be housed at Southampton University.

Therefore I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Basque Children of '37 Association for organizing this event and for their continuous enthusiasm and friendship. It is thanks to them that we could commemorate a fraternal encounter today of a regrettable chapter of our recent history.

This could also be an opportunity to celebrate our democracy: thanks to the efforts of Spanish society and of our different governments, we have enjoyed more than three decades of democracy without much resentment.



Address by the Spokesperson for the Basque Government and Councillor for Justice and Public Administration, Idoia Mendia

First of all, I would like to thank the Basque Children of '37 Association UK for the invitation. Thank you for hosting us. *Eskerrik asko*, as we say in Euskadi. *Muchas gracias*. I must say that it's also a deep pleasure and a honour to be here today sharing with all of you this remarkable event, sharing our memories.

Saben que el Lehendakari (presidente) Patxi López tenía un especial interés en compartir con todos ustedes este evento. Me ha pedido expresamente que les haga llegar su agradecimiento a todos los responsables de la asociación:

Manuel Moreno (Chairman);
Natalia Benjamin (Secretary);
Carmen Kilner (Treasurer);
Herminio Martínez.

Fue Herminio quien tras intervenir en la recepción anual que organiza el Ejecutivo vasco para recibir a los vascos residentes en el exterior le transmitió al Lehendakari su deseo de que estuviera hoy aquí compartiendo estos momentos con todos ustedes.

Solo las obligaciones ineludibles de nuestro presidente han impedido hacer realidad ese deseo compartido entre el Gobierno Vasco y la Asociación Basque Children of '37.

Sharing knowledge at Southampton University with you is a pleasure, of course.

The University is the house of knowledge, as you all know. But beyond that, with this kind of commemoration, with these events, we are also sharing memories. We have to cherish our memories if we want to build a new society, a better society, I would like to say. And that is still possible, despite the crisis and what is going on worldwide. So don't forget your past if you don't want to repeat the same old errors. And I can assure you that the Basque country is a place with deep memory. Now and ever. In these days, we are building our future from our memories and we are living peacefully together.

New politics for a new time - a new time we've been waiting for for ages in the Basque Country. A time for peace, a time for no terrorism. A time for full democracy and for tolerance.

As we say in our language, Euskera: *Pakea orain eta betirako!* Peace now and forever! *Nahi dut bakea zuzenbidearen garaipena legez defendatu herrialde eta pertsonen arteko harremanak zuzenbidea erabaki daitezen eta ez indarkeria erabiliz.*

Peace now and forever. This was our dream a long time ago, and this is what we are enjoying in Euskadi right now.

Tolerance, not a bad word.

Que lejos quedan las bombas, el exilio, los rostros desencajados por el dolor y sufrimiento! Ese reguero de crueldad que dejan la intolerancia y el totalitarismo cuando hacen causa común contra la humanidad. Ahora nos toca asentar la convivencia en nuestro país. Y será mucho más fácil y, desde luego, menos endeble si lo hacemos

sobre la base de la memoria. Nuestra responsabilidad como servidores públicos es mantener viva la llama de la memoria. Construir el futuro, sin perder de vista a través del retrovisor de la memoria compartida todo lo que ha pasado. Pasar las páginas de nuestra historia pasada y reciente, leyéndolas antes una a una con detenimiento y descartando visiones parciales y sesgadas o falsas e insultantes versiones oficiales fabricadas en los tenebrosos despachos de las dictaduras.

Como acabamos de hacer en Gernika recientemente y como estamos haciendo hoy aquí al volver la mirada atrás para recordar aquel 23 de mayo de 1937 y ver de nuevo la proa del Habana en el muelle de Southampton con su carga de esperanza.: the "niños vascos", as you say. Acabamos de recordar en Gernika - capital mundial contra la guerra y recordatorio perenne contra la intolerancia - el horror que supuso para la población civil el bombardeo y la destrucción llevados a cabo por la Legión Cóndor.

We all know that the destruction of Gernika, which inspired Pablo Picasso to paint his masterpiece, also brought nearly 4.000 children to Great Britain as refugees from the Spanish Civil War. That was the largest single refugees' flow ever to come to Britain and the first that consisted only of children. As Fascism closed in on Euskadi, the Basque Government decided to evacuate the children to be safe.

Among them was Karitza Olariaga Basterra: a 14 year old girl, identity tag number 1309. She was sent to Portugal on 12th July 1937. Fue la primera pasajera del Habana que salió de aquí, según resume Cliff Kirkpatrick en su artículo "The First Child to be returned". El primer grupo numeroso, formado por 160, tuvo que esperar hasta el 12 de noviembre de 1937 para ser repatriado: la mayoría a Francia. Otros, finalmente, optaron por rehacer sus vidas en Gran Bretaña.

Preservar la memoria, cuidar las piezas de ese puzzle para que las generaciones venideras puedan conocer el cuadro completo. Sin mutilaciones. ¿O alguien se imagina acaso que se pudiera hurtar al mundo la paloma que dibujo Picasso en el "Guernica", o el grito de dolor del caballo o de la persona que yace en el suelo con el brazo extendido? Sería un insulto al arte, desde luego, pero sobre todo sería un insulto a la inteligencia humana. Una afrenta a la memoria y al legado que a todos nos toca compartir y que hoy queremos poner en valor.

Se cumplen este mes 75 años de la llegada del Habana a Southampton. Relatos de niños y niñas que han pasado de generación en generación. Historias de solidaridad de quienes les abrieron sus hogares. De vivencias en las colonias en Newcastle, en Lancing, en Cambridge, en Aston - en tantos y tantos espacios de fraternidad por toda Gran Bretaña. Solidaridad británica con quienes tuvieron que decir adiós a sus familias ante la guerra y el avance del fascismo en el País Vasco.

Thanks, from the bottom of my heart. We will never forget your solidarity.

Archives relating to the events of 1937 and the subsequent lives of the children, the teachers, helpers, catholic priests and doctors who came with them, are being brought together in the University Library's Special Collections. I have been told that these archives

include some fascinating collections of photographs and memorabilia. A unique treasure. Today, I have seen some of them. We have just visited the exhibition in the Hartley Library of this university.

La firma del convenio entre esta Universidad y la Asociación Basque Children of '37 va a permitir guardar este tesoro en perfectas condiciones. Una colección con fotografías y cartas. Algunas de ellas con membrete de nuestro Gobierno Vasco encabezado por el entonces lehendakari José Antonio Aguirre - un luchador por la libertad y por el reconocimiento del autogobierno vasco, junto a insignes socialistas como Ramón Rubial - quien con la recuperación de la democracia en España presidiría el Consejo General Vasco- y de representantes del resto de partidos vascos de la época.

Entre ese material de enorme valor histórico hay también documentos oficiales, material filmico, canciones, testimonios orales, dibujos etc. Todo será depositado en la Biblioteca Hartley de esta Universidad para que quede a buen recaudo. Un archivo que podrá ser consultado en su versión digital por estudiosos, investigadores e historiadores. Quiero en este momento anunciarles el compromiso de nuestro Gobierno para conservar todo este tesoro histórico de manera adecuada y contribuir en la medida de lo posible a la digitalización y buen uso de este legado, memoria viva de un momento de nuestra historia. Para preservar la memoria de un episodio que se produjo en Europa durante el convulso siglo XX, un período de grandes luces y sombras.

No podemos plantearnos el futuro de la Unión Europea al margen de la memoria de nuestros sufrimientos compartidos. Como tampoco podemos en el País Vasco asentar la convivencia sin la memoria de lo ocurrido en la Guerra Civil, la posguerra, la Transición, hasta llegar a nuestros días. Por eso queremos desde el Gobierno que dirige el Lehendakari Patxi López una memoria viva, compartida e inclusiva. Una memoria al servicio de un relato que cuente lo que ha pasado sin ocultar responsabilidades. Vamos a construir el futuro desde la memoria, queremos que el País Vasco sea un país de la memoria.

Euskadi está asistiendo a un momento histórico. Por fin la ciudadanía vasca está viviendo un tiempo sin violencia, un tiempo de libertad recuperada. Es el premio a la resistencia ante el terror, el triunfo de la libertad y la democracia. El premio a los que nunca fueron indiferentes. Porque nadie puede ser indiferente ante el dolor, el exilio o la sinrazón terrorista.

Como señalaba el premio Nobel de la Paz y superviviente del holocausto nazi Elie Wiesel: "Ser indiferente a este sufrimiento -al sufrimiento de los demás, en definitiva- es lo que hace que el ser humano sea inhumano. La indiferencia, después de todo, es más peligrosa que la cólera y el odio", sostenía Wiesel.

Solidaridad frente a la indiferencia, memoria frente al olvido. Y no tengo ninguna duda de que los niños vascos que hace 75 años arribaron al puerto de Southampton en el Habana siempre tendrán un sitio entre nosotros.

Muchas gracias, Eskerrik asko and thank you.

An Account Adrian Bell

I have been given the privilege of saying a few words about the events that led to the evacuation to Britain of some 4,000 children from the Basque country precisely 75 years ago.

The story might be said to begin in March of 1937, when, after a first winter of stalemate around Madrid, General Franco ordered his forces to direct their attention towards the north. General Mola, placed in charge of the northern campaign, at once proclaimed: "I have decided to terminate rapidly the war in the north...if surrender is not immediate, I shall raze Vizcaya to the ground. I have the means to do so."

Within a matter of days, the means at his disposal had been put to work. In the early morning light of 31 March a detachment of the Condor Legion – the German squadrons that were serving with the Nationalists – bombed the small town of Durango. A total of 127 bodies were collected from the wreckage of the town; a further 121 died later in hospital. Systematic aerial bombardment of undefended targets which had no military significance was warfare of a new kind: it was a rationally calculated move to undermine an enemy's morale by terrifying its civilian population.

But surrender? There was no surrender, nor any likelihood of it. There was, however, a keen interest in securing the evacuation of women and children from the war zone. President Aguirre of the newly established Basque regional government discussed this with Ralph Stevenson, the British Consul in Bilbao, and Stevenson submitted the idea to the Foreign Office. Furthermore, he was able to report the willingness of the French Government to cooperate in such an evacuation. His proposal met with no enthusiasm in London. In fact he was mildly reprimanded for having taken this initiative: consuls are not expected to seek so shape foreign policy, still less are they expected to assume the authority to discuss controversial proposals with foreign governments. He was firmly instructed not to pursue the idea.

On the face of it, one might have thought that the Prime Minister would have viewed the proposal with some sympathy. Stanley Baldwin, after all, had the most morbid dread of this new threat of aerial warfare: "The bomber will always get through," he had so correctly forecast more than 5 years earlier. But Baldwin was not interested. "The climate here would not suit them," he said. And in the Foreign Office there was stiffer opposition. There the argument was that evacuating non-combatants – "useless mouths", as our Ambassador described them – would contravene the treaty of non-intervention.

So there the matter might have rested. There might have been no evacuation and we would not all be gathered here today, but for one event. And that event was, of course, the bombing of Guernica. General Mola's boast had not been idle: the town was razed completely and an unknown number perished in the flames.

Set against what was soon to befall cities across Europe, you might say Guernica was relatively trivial, but it was the first – "the first blitz of the Second World War", Anthony Eden later remarked – and, being the first, it had the power to provoke widespread revulsion. Guernica changed everything.

Consul Stevenson, who had walked among the ruins and the ashes the following day, submitted his detailed report to the Foreign Office, and, ignoring his earlier reprimand, he ended it with a plea:

"I have, though, [he wrote] strong views on the question of evacuation of women and children, even if it is only a few

thousand and if anything can be done in this respect before it is too late, so much the better."

In many ways, it seems to me, Consul Ralph Stevenson was the unsung hero of this whole episode. He made the cause of rescuing Basque children in peril his own, and in so doing he was hugely influential both in Bilbao and in London. Meetings of the Basque Government would be suspended to receive him and his reports were quoted at British Cabinet meetings. There is no doubt that Foreign Secretary Eden came to regard him very highly, and would have put great store by his report on the destruction of Guernica.

But now Stevenson's was no longer a lone voice. Simultaneously, in London, the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief was petitioning the Government to grant approval for an evacuation of children from the area around Bilbao. This committee had been formed at the end of 1936 to coordinate all the voluntary relief activity being undertaken by a plethora of political and non-political organisations. It was chaired by a somewhat maverick Conservative MP, the Duchess of Atholl, and its principal secretary, was the Liberal MP Wilfrid Roberts. I was delighted to learn that Mr Roberts' daughter, Joanna Matthews, is here today, because when I first became interested in this story she was kind enough to allow me access to her late father's papers. They were, of course, of enormous help in piecing together the story, but what they also revealed, through the countless letters he wrote over many years was a man of such steadfast dedication and concern for the plight of those children from the Basque region.

So then, in the immediate aftermath of Guernica, in the two or three weeks when the frightful agony that had been inflicted upon that little, hitherto unknown town was still vivid in the public imagination, the National Joint Committee was able to take the initiative and obtain approval for a limited evacuation from the region.

Approval was, in fact, granted just three days after the bombing of Guernica, but that was only approval in principle: it was not until the middle of May that the Government's agreement was finally obtained and cabled to Stevenson in Bilbao. Long before then, however, the process that was to lead to the evacuation had built up an irresistible momentum of its own.

By the beginning of May, The National Joint Committee had established a Basque Children's Committee, announced the impending evacuation in *The Times* and appealed for funds. Within a fortnight it had received donations of £12,000 and a promise of a further £5,000 from the Trade Union Congress. The Home Office had demanded detailed plans from the Basque Children's Committee as to how the children would be looked after before final approval for the evacuation would be granted; by the 10 May Wilfred Roberts had prepared and submitted them. Then the Ministry of Health raised fears that the Basque children might be carrying infectious diseases; immediately the Committee dispatched two English doctors to Bilbao to conduct medical examinations.

With all this going on in London, what was happening back in Bilbao, where the bombers were getting through every day, several times every day? There Leah Manning, another of the resourceful and energetic women on the National Joint Committee, was negotiating with President Aguirre and other members of his Basque Government, broadcasting regularly on Bilbao Radio to publicise the evacuation, and coordinating the details of its organisation with the Asistencia Social. As if any further pressure was needed, Consul Stevenson cabled the Foreign Office to report that he was being inundated with requests from anxious parents. Not surprisingly, within the Foreign Office there were fears that the National Joint Committee was planning the *fait accompli* – as one official put it – "several

shiploads of refugees arriving at Portsmouth, whom it would then be impossible to turn away without a public outcry”.

In the midst of all this frantic activity one senior official in the Foreign Office wrote a long memo in which he advised the Government to make up its mind between the conflicting pulls of humanitarian concern and adherence to the letter of non-intervention. His advice was ignored. The Government's attitude never was made unambiguously public. Only in the privacy of the Ministerial Committee on Foreign Policy, which met on the day before the 4,000 children boarded the *Habana*, was it conceded that the Government's agreement to admit the children from Bilbao had been wrung from them by outside public pressure.

One consequence of this, though, was the extraordinary way in which those competing pulls of humanitarian concern and the Non-intervention treaty came to be reconciled. That is, if “reconciled” is the right word, because what resulted was a conflicting, incoherent set of policies.

On the one hand, the Government agreed to allow 4,000 children to come to Britain. But then, when the children did arrive, it insisted that not a penny of public money would be made available to house them, to feed them, to support them. That was the condition that the Basque Children's Committee had been forced to accept – that they alone would be responsible for every aspect of the children's maintenance and for meeting the cost of it. Even the tents that were used – just up the road in Eastleigh – to accommodate the children when they first arrived had to be hired, not borrowed, hired from the War Department.

No other country which provided sanctuary to the Basque children interpreted the non-intervention treaty in so narrow a way, even though they knew full well how widely it was being flouted by other countries, nor did any other country impose such parsimonious conditions upon them.

But then, on the other hand, it was at the instigation of Anthony Eden – and remember, he was one of the principal architects of the non-intervention pact – that the government committed itself to providing Royal Navy escorts to any ship of any nationality carrying refugees, no matter where it was destined, be it to Britain, to France or to Russia. This was one of the requirements that Consul Stevenson had argued for when he made his proposal to the Foreign Office, because Nationalist warships were constantly patrolling the Bay of Biscay seeking to turn back any refugee ships. And Eden acted upon it, ignoring the protests from General Franco and facing down the stubborn objections raised within the British government by the Admiralty. Through the spring and summer of 1937 some 100,000 refugees escaped from the Northern ports of which 89,000 were escorted by British warships. Were it not for that policy it's doubtful that we would be here today. The fact is that the *Habana* would simply not have got through.

But with a Royal Navy escort it did, and so 3,826 children did arrive and, in due course, they were dispersed into some 70 locations, the length and breadth of Britain. The Catholic Crusade of Rescue took some 1,200 into its existing orphanages where they were supported by donations from parishioners; the Salvation Army took 400 into its hostels in East London, and two and a half thousand went into so-called colonies set up and run by ad-hoc local committees. It was those amateur committees who looked after the children and raised the funds to do so. They did that through public meetings, door to door collections, flag days, and by persuading individuals and organisations to sponsor a child. And they continued to do so, when weeks turned into months, and months into years.

The Basque Children's Committee advised the local committees “to try to ensure the widest possible base of support”, and they cited the case of the colony in Barnet in North London, where the committee had engaged the support of some 40

different organisations, each of the major political parties, three local churches, the Quakers, the British Legion, the Odd Fellows, and so on.

Naturally, the first place where those practical gestures of humanitarian support and solidarity with the children were demonstrated was here, in Southampton, where the children first stepped ashore. Reading the pages of the *Southern Daily Echo* for those months in 1937 you get a sense of the details: the meetings in the Guildhall to raise funds; the appeals for volunteers, labourers, plumbers, carpenters, to prepare the reception camp; the requests for blankets, cutlery, clothes and toys. And then the reports of individuals: the baker who would prepare 50 loaves a week; the women at the Corporation Baths who volunteered to do the camp laundry; the taxi firm that would loan cars; the cinema owner who gave free passes on a Saturday morning; the philanthropist who offered a house to serve as a sanatorium; the firms that supplied gifts; the shoe makers union that supplied 1,000 pairs of boots. And so on.

It was on the basis of that kind of spontaneous generosity from thousands of ordinary people from all walks of life, sustained not just for the three months that everyone had anticipated, but over years, that the Basque children were destined to survive.

As for the Basque Children's Committee itself, charged by the Government with total responsibility for their maintenance and ultimate repatriation, it continued to fulfil this duty of care until 1951. Only then did it wind up its operation, after 14 years, by which time the oldest children still remaining in this country had reached adulthood. It could reasonably be said to have completed its responsibilities, and to have done so honourably.



Bernardo Fernández with Adrian Bell

The Niños speak

Vicente Cañada

En mayo de 2007 acudí como Presidente de la Asociación de Evacuados de la Guerra Civil, para celebrar con vosotros el 70º Aniversario de las evacuaciones y hoy vengo en la misma condición.

Regresé a Bilbao, después de una estancia de dos años en Inglaterra, sin obtener como regalo unos buenos conocimientos de vuestro idioma que me hubieran abierto paso en mi vida laboral, tan difícil para nosotros que nos encontrábamos faltos de instrucción. Este era el único reproche que podía presentar a una estancia que, por lo demás, fue feliz, y lo fue al encontrarme con magníficas personas que me dieron desinteresadamente algo verdaderamente necesario en aquella edad: cariño y protección.

Os diré que, en verdad, nuestro regreso fue sumamente penoso pues encontramos el país en una situación lamentable con unas carestías enormes y, lo que era peor, con el enemigo disponiéndolo todo a su conveniencia y sin olvidar que las guerras crean odios y represalias y, más aun, si hablamos de una guerra civil. Vivimos en la pobreza largo tiempo y, aunque trabajo si había, estaba tan mal pagado que mucha gente tenía dos ocupaciones y ni aun así se conseguían los ingresos suficientes para lograr un mínimo de desahogo.

Los que veníamos del exilio, tan carentes de formación como era mi caso, empezamos nuestra formación en el propio trabajo y poco a poco, algunos, tuvimos la suerte de conseguir ocupaciones de cierto nivel y desde esta posición fuimos mejorando.

Después de leer el interesante libro de Adrian Bell, *Solo Serán Tres Meses*, he visto que en este país ocurrió algo parecido, los que se quedaron sufriendo todos muchas penurias e, igualmente padecieron los desastres de la guerra. Afortunadamente se salió victorioso de la contienda que nosotros desde España seguíamos paso a paso.

Siempre que vengo a estas tierras lo hago con gran ilusión aunque en los últimos tiempos me acompañe una cierta melancolía pues mis viejos amigos, aquellas entrañables personas que alegraron mi estancia, ya no están, porque, poco a poco, nuestro tiempo se va pasando.

Probablemente este será mi último viaje a esta querida tierra pues la edad, por una parte, y la finalización de nuestra Asociación, que está prevista para diciembre de este 2012, después de unos años en los que nuestra principal actividad ha estado dedicada al recuerdo, celebración y cuanto se relacionaba con nuestras salidas al día de hoy está cumplida suficientemente y aconsejan una retirada honrosa.

Espero que este acto del 75º aniversario resulte tan espléndido como el del 70º que sorprendió a todos por su excelente organización y las espectaculares intervenciones de las que guardamos un grato recuerdo. Por nuestra parte tenemos proyectada la celebración de este aniversario en Santurce, el 24 de mayo próximo y conjuntamente con la Asociación de Niños Evacuados el '37 y acogeremos con cariño a cuantos deseáis acompañarnos.

Herminio Martínez

The circumstances of our arrival here in Southampton in May 1937 were quite extraordinary. We know that the British government of the time simply did not want us, and gave us no

help or support whatsoever. It would seem that the sympathies of that Conservative government, lay more with Franco's fascists than with the Republican government, freely elected by the Spanish people. It was the revulsion following the destruction of Guernica by the German Condor Legion that caused a change of mind.

However, if the British Government did not want us, the same cannot be said of the British people, who gave us so much help and support. These people came from all walks of life, from the full spectrum of British society. I want to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to so many, who did so much for us.

What a task these people took on! To bring 4,000 children in one boatload, and in such difficult circumstances to Britain. When I see photos of the Basque children when we arrived; so many, so young and so tiny, I realise the humanity that motivated so many British people of the time.

I feel privileged to have known some of these wonderful people. Like many of us, I have been inspired throughout my life by such idealists.

We came across many, who, working in the colonies all over the country, devoted years of their lives to us. Many were working class people with their own problems in those difficult years of depression and unemployment. Some, like Wilfrid Roberts the Liberal MP, Leah Manning the official of the teacher's union, and the Tory MP, the Duchess of Atholl, organised our evacuation. I want to mention others, as examples of so many.

Chloë and Poppy Vulliamy both took charge of some of the colonies. Chloe's support went further. She was arrested and imprisoned in Spain while providing help to the families of some of Franco's victims after the war.

Ronald Thackrah, very much involved with the Barnet colony, who was sent to Bilbao by the Basque Children's Committee, to verify that the requests for repatriation by our parents were genuine, and who was expelled by the Franco authorities.

Eric Hawkins, who rushed to the camp at Eastleigh to help out with interpreting, and who did excellent work both at the Cambridge colony and at the disastrous camp at Scarborough.

Then there was that lovely caring person Miss Picken, the Secretary of the Basque Children's Committee over so many years. She took such a personal interest in us and would even visit some of the children who were in hospital.

The Quakers, whose many members supported us in such practical ways. They did not preach; they practised their beliefs.

Everything we experienced as we were growing up was not all "honey" of course. There was that hell of a colony that was Margate. Quite an experience, certainly! There were the difficulties of life during the Second World War. The long years of loneliness, of growing up and having to fend for ourselves, still very young, without the support of our families. Life was tough.

Looking back, the interesting result of our experience is that what might have been a disaster for many of us, brought out the best in us, and that we grew up to become independent and responsible citizens who have made a positive contribution to this Society.

Paco Robles

I was almost 11 when my sister and I were sent to England, 75 years ago this month. The journey from Santurce to Southampton was terrible, on that we all agree - vomiting and trying to sleep on

the floor, terrible! At Stoneham camp we were eight to a tent. Of course we didn't undress, so soon we had picked up fleas, which we then took to the other colonies. A lasting memory is of being woken up every day in the camp by loudspeakers playing "Land of Hope and Glory". It is still my favourite song.

We were there about a month after which we were taken to Wherstead Park, Ipswich, to a lovely big house set in magnificent gardens and grounds. This was a very happy time for us. I remember Mrs Chloë Vulliamy and others visiting us bringing sweets and toys – I particularly remember being given a torch.

After almost year there, I went to live with Mrs Vulliamy for a few months, but I missed my pals, so I moved on to a colony at Wickham Market, in a disused hospital re-opened specially for us. It was a terrible place: we all caught scabies and the house was infested by rats. But it was not all bad as I formed some long-lasting friendships there and also started to learn English. I wasn't too keen on this at first – I couldn't see the point, as I thought we would be going home soon and it sounded very strange to my ears. The first words I learnt in English were: "I think so". I liked them so much that I repeated them to any question that I was asked, such as: "What is your name?" "I think so." "How old are you?" "I think so" etc. When I saw the questioner smile, I said to myself, I know how to speak English and I thought that I had mastered the whole of the English language, which made me very happy. But eventually I put my mind to it and my friend Pedro Encinas and I shot to the top of the class! To this day I enjoy repeating: "I think so"!

My sister and I were then fostered for two years by a family from Birmingham. They had recently lost a son and didn't feel too kindly towards us. I had to help the father on his smallholding: I was up at six to milk the goat, clean the pigsty and collect the 5 gallon churn of milk. After that I had breakfast, some bread with very little jam and a cup of tea. Then I went to school. We were hungry here - even the dog had more to eat than us. But school was good and I enjoyed it: I could swap Spanish stamps for more food!

After 18 months with no word from us, (we were forbidden to write letters), the Basque Children's Committee came to find out what was happening to us and they soon took us away from that place.

I spent short periods in colonies in Carlisle, Margate, Carshalton, Barnet and Finchley so I got an idea of how different the colonies could be. I had both good and bad experiences, and I think that many of us who were moved around a lot will have similar mixed memories and feelings.

One thing that we all share, though, is that 75 years ago we made enduring close friendships that are still going strong today, even though there are fewer of us every year.

Juanita Vaquer

I was born and lived in Santurce until, when I was eight years old, we left for Britain on 21 May 1937. My mother had recently heard of the death of my father defending Gernika, so it was left to an elderly relative to bring my sister and me to the docks to join the thousands of other children embarking for Britain.

Paco has just told you about his mixed experiences at several colonies. I was only at one place after North Stoneham and did not have a good experience at all. My sister and I were among twenty girls sent to the Sisters of Nazareth Convent at Didsbury,

Manchester. I was there from 1937-1943, and I don't want to say much more about it. At the end of the Spanish Civil War we couldn't go home because we had no home to go to. As I said, our father had been killed, and our mother was now a refugee somewhere in France.

We were taken out of the wretched convent by a doctor friend of a relative. I was fourteen years old. We lived with him and his wife for a year, then they had a baby and there was no longer any room for us. The doctor found a job for my sister at his hospital in Manchester, and I decided to move to London. I stayed at the colony at Woodside Park in Finchley for a year and then went to the Basque Children's Committee who found me a job as a nursery nurse. I was fifteen at the time, the Second World War was in its last year and there were plenty of jobs for nursery nurses. I spent three years looking after children in a beautiful Queen Anne house in Bethnal Green that was owned by Cambridge University. I was happy there and well looked after.

There were two other Basque girls in Bethnal Green with me – Rosita Sánchez and Ma. Jesus Robles, Paco's sister. We all became good friends. Rosita took me to the *Hogar Español* and there to my surprise I found that I was not alone, there were **lots** of other niños vascos who had stayed in Britain after both the wars. We developed very close bonds and became for each other the family that we had all lost. And we have remained a family ever since. I don't know if others who have not gone through our experience can quite understand how we all feel towards each other.

After Bethnal Green I took a job in a factory belonging to John Lewis where I worked in the dressmaking department as a finisher. It was there that I met my husband to be, Jaime. We married in 1952 and have just celebrated the 60th anniversary of our happy marriage.

I am the last of the *niños vascos* to speak today so I will end by welcoming our special family of *niños vascos*. Over the 75 years we have shared happiness and laughter but also a lot of sorrow. Now is perhaps the time to think in particular of our brothers and sisters who are not here today, either because they cannot travel or because they have died. We remember all of them at today's events.



Vincente Cañada Herminio Martínez Paco Robles Juanita Vaquer

About the BC'37A

Natalia Benjamin, Secretary

I would like to say a few words about the Basque Children of '37 Association because without it, none of us would be here today! The Association was founded in November 2002, which means that we will shortly be celebrating our tenth anniversary. To date we have around 240 members from around the world, ranging from *niños vascos*, their families, children and grand children to academics, researchers, teachers, students, writers, all of whom have a special interest in the subject. Foremost of our aims is the preservation of the memory of the *niños'* experience for descendants and future generations. During the ten years of our existence, we have accomplished a great deal. and I am proud to be able to list such a wide range of accomplishments:

- We have had seven blue plaques erected in colonies around the UK where the *niños* stayed;
- given numerous talks locally, nationally and internationally;
- participated in international conferences;
- created a series of digital display boards which can be loaned for exhibitions;
- advised students on theses at both undergraduate and PhD levels;
- organised two major events commemorating the 70th and now the 75th anniversary of the *niños'* arrival in Britain;
- produced a bibliography of books and articles in English;
- amassed a wealth of archival material;
- written and edited six books; published sixteen Newsletters;
- published a special edition in Spanish of 40 articles from the Newsletter.

Another of our aims has been to educate and inform the public on the subject of the Basque children so that they should not be *los olvidados* of the Spanish Civil War and we will continue to keep alive the story of these courageous "children"..



Natalia
Benjamin

Alicia
Pozo-Gutiérrez

Carmen
Kilner

Handing over the Archives to Chris Woolgar, Head of the Hartley Library at Southampton University

Archives help us to understand the past and show us and future generations how we came to be what we are. They are also a means to give people whose families emigrated access to information about them. In addition, they are of immense social and historical value for the community.

The story of the Basque refugees who came to Britain as children should not be forgotten; not only is it part of the history of Spain and the Civil War, but it is also part of the history of Britain, the history of families separated and adapting to an entirely different culture. It should not be a neglected legacy. Your documents are valuable. That is why we urge you to share your memories.

The Association has been collecting material concerning the Basque children in Britain for over ten years now. And one of its foremost aims is that this Archive would eventually be deposited centrally in a university in Great Britain where it could be preserved under optimum conditions and filed to be user-friendly. The Special Collections of the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton was chosen by us as it was considered the best out of four other archives. The BC'37A Archive will be stored and housed in more suitable conditions than in my overcrowded study and be available for consultation by families, researchers and also by future generations. The message I leave with you is: preserve your history, don't throw anything away and so implement *la memoria histórica*. Without archives, there is no history.

And now I have great pleasure in handing over to Professor Chris Woolgar, Head of the Special Collections, the Archive entrusted to me.

Receiving the Archives and Launch of *Here, Look After Him* by

Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez and Padmini Broomfield
Professor Chris Woolgar

Natalia has said almost all that needs to be said – except that this group of material would not have come together without her determination. The records of those who come to this country as refugees are typically minimal – and those that are brought by children are even more elusive. Without Natalia's work, this corpus of documentation and the insights it contains into the events of 1937 and subsequently, would not be with us. We are very grateful to you and pleased to hold the archive among the Special Collections in the Library here. The Southampton connection is an important one and one we shall work hard to sustain.

Even with the documentation that Natalia has gathered, the perspective of the *niños* themselves is not well recorded. That has been the inspiration for a further project, to record the life-stories of some of the children, not only as a way of understanding what happened 75 years ago, but also for helping us see the consequences of exile and migration, and how it affects people's lives in the long term. With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the University of Southampton, in partnership with Hampshire Archives and Local Studies, has run a project to over the last three years that has produced a travelling exhibition,

a teaching pack for schools and, most importantly, a collection of long interviews which my colleagues Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez and Padmini Broomfield have brought together, and which are now among the holdings of Special Collections Division in the Library. From these recordings, Alicia and Padmini have written a book, *Here, Look After Him*, which you have in your conference bags. It gives me great pleasure today to thank those who have supported this project — those who have been interviewed, and the Heritage Lottery Fund for its grant — and now to launch the volume. It is a compelling read, and the stories it contains are both fascinating and revealing of the impact coming to Britain has had, both in the short-term and the long-term. I have learned a great deal not only about the *niños*, but also about Britain and Spain. It is a work of passion and scholarship, and it allows the *niños* to tell their life stories with great dignity. I commend it to you most warmly.

Vote of Thanks

Manuel Moreno, Chairman of BC'37A UK

On behalf of the Basque Children of '37 Association, I would like to thank all of you for coming today: our honoured guests, the *niños vascos*, the friends and families, the entertainers. I would like to record our grateful thanks to the following organisations:

the University of Southampton, for helping to fund and organise the event and for allowing us to use the venue and facilities. In particular I would like to thank Professor Chris Woolgar, Head of the Special Collections of the University of Southampton Hartley Library, whose close collaboration with our committee throughout this project has been invaluable; both the Basque Government Presidency, General Secretariat for External Affairs and the Office for Cultural and Scientific Affairs of the Spanish Embassy in London, for the generous financial and moral support they have both given us; the Heritage Lottery Fund, whose support has just been explained;

finally we would like to acknowledge the financial support of this event by The Galvani Charitable Foundation and the National Union of Teachers.

Today we can look to the past and celebrate the courage and determination of those *niños vascos* who came to this country and made good lives out of disastrous circumstances. We can look at the present and celebrate being together today, sharing a momentous occasion in the company of our honoured guests, family and friends. And we can look to the future knowing that the books written, films produced, academic studies made and archives kept, mean that the *niños vascos* will never be *los olvidados*.

Thank you



Anniversary Lunch

What you said about the event

- Thank you so much for providing a super celebration. Well done.
- *Felicitaciones por el evento, fue maravilloso. Lo pasamos estupendamente. He empezado a leer el libro esta mañana y me gusta mucho. Siempre me hace soltar una lágrima.*
- Just a short note to thank you both for yesterday and inviting na-mara to perform at the event. It was wonderful to me to hear such lovely comments on our songs and to meet so many people who knew my father and mother.
- Bravo and well done! I enjoyed myself hugely!
- What an achievement! I hope that you feel well satisfied that the weekend events at Southampton were most successful and a worthy reward for your endeavour and research. I find it amazing that all those records, photographs and human accounts have been amassed to create a valuable archive for future learning and interest. You must be very tired, but I hope pleasantly so and relieved – the joys and pleasantries of the day will rest with these people forever.
- Thank you for all you and your team did to make Southampton such a fantastic celebration. You have created a lifetime of memories for us.
- *Quiero darte las gracias por todo en nombre de nuestra familia. Ha sido un viaje precioso para montarlo. Todo resultó precioso, la comida era extraordinaria. Fue muy emotivo pensar que el niño inglés que visitaba Theydon Bois (que tendría hoy 90 años) hablaba 75 años despues con mi padre, uno de esos niños.*
- It was impressive how many people attended last weekend's events and how well it was organised.
- Well done for arranging Southampton. It was a great success.
- I think you've done terrifically well in setting up and sustaining the *niños* organisation over ten years and taking it to its successful culmination at the 75th anniversary, when you handed your archive over to the right institution which will guard it forever. It's a day we will always remember.
- How do I begin to thank you for such a wonderful day last Saturday. From start to finish it was interesting and enjoyable. What thrilled me most about the event was that I was able to find a picture of my late husband in the Hull colony. It has now been sent to many members of our family.
- My daughter and I would like to thank you for all the hard work you must have put into the event. It was very much appreciated.
- I'm sorry I never got near enough to you at Southampton to congratulate you and your team for the magnificent celebration of the arrival of the Basque children in 1937. I met so many wonderful people on Saturday, it was a real treat. Thank you.
- My message is to thank you both for the tremendous efforts you made to ensure a very successful day at Southampton. Everything went like clockwork...
- The event was fantastic.
- What a weekend. You and everyone involved in the planning must be very pleased at how well it went. The dancers in particular

were just superb and impressed us; I met several new *niños* and it was a joy talking to them.

- I did enjoy the event but I find it all a bit sad knowing that it is unlikely that there will be another like this.
- We thought it was all fantastically well arranged. Nothing short of a *milagro*.
- *Ha sido un placer colaborar con vosotros. Estáis haciendo un gran labor.*
- Congratulations on such a wonderful and successful event. No doubt everyone thoroughly enjoyed it. You have worked so hard and the result is impressive.
- Thank you for organising this fantastic event at the weekend. It went really well and was appreciated by all who attended.
- Thanks for all you and your team did to make Southampton one fantastic celebration.
- You have all created a lifetime of memories for us.
- *Los actos de Southampton fueron un modelo de buena organización y un éxito total en el objetivo de honrar a los niños vascos. Fue un verdadero honor y un gran placer haber podido estar allí. Todos mantenemos muchos agradecimientos por hacernos participar en el evento.*
- Thank you so much for organising such an interesting and enjoyable weekend at Southampton celebrating the children, teachers and others who helped. To organise an event such as this takes a lot of planning and I know you must have had a huge input.
- Just to say that my husband and I enjoyed our day on Saturday. It's a day that we will always remember. He was interviewed three times by different stations. When we arrived home we had three messages from relatives and family in Bilbao saying they had seen him on the News!
- Thank you so much for finding a place for me at such short notice. I enjoyed the whole experience greatly. The meal was very good, it could not be faulted – it must be quite difficult to cater for 250 people. The whole experience was very illuminating. I was interviewed and touched on the fact that although this event was about the exodus of the Basque children, the teachers who came with the children tended to be forgotten, especially those who could not return to Spain. I cannot imagine the hard work you and the committee have put in to organise an event such as this. So may I offer my warmest congratulations on a superb weekend.
- May I say that I was quite overwhelmed after the celebration weekend at Southampton University. We thoroughly enjoyed it although it had its emotional moments. You did a wonderful job. Our grateful thanks also to all the hard work of the volunteers who helped make it the success it was. The lunch was especially memorable and it was good to make contact with other *niños* and their relatives. I was fortunate in seeing my late husband in a group photograph.
- May I on behalf of the family say how much we enjoyed the events on Saturday. It was agreed that the whole committee, not forgetting you, had put in a great deal of thought and concentration into the events, and kept the speakers well liaised all the way through. The film of the *Habana* leaving port was quite emotional. I also felt that the Ambassador threw a new light on the subject.

- I want to thank you so much for organising such an interesting and enjoyable weekend. It needed so much forethought and preparation, and it all went so well.

- It was an interesting day, consisting of good lectures and speeches. I was touched by the *niña* whose early days were marred by the horrible treatment when she was in a convent. My view is that some in power lack heart and soul, but real people have both! Altogether, well done, it was a lot of work for you, much appreciated by all of us.

- I found myself sitting next to a lady who spoke only Spanish, She had come over from Spain with her grandson to participate in a Basque children event for the first time ever. She was the widow of a *niño* and had just discovered the existence of the Association through her grandson surfing the internet.

What you wrote about the event

Olwen Zornoza

From the moment we booked in at the Southampton hotel on Friday afternoon we felt as if we were on holiday with a large group of friends, family members even, many we hadn't met before but with whom we soon became on good terms. I was so glad the event was over two days so that we chose to stay over two nights and had time to socialize with these friends, all there for a shared purpose. During the weekend, there were many references to "the family" formed by the evacuated children, their carers and supporters, essential to their psychological survival. For me, Venancio's wife, I felt this family spirit strongly throughout.

On Friday afternoon my husband and I walked to the university campus. We were permitted to have a look around the archives in the Library, which was opened specially for us. These archives, stored in ideal conditions, will be a wonderful resource for future generations.

The whole weekend was full of interest, worthy of this year 2012, with so many grand national celebrations in this country. The University of Southampton, together with the Basque Children of '37 Association UK, did a wonderful job in organizing this occasion. The quality of all the posters in the exhibitions, the publications and the presentations, were of the highest standard. I hope it will help to spread to a wider public the awareness of this cruel period. There are so many who don't know of the turmoil and lives turned upside down in 1937.

On a more personal note, Venancio was delighted to meet *niños* whom he hadn't seen for some time, bringing good memories. He also appreciated the chance once again to thank the British people for their care and generosity out of their own purses 75 years ago when the government were reluctant hosts, unwilling to dip into public funds.

Like after all good parties, too, we went home clutching our bag of presents. We returned home on Sunday feeling we had had a short holiday with friends and family, full of variety and interest – and we even had sunshine.

To culminate it all, Ven and I joined others at Blackboys, East Sussex, three days later, to see the unveiling of a plaque marking a colony where 20 Basque children were sent in 1937, among them Moises and Miren Alonso, from Michigan. We had already met them in Southampton and were happy to see them there with their families.

Annette Clapton née Gildersleve

What a welcome. The sun shone. The Reception area was thronged with *niños* and their families happily greeting each other, musicians in colourful traditional costume weaving through, sober university staff and dignitaries conversing, helpful students ensuring we knew where to go and what to do and yet more groups clustered around the displays swapping memories and absorbing information. Perhaps there were even a few like ourselves, more tenuously connected and rather overwhelmed. As the day progressed we were ever more impressed by the overall organisation and by the variety and balance of the programme. A roller-coaster of a day embracing a rich mix of the formal, personal, educational, entertaining, social and joyous.

We are grateful that the slender thread which runs from my socialist parents who fostered Koke through my hazy childhood memories of him prompted me to contact Natalia. It was the warmth of the welcome from Natalia, Herminio and the other *niños* at Koke's Memorial Service that caused me to join the Basque Children of '37 Association and enabled us to experience this splendid commemorative event.

I had thought I was quite knowledgeable about the events of the Spanish Civil War, the International Brigades and the *niños vascos*. How wrong I was. The extensive displays in the Reception area opened my eyes to the mammoth logistical task it must have been to prepare for the arrival of 4,000 children. How immeasurably difficult to address the emotional needs of such large numbers of uprooted and vulnerable *niños*. The photographs of the camp at Eastleigh and of the many colonies which were then established have helped us appreciate the enormous achievement of the numerous individuals and organisations involved.

I had previously read Natalia's book of interviews, but hearing first-hand accounts and seeing the film of the *Habana* has given an emotional depth to my appreciation of the personal trauma and cultural disconnect each child must have suffered. I have since read Adrian Bell's book and viewed the moving DVD *The Guernica Children*. It is fitting that the archive assembled by the Association has been gifted to Southampton University. This will not only give present and future students the opportunity to study and utilise the information, but it should also ensure that the dreadful experiences of that shameful fascist period will continue to be remembered. The screening of the film exploring the experience of children who sought sanctuary in the USSR reinforced the message that those who came to Britain were only a small proportion of those dislocated by the war.

George Santayana's view: "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it" should be shouted from the rooftops. That children are still experiencing similarly devastating lives under military and religious dictatorships is a real indictment of humanity. At a personal level this event has reinforced my determination to ensure that all my friends, relatives and grandchildren know the context and appreciate experiences of the Basque children.

It was particularly lovely to join the *niños*, their families and friends for the life affirming music and joyful dance sessions. It reminded us that in spite of dreadful experiences, when they are overcome, we all know how to celebrate.

A warm thank you to all those *niños*, families and friends who contributed in the past and made this more recent event possible. A particularly big thank you for letting us share this 75th anniversary commemoration with you all. It was a wonderful and moving experience.

Bernardo Fernández

Mi primer encuentro con los Niños Vascos ocurrió allá por el año 1990. Había llegado a Londres para desempeñar el cargo de Consejero Laboral de la Embajada de España y enseguida, en el desempeño de una de mis funciones, tome contacto con el Club de Jubilados Españoles de Londres, del que era presidente Justo Moreno, y Secretario General Martín Cantal. A ellos oí hablar, por primera vez en mi vida, – he de confesarlo – de los Niños Vascos y ellos me presentaron a las primeras "Niñas" que conocí: Esperanza y Helvecia. Desde el primer momento me cautivaron sus trayectorias personales, pero sobre todo su bondad y dulzura. Nunca aprecié en sus manifestaciones ni un ápice de rencor hacia los culpables de su separación de los seres queridos y precoz exilio, a pesar de sobrarles motivos para ello. Estoy convencido de que mi conocimiento y trato con ellas marcó definitivamente mi dedicación, cariño y admiración por todos los Niños Vascos.

No quisiera dejar de hacer una breve reflexión sobre el hecho, verdaderamente lamentable, al que me he referido antes, de mi ignorancia de lo ocurrido en mayo de 1937 a los niños que fueron evacuados del País Vasco por salvarles del terror de los bombardeos fascistas. Sin duda hay una parte de culpa mía personal por tal ignorancia, pero lo realmente lamentable e importante es el silencio impuesto por el régimen franquista sobre todo lo ocurrido así como la falta del suficiente interés de la España democrática por saber y divulgar todo lo ocurrido, al menos hasta las dos últimas legislaturas de mayoría socialista en el Parlamento, en las que, a duras penas, y con el freno y obstrucción de las fuerzas políticas más reaccionarias, se intentó recuperar la Memoria Histórica.

En este marco político y legislativo, en el año 2004, tuve la oportunidad y el privilegio de reanudar mi tarea como Consejero de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales de la Embajada de España en Londres, y de desarrollar, dentro de mis modestas posibilidades, la política del Gobierno en materia de recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, en lo relativo al triste episodio de la evacuación de los Niños Vascos de 1937.

En mayo de 2005 tuve el privilegio de asistir, en representación del Embajador, al acto celebrado en la Universidad de Cambridge con motivo del descubrimiento de una placa en la casa en que estuvieron los Niños. Hasta aquel momento no se tenía conocimiento en la Embajada ni de la existencia de la Basque Children of '37 Association UK. Fue un acto muy emotivo por su significado, pero además, para mi supuso el primer encuentro con la Asociación, y el inicio de una relación, creo que, muy fructífera entre ésta y la Embajada de España. La Asociación ofrecía al Gobierno de España el mejor cauce y las mayores garantías para prestarle, dentro de las limitaciones presupuestarias existentes, todo el apoyo que merecía su impagable esfuerzo de recuperar la memoria de aquella triste odisea que sufrieron los niños, sus madres y padres y sus cuidadoras y maestras, y de hacer justicia y agradecer a la sociedad civil británica por todos los ejemplos de humanidad y solidaridad que sus gentes dieron a quienes tenían más responsabilidad y obligación de haber evitado o paliado aquella tragedia. He de decir aquí que, desde el momento en que informé al Embajador Carlos Miranda del acto de Cambridge y de la existencia y características de la Asociación, su implicación personal y su respaldo a mi labor en el apoyo a la Asociación fue absoluta.

Aquel reencuentro con los Niños que ya conocía, – Helvecia, Esperanza, y otros – y mi primer encuentro con otros que no conocía – Herminio Martínez, Manuel Moreno – y, sobre todo, el inicio de mi colaboración y amistad con Natalia Benjamin, Secretaria de la Asociación, marcaron, sin duda, toda mi etapa como Consejero de Embajada en Londres entre 2004 y 2008.

A partir de entonces fueron muchas las horas de trabajo juntos, y muy numerosos, y a cual mas emocionante, los actos de recuerdo y homenaje a los Niños a los que tuve la satisfacción de asistir. Muy especialmente recuerdo la celebración de los 70 años de la llegada del *Habana* a Southampton.

No quiero dejar de recordar otro acto -no recuerdo la fecha- que se celebró en el Colegio Español de Londres, en el que se clausuraba un ciclo de charlas de varios de los Niños a los jóvenes del colegio que, sin duda, constituyeron la mejor lección de Historia de todos sus estudios.

Y recuerdo especialmente aquel acto también porque, saliendo del mismo, en el autobús londinense en el que volvía a casa, una distinguida dama, que me oyó algún comentario sobre los Niños que yo hacía a quien me acompañaba, se me presentó y me dijo que su madre había sido una de las maestras que vinieron a Inglaterra con los niños. Era Carmen Kilner, con la que, desde entonces tuve la oportunidad de colaborar como Tesorera de la Asociación, y disfrutar de su amistad y la de John, su marido y ayuda inestimable en sus trabajos en la Asociación.

Estos y otros muchos recuerdos de aquellas etapas de mi vida en el Reino Unido se me agolpaban en la memoria el día 12 de mayo pasado cuando acudía a la celebración del 75 Aniversario de la llegada de los Niños Vascos a Inglaterra y me reencontraba con muchos de aquellos amigos y amigas, al tiempo que recordaba con tristeza a los que ya nos habían dejado.

Nunca agradeceré bastante a la Directiva de la Asociación por haberme permitido estar presente, junto con toda mi familia – María Luisa, Irene, Juan – en esta celebración tan emocionante como bien organizada. Por diversos motivos este acto ha de considerarse memorable y yo diría que se ha tratado de la verdadera culminación de un esfuerzo sobrehumano por colocar en su lugar en la Historia a la odisea de los Niños Vascos. Sería demasiado largo referirse a tantos como han contribuido al éxito de este hermoso proyecto, entre los que han de destacarse los numerosos profesores británicos que investigaron los hechos históricos, artistas que los recrearon – Adrian Bell, Steve Bowles – y un largo etc. Pero hay dos heroínas de esta proeza, dos mujeres a las que nunca agradeceremos bastante lo que han hecho: Natalia Benjamin y Carmen Kilner.

Cliff Kirkpatrick

This special anniversary was celebrated by a two-day event held at the University of Southampton on the 12 and 13 May, organised jointly by the Basque Children of '37 Association UK and the University of Southampton. The proceedings were formally opened by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, followed by speeches by dignitaries including the Spanish Ambassador and the Basque Minister of Justice. After the Anniversary Lunch, the events then took on a more social and cultural flavour, the *txistularis* (Basque pipe and drums) leading the way to the entertainment venue for performances by the folk singing duo *na-mara* and the Basque dance group *Kezka Dantza Taldea* from Eibar. The whole day was fantastic, the lunch itself being a particularly memorable occasion. It was attended by some 250 people. Not only was the meal and the entertainment provided of the highest standard but what made it special was the presence of the 29 *niños*, now in their 80s and early 90s, who on that day were the representatives of all those who came over on the *Habana* – sadly no longer with us – but whose memory was honoured at the gathering. To make the niños instantly recognisable each was given a replica hexagonal identity tag to wear accurately copied from surviving originals. One particularly nice touch was that each tag was separately numbered to correspond with the registration number given to each individual child in 1937. These *niños*, together with their children and, in many cases, grandchildren, formed the largest contingent present and, deservedly so, became the

focus of a great deal of media attention with filming and recorded interviews being carried out.

On a personal level I felt extremely privileged to meet and speak to a number of the *niños* whom I hadn't met before and my wife and I were seated for lunch with eight people from two related families, one branch headed by the sprightly niña María Luisa Martínez Olaizola (Toole), originally from San Sebastián, and her adult children, all from Lancashire; the other was headed by an English lady, Joan Martínez, the widow of Álvaro, María Luisa's younger brother who had also come over on the *Habana*, together with her two sons. This branch live in Somerset and the cousins hadn't seen each other for two years. What delightful company they were and we all got on famously. Whilst most of the niños who attended still live in the UK many had travelled from Spain and two had even come from Florida, USA. Interesting conversations must have taken place at all the tables and it was certainly an emotional reunion for many of those who had made the journey.

All in all, a well organised and most successful weekend enjoyed by everyone who attended.

Emily Charkin

I am an historian of education at the Institute of Education in London. I attended both the Oxford one-day event at the University Department of Continuing Education on 21 April 2012 and the reunion event at Southampton on 21 May 2012 in order to learn more about the Basque children's experiences and to explore the significance of those experiences for the history of education. It was a privilege to be part of this impressive example of the on-going co-creation of public history by professional historians, archivists and the *niños* and their families.

From one point of view, as Tom Buchanan, historian, described, there was a "disruption of education" or as Herminio Martínez, one of the *niños*, put it "our education had been totally messed up". Many of the children did not attend school for some years. The colonies varied in how much formal education they provided. However, there is another way of looking at the children's experiences which suggests that the people they met, the places they went to and the communities they lived in were an education in themselves. Herminio even goes so far as to say: "When I knew more about the English school system, I was so grateful I had missed it".

Some children's experiences were clearly more positive than others – Herminio spoke of "inspiring people"; Paco spoke of the colonies being "like families", while Juanita Vaquer spoke of a "wretched convent" from which she could not wait to escape. The evocative photo boards of the different colonies in the exhibition also suggest a range of environments from beautiful country houses and gardens to more basic and cramped conditions.

My overall impression from the stories I heard – both the official talks and the informal conversations over lunch and coffee – was that these children of freedom fighters against fascism were courageous and resilient freedom fighters in their own lives. They have fought battles to overcome the difficulties and challenges of life as a refugee in a foreign country. These people are not just victims of historical events who were disadvantaged by their lack of formal schooling. They are also active and determined self-educators: their stories are full of examples of taking responsibility for looking after themselves, each other and their own environments.

For historians of education, the colonies provide an interesting example of an unintentional experiment in which education is not organised by the state and in which the conventional boundaries of home and school are blurred. They can be compared with the colonies in Spain, which as María del Pozo has shown, were

not just places of refuge but sought to 'educate them for a more egalitarian future society'.¹ They should also be situated within the wider progressive and radical movement characterised by the New Educational Fellowship network, the numerous experimental boarding schools in the UK at the time and the residential experiments of David Wills and Homer Lane with their high levels of self-government and their emphasis on contribution to the community as well as formal education.

But historians of education should look not only to the colonies but also to the life stories of the *niños* which offer a profound challenge to our assumptions about the nature of a "good education".

1. Pozo Andrés, M^a del Mar, del: "Children at risk in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): from refugees to citizens". Paper presented in the Eighth European Social Science History Conference (Ghent, Belgium) 13-16 April 2010, p.2.

Gerald Hoare

Saturday 12 May 2012: check-in 06.30 at Manchester Airport, board flight to Southampton, cloudless blue sky, calm but noisy journey, take bus to University, arrive 08.30, couldn't have been easier to make my way to the 75th anniversary event of the arrival of the *niños*.

These are some of my mental notes about my journey to Southampton. How different it must have been on 21 May 1937 with thousands of children accompanied by teachers, helpers, and priests, making their way to Santurce dock in Bilbao. It was to be an escape from the horrors of civil war in an old tub of a boat, the *Habana*. Today, Health and Safety would not have allowed such a huge number of people to take that voyage. The open sea held its own dangers with the threat of being shelled by Nationalists vessels but under the protection of the Royal Navy, the *Habana* made its way safely to Southampton on 23 May 1937. The major hazard for all on board was the infamous Bay of Biscay which caused nearly everyone to be sick.

I sometimes think about that escape from Bilbao and the arrival at Southampton. My mother was one of the teachers, a *maestra*, one of about 100 or so who had accompanied the children and one of those who would not return to Spain. She was 24 years old. A lump comes to my throat when I see in my mind's eye how her life changed dramatically forever.

The arrangements to organise some 4,000 people on board the *Habana* could not have been an easy task and a lot of thanks must go to the Duchess of Atholl or the "Red Duchess" as she would be known. Together with Ellen Wilkinson and Eleanor Rathbone, they opposed the British government's policy of non-intervention and managed to persuade those in power to allow the *Habana* to be escorted and to be allowed to dock in Southampton.

In the Southampton city archives a detailed map of Southampton Water shows the exact berthing point of the *Habana* and it is here to where my mind is directed saying "this is where it all began in this country".

The 75th anniversary celebration was, to all intents and purposes, a celebration directed at the children, the *niños* and quite rightly so. But for me, it was also a celebration of my mother's arrival in this country. My life would begin some years later and I would be the one with the "Spanish mum" as the people in my street would regard me.

I had arranged at the very last minute to go Southampton as originally I had said that, due to personal circumstances, I would not be able to go. On the day before the celebration I was consumed with guilt that I was not going to be there. This would be the last opportunity to celebrate such an event and after some

rapid arrangements I was going to be there. I am very glad that I did go. I was privileged to have been seated at the admirable lunch next to a *niño* – Kerman Iriondo whom I guessed would be in his early eighties. It was a memorable experience for me to talk at length to one of the children who had actually been on the *Habana*.

My abiding memory of this very well organised event was one of "privilege". It was a privilege to be there surrounded by the history of the journey to this country and the people who had had their lives changed by events beyond their control.

Jane and Willie Black

Thank you so much for inviting us to the Basque reunion in Southampton. It was an extraordinary day from beginning to end. All the preparation was evident in the smooth running of events and a balance of time: to talk, to be informed and to attend to physical needs. Table 9 was deeply impressed by the quality of the meal and the organisation of the staff to produce hot food for all.

We met several *niños*, all so warm, so keen to talk and so full of life. The strong feelings they have for each other as a group were tangible, their individual memories so vivid and very moving. What a hugely emotional day it must have been for them! They all seemed to share every moment with energy.

We also enjoyed meeting staff from the Spanish Embassy and various researchers.

There was a steady trade at the shop, display materials were fascinating and the evening film complimented the Spanish/British element well.

Joanna Matthews

The weekend at Southampton University last May for the 75th Reunion of the Basque children, was a happy gathering. For me, it was a renewal of some previous acquaintances and also a heart-warming realization of the role my father, Wilfrid Roberts, Secretary of the British group who organised the evacuation of the children, had played.

From the initial sessions of speeches, the outstanding personality for me was the Spanish Ambassador, who spoke movingly of the need for reconciliation and his view that now was the time for this healing process to be recognized. There was also the presence of a group of about 29 "children", for the most part octogenarians or even older (of course, as it is now 75 years on from 1937) who were as excited and happy as any group of younger children might be at coming together for a special party. Two "children" came from America and several from Spain, which gave a poignancy to the otherwise joyful occasion.

During lunch, and after, the usual question was: "How do you fit in to this scene?" I was proud to be able to say I was Wilfrid's daughter, and the reaction was invariably positive. The next question was usually about my father, but I wasn't able to be much help: as far as I was concerned he was often away, and he spent a lot of time in Westminster as an MP, so although we lived in Hampstead, for easy access to Parliament, on the whole my two sisters and I didn't actually see a lot of him at this time. Of course we knew about the Basque children, and we even met some of them in Brampton, Cumbria which was our other home. On one occasion I was excused afternoon school to go and present a bouquet to the Duchess of Atholl, (another of the important sponsors), a job which I had done on other occasions with other VIPs, and I suppose I was therefore trusted to curtsy gracefully and smile sweetly (I was 8 years old). The reward for a good performance was an ice-cream, as well as half a day off school!

I remember learning a few songs then, of which I can now only recall the odd line. But I knew there were *cuatro generales*, leading to the question of who was the fifth general and was there a Fifth Column? Later I met other Spanish political refugees, but the Basque children were MY age, and it hit home that they had had to find a new home in England, even if only temporarily. In 1937, it hadn't occurred to me that I and my younger sister would also be dependent on the kindness of strangers in a foreign land. We were evacuated to the USA in 1940 after Dunkirk, when there was a real threat of invasion. But that, of course, was a much less violent experience for us, compared with the war-torn evacuation in 1937.

Leonard Palmer

The time was 7.45am. The day was Friday 11 May 2012. My radio alarm roused me from my slumbers. I wasn't used to be awakened so early in the morning, so what was special on this occasion? Well, I had to be up early as I had a train to catch in my home town of Ulverston in Cumbria in order to get to Manchester Airport for the 17.40 flight to Southampton.

A neighbour saw me go for the bus at 11am, got his car on the road and drove me to the railway station. Neighbours are like that in this part of Britain. The train was on time and soon I was trundling across Morecambe Bay and after changing trains at Lancaster, I eventually arrived inside Manchester Airport. As I am nearly 90 years old and registered blind, I was met at the airport by rail staff under the assisted passenger scheme and very soon I was in an electric buggy being driven to Terminal 3.

Forty minutes after take-off, we touched down at Southampton Airport and very soon I was on my way by bus to the Highfield Hotel near Southampton University.

So why was I travelling to Southampton on the 11th? You've guessed it – it was anniversary of the arrival in Britain of 4000 Basque refugee children in May 1937. 250 people were descending on the university campus to commemorate the occasion. "To remember and be remembered" was the theme of the event

At 9.15 on Saturday 12 May, I was interviewed by BBC Radio 4 for a programme to be broadcast at 10am on 18 June. After the interviews, I was taken to the university campus where the main celebration was to take place. The organisation of the celebration had been brilliantly organised by Natalia and her team of helpers.

There was an exhibition with a huge array of photographs relating to the journey of the Basque children in the *SS Habana*, pictures of the initial camp at Stoneham, plus numerous photographs of the various colonies to which the children were eventually dispersed. There was a book stall with various publications available all relating to the Basque refugees or aspects of the Spanish Civil War. There was also a new book, edited for the occasion by Natalia Benjamin, including testimonies of the Basque "children" and the experiences of many of the people who had been associated with them.

Around about 12.00 we were entertained by a group of young Basque dancers – very colourful and quite noisy. For me it brought back memories of a concert in 1938 at Edmonton Town Hall in North London held to raise funds to sustain the Basque children in exile. It was a very emotional and tearful occasion.

At 2pm we were led by the dancers to the dining hall for lunch. This was a four course meal, beautifully prepared and presented. On Saturday evening I had the unexpected pleasure of meeting a "child" who had been at the colony called "Woodberry" or the Leah Manning House, at Theydon Bois on the edge of Epping Forrest. I used to visit the children there and produced a group

photograph I had taken of them; this "child", whose name was Vicente Romero Olabarria, told me what had happened to those I could remember, such as Luís Sanz, Jesús Alcón, Martín Oviedo, Ramón de la Cal, Pilar Cortes, Agustina Laria and Teresa Gonzales. Again it brought tears to my eyes.

On the Sunday morning two American ladies, sisters, came to me and said: "We owe you a vote of thanks" I queried this and said: "Why"? They replied: "Our parents were Basques who emigrated to America and we thank you for what you did for the Basque children." Again, my tears flowed.

All in all, how do I sum up what turned out to be a very emotional and at times upsetting experience of the 75th anniversary? I thought it was brilliantly organised and everything ran as smoothly as clockwork. But things don't just happen and Natalia and her team must take the full responsibility and credit for what turned out to be a fitting commemoration of the Basque children's arrival in Britain in 1937.

I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to take part in this event and would like to extend my sincere thanks to all those people who made it possible. *Muchas gracias!*

Luis Ruiz

I almost missed the Anniversary event! When I realised I had missed the deadline for tickets to the 75th Anniversary reunion at Southampton, I was, to say the least, very upset with myself. I had set my heart on attending, together with my wife Carole and our two children Danielle and Luis. When Natalia found four spaces for us we were overjoyed. My father, one of the *niños vascos*, had passed away in June 2011 and it was felt by all of us that we needed to come along and give our support to the Association as he could not.

Having attended, we are so happy we did. How nice it was to see again the familiar faces. Once again the organisation of the event was marvellous, with just the right emphasis on the History and Tradition, with exhibitions and refreshments on arrival followed by a lovely meal.

We were very happy to be seated with two daughters of a *niño* from America, as well as one of their daughters and two of their aunts from Bilbao. The conversation went from English to Spanish, then to American and back to English again. Everyone was so friendly and enthusiastic to find out others' stories and to tell their own.

Following the meal, we had the opportunity to listen to the guitar music and traditional dances that had been laid on, and to meet with my Uncle Alfredo's widow Janet and several of my cousins Jane, Carmela and Carlos, who had travelled down from the Midlands.

It strikes me that the life-changing events of 1937 are still having effects on people to this day: I see myself and others still trying to come to terms with the displacement and break up of their families and their ties with the Basque Country. It is however for me very refreshing to see the next generation taking such a genuine interest in their roots. Many of those, myself included, who recently obtained full Spanish nationality can now, I suppose, feel a much greater connection with the traditions and language which were passed on to us by the *niños*. Despite having made new lives in this and other countries, I suspect they always had a longing to return to the Spain of their childhood.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of myself and my family to say a big thank you to the Association for all its hard work and for organising once again such a great anniversary reunion for the surviving *niños*, their families and all other interested parties.

It seems more important now than ever that the story of the niños vascos be told and passed on to future generations.

Martin Murphy

The *niños* – or should I call them grand-*niños*? – who re-lived their childhood experiences at the gathering in Southampton last May vividly recalled what they had felt all those years ago, when they were suddenly transported from the familiarity and stability of home to a bewildering new environment. Some, city-dwellers, now experienced country life for the first time. Many were disorientated by being moved from one place to another as colonies were formed and re-formed. Some had their first taste of institutional life. All were caught between two worlds, trying to adapt to a new world while remaining loyal to the country and the parents they had left behind.

Their British hosts also had some adapting to do. In those pre-war days “foreigners” were a curious rarity. Immigrants were largely confined to major centres of population, whereas the colonies where the niños stayed were often based in villages among country people who had never been to London, let alone the continent of Europe.

Fate wasn't kind to all the *niños*, especially those who were assigned to institutions, but the overwhelming feeling of most of them seems to be one of gratitude for the kindness of strangers. This is touchingly illustrated by a report in the *Yarmouth Mercury*, dating from the summer of 1937, which describes the day out on the beach at Yarmouth of a group of fifty-one boys from Oakley Park, Hoxne, near Diss. This was the colony organised by Poppy Vulliamy which was about to move to a disused rectory at Rollesby, near Yarmouth, and later moved again to Thame, Eaton Hastings and (finally) Shipton-on-Cherwell.

“Viva the English!”, “Viva Yarmouth!” runs the headline: “Basque Boy Refugees' Grand Day of Fun”. “The Freedom of the Pleasure Beach”, the report continued, “granted to the party by Messrs Pat and John Collins, provided a rousing start to a hectic day of pleasure-making. Nothing could give the lie more vividly to talk about “insurmountable national barriers” than the sight of an amusement attendant playfully ruffling the black hair of one of the “nippers” just as he would that of his own son. Indeed, these good-natured show folk so far caught the spirit of the occasion as to burble bits of Spanish picked up a few minutes beforehand. To say the boys were thrilled by the amusements is to make a gross understatement. Their chief comment seemed to be “Boom!” on the dodgems, and “Terrificol!” for nearly everything else. “Viva the management! Viva Yarmouth!” they shouted as they left for lunch.

In the afternoon, cries of “Viva!” again rang out at the conclusion of a visit to the Hippodrome Circus, which was given a national touch by Spanish community singing, “led from the ring by Paul Zaharoff with his accordeon”. Then it was on to tea on the Britannia pier with the Mayor and Lady Mayoress, accompanied by Miss Vulliamy and members of the staff “including Dr Seigo, in charge of the boys' education, and Señor Gómez who gave up his position as assistant chef at the famous Barcelona Restaurant in London in order to cook for his young compatriots”.

“Some of the people in England”, the Mayor said in his address, “have not really understood about these children. They have not realised how sad they must have felt at being compelled to leave their native land and parents and to come to a strange land in which they could not understand a word that was spoken. There has been a good deal of thoughtless and ill-informed criticism about this whole affair, and it is difficult to understand how people living in a country like ours in which civil war is unthinkable have not sufficient imagination to realise the conditions in which these children found themselves. Sometimes

it is said that charity begins at home”, he concluded, turning to the boys, “but it is noteworthy that the people who are helping you today are precisely those who always respond most readily to local appeals. Charity at home is indeed a cramped thing if it does not repose on a broad basis of humanity”.

The boys' appreciation of Yarmouth's hospitality was expressed by their 14-year-old “President”, Alberto Fernández Garbiscu, who approached the *Mercury* reporter after tea. “We have had a wonderful time”, he declared (in perfect English!), “and I like Yarmouth better than any English town I have seen. I should like to live here”.

Are there any survivors, I wonder, of those fifty-one boys who enjoyed “the freedom of the beach” on that memorable day by the seaside seventy-five years ago?

Eduardo Ramón and Miguel Angel Cubero Elduque

Nuestra madre fue una de las niñas evacuadas a Inglaterra en el *Habana* en 1937 y regresó a España en diciembre de 1939. De los más de dos años y medio que pasó en Inglaterra siempre guardó un muy grato recuerdo que quiso compartir con sus hijos. Ella había acudido a algunos aniversarios celebrados en España, el último en Bilbao en 1997. Después de su fallecimiento en el año 2004, hemos querido que sus recuerdos perduraran en nosotros. Así que asistimos después al 70º y 75º aniversario en Southampton, pero con una sensación diferente.

Quando asistes a los diferentes actos, los espectáculos de danza, etc. o si te presentan a “niños” de la misma colonia o a sus parientes, no es percibido de igual forma si vas en compañía de un “niño” que si lo haces “acompañando a su memoria”. Sin embargo, quedamos muy satisfechos con el homenaje de autoridades de ambos países, y en especial, con la entrega del legado de los archivos recopilados por la Asociación a la Universidad de Southampton. Esto, en especial, creo que fue para nosotros uno de los momentos mas emotivos de toda la celebración, habida cuenta del olvido que, sobre todo en España, ha existido sobre muchos temas relacionados con la guerra civil y cuya ocultación o desconocimiento causan pesar entre quienes los vivieron.

Y más en concreto, con el proyecto de historia oral, de los trabajos realizados por estudiantes y de la difusión que esta parte de historia va a tener en las escuelas se comprueba, no sin cierto asombro, el interés mostrado por el pueblo de un país diferente acerca de unos sucesos relativos a niños, para ellos extranjeros, pero que asumen como algo “propio” y que ellos integran también en la historia de su propia nación. Así, el Simposio sobre niños evacuados y cine ha supuesto la incorporación a los trabajos cinematográficos ya existentes, del proyecto *To Say Goodbye* y de películas como la de Carlos Iglesias y documentales como el de Luis Argeo y que contribuyen a extender la labor realizada por la Asociación sobre los Basque Children al conjunto de los casi cuarenta mil niños evacuados durante la guerra civil y que también forma parte de la misma historia. Resulta sorprendente para un español (residente en España) esa diferencia en el interés que los ciudadanos ponen en el conocimiento de su propia Historia. Parece que en el Reino Unido haya exquisito cuidado por las pequeñas historias, personales incluso, que forman parte de la historia local y que nutren también la Historia del propio país.

En la mesa redonda al final del simposio, se comentó sobre los silencios de algunos de los niños evacuados o de sus descendientes y que se muestra en la dificultad, reticencia u oposición a transmitir sus recuerdos. Algunos británicos advertían de que, en relación a la Segunda Guerra Mundial, también se dan esos silencios por lo que quizá no habría diferencia entre ambos países. A mi modo de ver, hay que hacer una clara distinción

en este caso, porque al silencio personal, siempre respetable, hay que añadir el silencio forzado impuesto por una dictadura de casi cuarenta años y otros treinta y cinco más de olvido. Esta "especialidad" española es la que puede explicar la diferencia en la asunción de la propia historia a que nos referíamos antes y que afecta a la forma de abordar el conjunto de muchos otros temas históricos.

En el Congreso Internacional Ideas en Armas sobre las dictaduras en el sur de Europa, celebrado en la Universidad de Zaragoza el pasado 1 de junio se incluyó una exposición sobre los niños vascos, con intervención de la profesora Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez de la Universidad de Southampton. Se nos preguntó sobre la elección por nuestra madre y por nosotros como descendientes entre el recuerdo o el silencio: respondimos haciendo alusión a la manipulación que el tema de los niños refugiados había sufrido durante los años de posguerra al presentarla como un "robo" a sus familias, etc. Aunque sólo fuera por evitar esa confusión, vale la pena contribuir a divulgar lo mucho o poco que cada uno conoce.

Maria Luisa Toole

It doesn't seem like 75 years since we came to England – I can still remember how different things like the double decker buses were to me and my brother, Alvaro Martinez. I was looking forward to this weekend because, every year, you don't see friends from one year to the next. Being 75 years since we came over I thought more people might be able to come.

There'd been a lot of hard work to organise the weekend and I appreciated that. On the Saturday I arrived with my family at the venue and all the helpers were really friendly. My children were taken by the replica identity badges we *niños* were given, I don't know what happened to mine. I looked at the photographs of all the colonies and the photographs of the Cambridge colony brought back lots of memories. People always said we were the lucky ones going there. We also went to the new exhibition in the library, which was very moving. Everyone seemed to enjoy the people that came to give talks and it was fabulous to see the dancers again. I saw them at the 70th anniversary event and remember talking to them and finding out that they came from near where I had lived. I always told my children how we used to sing and dance the *jota* in public to raise money for the colony.

I met a lot of new people including Cliff Kirkpatrick and his wife who have become friends, as well as seeing a lot of familiar faces. The sad thing was that my brother wasn't there but his wife, Joan, and two sons came down from Yeovil and it was lovely to have the family together. I was proud to have my children there with me and people kept saying how nice it was that they had come with me.

It was interesting to see the film set in Russia of the *niños* who were evacuated there. Their lives were very different to the lives we have led in England. The film *To Say Goodbye* was also introduced at the weekend and it'll be shown at the San Sebastian Film Festival. I am really looking forward to it and meeting up with the other 5 *niños* who are attending at the end of September. It is a very emotional year for us *niños vascos*.

It was nice to see everyone as time goes on. We have a lot to remember about the weekend. I had memories of the 70th anniversary but there was a lot more to this weekend with the meals and the talks stretching over 2 days. It was a tremendous effort by everybody and I would like to thank all those who organized the event for everything that they have done for us – we wouldn't have all the new memories we made without them.

Peter Wood

What a grand place Southampton University turned out to be on Saturday 12 May! The Reception area was teeming with people and the receptionists were calm and capable, handing out the printed bags to each of the group leaders. Each bag contained a book *Here, look after him*, put together by Spanish staff at Southampton University, a commemorative programme of the weekend's events and badges for each member of the party or a facsimile of the hexagonal disk with its unique number, worn by each of the *niños* who came to Britain on the *Habana*.

We were led by *txistularis*, the band from Spain, into the Nightingale Theatre and the proceedings started with a showing of a film of the *Habana* leaving Santurce which we had never seen before. Then we were introduced to the speakers and special guests, amongst whom were the Spanish Ambassador, the Mayors of Eastleigh and Southampton, film director Carlos Iglecias and many others. They gave speeches of welcome. Four *niños* were also asked to speak: Juanita Vaquer told of being sent to a convent in Manchester on arrival in England, where she spent nearly seven years as a domestic servant, never being allowed out of the confines. The memories brought tears to Juanita's eyes, as well as to those in the audience. Herminio Martínez gave a good account of life in Britain as a refugee, giving thanks to the British people who took the Spanish children to their hearts and looked after them in the various colonies scattered over the British isles.

The *niños* were called down to the front for a photo shoot and we found that they were more numerous than we had thought, including some from Spain and America who had flown in to take part in the anniversary celebrations. After a fine solo dance to pipe and drum (the *auresku*), we were again led back to the main venue by the *txistularis* to the restaurant where the tables were laid out ready for lunch. Finally seated, we were served up a wonderful three course lunch by very attentive waiters and waitresses (students we presumed). The seating plan had been chosen with great care. On our table we had four generations of family all because of one *niña* coming to Britain. Everyone enjoyed the camaraderie of being together and while we enjoyed our coffee, the *txistularis* sang us a haunting Basque song, a great pleasure to listen to.

Our thanks must go to the committee of the Basque Children of '37 Association and to everyone at Southampton University who made us feel so wanted.



Txistulari

The Family of Antonio Muñecas

On the morning of 12 May 2012 we all bundled into a minibus we had hired to transport our family of twelve down to Southampton and, fortified with tea and bacon sandwiches, we headed for the motor way. Our *ikurriña* was proudly displayed on the back of the minibus and with our Basque CD compilation blaring out "Desde Santurce a Bilbao" and other Basque songs, we were on our way!

On the journey down we spoke about *aita's* (father's) life and what it had been like to be a *niño*. He spoke of the crossing in the *Habana*, he remembered his number tag was 539 and his brother's was 540. He spoke of his first impression of the camp at North Stoneham and the other colonies he stayed at in Wakefield, Rowley Lodge, Plymouth, Margate, Worksop, Woodside Park and Holland Park. It was emotional for us to try and picture this gentleman of 86 as a 10 year old boy growing up without his family in a foreign land.

On arrival at Southampton, we were delighted with the wonderful display of pictures and write ups about the colonies the *niños* had stayed at and the bag of goodies we all received. *Aita* was chuffed with the badge No 539 he was given to wear, a small reminder of what he had worn 75 years before. The *txistularis* lead us to the Nightingale Lecture Theatre where the event officially began.

The day was beautifully planned, the speeches by the *niños* were very moving, we greeted old friends and listened to stories other *niños* wanted to share. The memories of the *niños* who found refuge in Britain belong to *aita* and his friends, but this day allowed family members to share and remember with them the journey they took.

We met some amazing people, we had a lovely lunch with a few glasses of wine, *na-mara* performed some very poignant

songs especially the one "Only for Three Months" and *Kezka Dantza Taldea's* dancing and singing was wonderful.

For our family this trip to Southampton was something we felt we had to do for *aita*, to remember his story. This January we sadly lost our *amatxo* (mother), known to her friends as Charo, and even though *aita* was the *niño* it was *amatxo*, who having lived in Sestao all her life and only coming to England when she was 29, gave us our love of all things Basque. Charo loved to sing and dance *jotas* and even though she was unable to join us she was there very much in spirit especially when we sang "Soy De Santurce".

It just remains to say *Agur* and to thank all those who helped make this day so special.

Maria Juisis

We all love our parents and grandparents. The Anniversary event brought home to us that it is not until we become older that we realise the trauma that the *niños* went through. The work of the Basque Children Association is very important. What has been achieved with very little funding is a miracle, There are so few of the *niños* left, the Association is helping keep their memory alive. Many plaques have been put up in the houses where the *niños* stayed. Documentary films have been made and a book of the *niños'* reminiscences published; all this is due to the Association.

I believe that as a daughter of one of the *niñas* it is important to honour my mother and not let the world forget that at the age of 11 she was sent from her home to a foreign country. She never saw her father alive again and didn't see her mother for another twelve years.

Thank God we live in better times.



Niños on the platform

“When History Meets Memory and the Arts: the Story of the Spanish Civil War in Film”

Padmini Broomfield

This symposium, organised by the University of Southampton, on the second day of the 75th anniversary commemoration events, brought together a group of Spanish, Basque and British film-makers who shared their motivations, inspirations and interpretations in capturing the story of the Spanish Civil War evacuee children through the medium of film. Accompanied by clips from their films, their presentations highlighted the challenges and their own intense emotional investment in the process.

Established and award-winning film-makers were joined by a group of aspiring young film students to discuss the very different approaches, formats and backdrops of their individual films, which ranged from Luis Argeo's very personal and reflective treatment of the story of one Asturian child evacuated to the USA (*In Corsino* by Cole Kivlin), to Carlos Iglesias' epic feature, *Ispansi* (Spaniards), on the experiences of children evacuated to the former USSR. Steve Bowles presented an insightful round-up of how the story of the Basque Children evacuated to the UK has been told over the past 75 years – from early newsreel footage to his own documentary *The Guernica Children*. The most recent treatment of the story – an innovative animation documentary, *To Say Goodbye*, by Izaskun Arandia and Matt Richards – uses the powerful medium of the original voices of the Basque Children recorded during the University of Southampton's project, *Los Niños: Child exiles of the Spanish Civil War*.

Often the film-makers developed close relationships with the evacuee children whose lives they were portraying in film. What was particularly interesting was how Izaskun and Luis had also successfully engaged with members of the second and third generation in their films or through social media such as Facebook and Skype.

This active involvement of the protagonists of the films was a special feature of the symposium too; the *niños* and their families present took to the floor to add personal stories and reflections, and to applaud the efforts to preserve and disseminate their stories through creative media. The symposium offered further opportunity for the descendants to develop these newly-formed friendships and to get more involved in actively preserving and sharing this aspect of their family history.

For the others in the audience, comprising of students and academics, film-buffs and interested individuals, this was a unique opportunity to meet and hear first-hand from those who had experienced these extraordinary events. The symposium was a fitting conclusion to the weekend's 75th anniversary commemoration events.

Steve Bowles

After a highly emotional first day celebrating the 75th anniversary of the arrival of the *niños*, the second day was intended as a more reflective analysis of how the story of the children has been told over the years. Dr. Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez from the University of Southampton's Spanish department gathered together a number of individuals who have contributed to the telling of that story through the medium of film.

The session kicked off with a talk by Spanish Director Carlos Iglesias whose film *Ispansi* had been screened the previous evening. *Ispansi* is a fiction-based-on-fact cinema film which tells the story of those that fled to the Soviet Union during the Spanish Civil War. The film traces the story of the key protagonists from Civil War to World War to Cold War. Carlos – who also stars in the film – explained his fascination with a story which has been largely forgotten by the world. A lively discussion ensued about how true-to-life the film was, and how realistic the inevitable love story at the heart of the film was, where two individuals from such different backgrounds are thrown together.

I then outlined the development of my own documentary film project – *The Guernica Children* – originally produced for the BBC and then re-cut into a feature-length version for the 70th anniversary commemoration. As well as its TV screening in the UK, the film has been widely shown in Spain and the Basque country.

That was followed by an interesting presentation by a number of University of Southampton Film Studies students who had prepared trailers for speculative film projects on the story of the Basque children. It was refreshing to have a more youthful view on the way that the story can be told.

The final session before lunch involved an excerpt from the film *Corsino*, by Cole Kivlin and talk by Spanish director Luis Argeo. The film tells the remarkable story of Corsino who left Spain, travelled to France and then eventually came to settle in Texas in the USA. Remarkably, it was only in his later life that Corsino decided to re-discover his roots.

After lunch we were treated to some excerpts from the documentary film project *To Say Goodbye*, directed and produced by Matt Richards and Izaskun Arandia. The film uses voice recordings collected during the Heritage Lottery Funded project run by Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez at the University combined with stunning animations. At the time of the conference the film was still “in progress”, but I can report that it has been completed and premiered at the San Sebastian Film Festival to critical acclaim.

The round table discussion focussed on the value of these different interpretations of the story. At the heart of the discussion was the fact that the hard graft of gathering the story had been done by Adrian Bell's book *Only for Three Months*, and, in the wake of its publication, by the Basque Children of '37 Association.

For the future, the priority must be to preserve that story. The transfer of the archives from the Association to the University of Southampton's Hartley Library archives represents a last critical stage in preserving that important story for future generations.

See: <http://60.southampton.ac.uk/preserving-the-stories-of-basque-refugees/42>

Other Anniversary Events

Day School with Oxford University

The Association is privileged to have the influential and sympathetic support of Dr Tom Buchanan, Director of the Oxford University Department of Continuing Education. Several members attended the latest day school at OUDCE in April where the subject was "The Basque Refugee Children in Britain 1937 to 1939".

Tom Buchanan set the scene for the momentous voyage of the *Habana* and the resistance of the UK government to the humanitarian project. He explained how the government eventually softened their hard line as a result of public opinion following the bombing of Gernika in April 1937, the reporting of the atrocity by George Steer of *The Times*, and the persistence of Labour MP Leah Manning.

Once in the UK the *niños* suffered frequent changes of fortune. Some colonies were well run with compassionate staff, others were cruel and neglectful. In this regard I recommend Hywel Davies' excellent book *Fleeing Franco* (reviewed in these pages last year). There was constant sniping by the right wing media and the Catholic Church. Together they sought every opportunity to undermine the good work of the volunteers from the Basque Children's Committees and called for the immediate repatriation of the children to an extremely uncertain and dangerous future back in Spain.

Nick Rankin spoke eloquently of the political struggle in the Basque region in the immediate run up to the evacuation. He spoke of the role of President Aguirre and of the President's close relationship with Steer. Nick explained the complexities of the defence of Bilbao and the several resistance groups involved in the famous *Cinturón de Hierro* – the Ring of Iron. The Nationalists made considerable gains through the supply of information by collaborators and infiltrators.

Herminio Martinez shared his lecture slot with Natalia Benjamin, the title of her intervention being "Researching the Basque children". She explained to the audience the considerable body of research that she and the Association had done over the nearly ten years since its formation. She outlined the seven blue plaques that have been installed, the growing archive of testimony and photographs of the *niños* and the colonies, the collection of testimonies in her book *Recuerdos* and the forthcoming *Memorias*, and the travelling exhibition, now digitised, that has toured many towns and cities in the UK. She concluded by giving a list of areas which still had to be studied and researched.

Herminio, as ever, pulled no punches. His gratitude to those in this country who cared for him and his brother never clouds his judgement of those who stood in the way of humanitarian action. Such people, here and in Nationalist Spain only made the trauma of separation from family and familiar surroundings all the harder to come to terms with. The emotional force of Herminio's testimony is as raw today as it would have been real 75 years ago.

For those of us at the day school who are familiar with the history of the Basque refugee story, much of the content of the earlier presentations would not have been new. The final talk by Tony Kushner was perhaps the most revealing. It placed the UK government's hostility to the Basque children in the context of a long held xenophobic strand of UK opinion going back to the 1850s. In 1905 the Aliens Act was introduced allowing a degree of protection for those seeking asylum from hostile overseas regimes but within a short time there was mounting opposition to even these timid reforms. By the 1930s the UK was no longer

a haven for persecuted minorities. The safe evacuation of 4,000 Basque children was therefore a very significant victory for humanitarian action and was followed just a year or two later by the much larger evacuation from Eastern Europe of Jewish children under the "Kindertransport" project.

Report by by Colin Carritt

Anniversary Lecture given by Dr Richard Baxell

The Association was privileged to have Dr Richard Baxell deliver the fourth annual lecture in London on the 20 October, under the title "Defeat and Exile: the British volunteers and the Basque children 1937 - 1945." It is becoming increasingly difficult to present a lecture about the Basque children from a new perspective, containing the right balance of general information and detail, to an audience of varying degrees of knowledge. Dr Baxell succeeded admirably in doing this and treated everyone present to an informative and stimulating talk.

On his own admission, Richard's expertise and specialised area of research is the British battalion of the XV International Brigade and he has written several highly acclaimed books and articles on the subject. His latest book, *Unlikely Warriors*, which was published in September, is an outstandingly good oral history of the British volunteers from their struggle against the Blackshirts to the fall of the Nazis' Third Reich in 1945.

Not surprisingly, Richard's approach to the subject matter of the lecture was to focus on two groups who left Spain for England on specific dates during the Civil War: the close to 300 surviving members of the British battalion who arrived at Victoria station on the evening of the 7 December 1938 and the much larger group of around 4,000 Spanish children and accompanying adult helpers who had left Santurce on the *SS Habana* which arrived at Southampton during the morning of the 23 May 1937 and disembarked its passengers. This was certainly a new angle and it was particularly interesting to learn of the links between the two groups – perhaps far more prolific than is generally realised – and of the experiences of a number of the individuals within each group after the civil war in Spain had ended and during the Second World War that followed.

Personally, I got a lot from the talk; the account of the older Basque boys who subsequently served in the British armed forces during the Second World War was especially fascinating. Sadly three of them were to lose their lives on active service.

A lively Q & A session took place at the end of the lecture with questions and comments from a greater number of people in the audience than I remember from any of the previous annual lectures.

Richard's talk was well-received and was a fitting tribute on the 75th anniversary year of the arrival of the Basque children refugees in this country. It was also the 75th anniversary of the arrival in Spain of many of the 2,600 British volunteers, male and female, combatants and non-combatants, from all walks of life, and of the 530 or so members of the British battalion who were killed serving in Spain.

Report by Cliff Kirkpatrick

New Documentary: Wales and the Basque Refugees – the children's stories

A new TV programme about the experiences of Basque refugee children in Wales was screened by BBC Wales on 3 December at 22.35. The Basque Children of '37 Association has been closely involved with finding suitable archival material for the documentary.

Presented by Eddie Butler, the programme focuses on the colonies at Caerleon, Swansea, Brechfa and Old Colwyn, and interviews Josefina Savery, who was 14 when she arrived at Caerleon, her brother Gerardo, who was seven, and José Armolea, who was 11 when he was sent to Brechfa. All three lost a parent in the Civil War.

The programme traces the sympathy of the Welsh people for the Basques, and the similarities between the two countries. Like the Republicans, Welsh miners considered they were fighting Fascism in the form of high unemployment, low wages and benefit cuts in the Welsh valleys. Wales supplied more volunteers for the International Brigades than any other part of Britain, and 33 gave their lives.

The programme also interviews Hywel Davies, author of *Fleeing Franco*, a book about the Welsh contingent of refugees, Aberavon MP and historian Hywel Francis, author of *Miners Against Fascism*, Alun Emlyn Jones, whose father John was instrumental in setting up Cambria House at Caerleon, and the family of George Phillips, a coach driver who used to take a dozen Cambria House children home for tea with his Mum and Dad on Sundays. There is also a contribution from the late Rosa Steel, nee Noriega, who was interviewed several years ago about her experiences with the children at Sketty Park House.

Producer and Director: Richard Edwards

Associate Producer: Valerie Brown

film clip: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p012czp8

BBC 4 RADIO PROGRAMME Habana: Children of the Spanish Civil War

Rob Garcia is an Englishman who trained in classical guitar and, with singer songwriter Paul MacNamara, is part of folk duo namara (www.na-mara.com). So what does Rob Garcia have to do with BC'37A UK? Of course, the name gives it away. Rob's father Fausto was one of the 4,000 children who left Bilbao on the *Habana* on 21 May 1937. Rob tells his story through songs and interviews on a memorable BBC radio 4 programme that went out on 18 June. He is joined on the broadcast by BC'37A UK Chairman, Manuel Moreno, Carmen Coupland, Paco Robles, Josefina Stubbs and the indefatigable Herminio Martinez.

Some, like Manuel, Rob and Josephina are "second generation refugees", born and bred in the UK. Others like Paco and Herminio are living testimony of both the trauma and the resilience of the Basque children. Of those born to Spanish refugees, their upbringing was often very different. In Manuel's case, his parents insisted on Spanish being spoken in the family home and the children were encouraged to imbibe the culture of their roots. By contrast, Carmen's mother did not want to recall the horrors of the Basque bombardment and there was little discussion about their Spanish culture until much later in life.

The programme skilfully explored the psychological effect of the children who arrived in Southampton from that epic voyage

across the Bay of Biscay, all of them expecting only to be here for about three months. 250 of them remained for the rest of their lives and had to make the transition from temporary exile to permanent citizenship. It cannot have been easy knowing that their parents and loved ones remained in Spain under the most repressive police state imaginable.

Some, like Pilar Cortez, the childhood sweetheart of a local north London boy who used to visit her at the Woodberry colony, did set out to return home but she never arrived and it is believed she died of starvation in a French transit camp. But of those who stayed and established Britain as their home, many married locally and settled down to have families here – these are the "second generation refugees". Many have valued their Spanish cultural roots but those roots may no longer match the 21st century Spanish culture. Manuel identifies with the flood of present day child refugees whether in the Middle East, the Balkans or elsewhere whose futures are often conflicted by their by their cultural heritage and the march of history. Herminio, one of the original child refugees, feels that his heart remains with the optimism and idealism of the second republic of the 1930s. All the more reason to learn from our history and all the more reason to protect the value and integrity of historic memory.

Report by by Colin Carritt

To download the programme, go to www.na-mara.com website, select a tab called MP3 from the tabs along the top, select and open link called BBC Radio 4 programme about the *Habana*.

Premier of animated documentary film

To Say Goodbye is the title of a new documentary film produced by filmmakers Matt Richards and his wife Izasakun Arcandia. It was first presented at the Symposium on 13 May and due to be premiered at the San Sebastian International Film Festival in September.

The film tells the story of the Basque children evacuated to Britain in 1937 who were told they would only be away for three months. 250 of them never went back to live in Spain and 75 years later, some are still here, forever separated from their parents and homeland, their families torn apart and their childhood destroyed by a brutal and bloody conflict. *To Say Goodbye* is a film about the loss of childhood, the stripping away of identity and the hope of reconciliation, all set against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War.

Using the voices of 14 Basque "children" gleaned from recordings for the new book of oral testimonies collected by Southampton University researchers, this tragic episode in history is revealed in an animated documentary that seeks to appeal to all ages.

Six of the *niños* whose voices were used were invited to San Sebastián for the duration of the festival. After the first screening of the film, they were invited to a reception in the Town Hall. Their host, Mayor Juan Karlos Izaguirre welcomed them with these words: "Your lives are our legacy, you are now part of the collective history of this town and witnesses of something that some people wanted to forget about. You have suffered doubly: first because of the war and Franco's subsequent repression, second because you never had the opportunity to return to your homes."

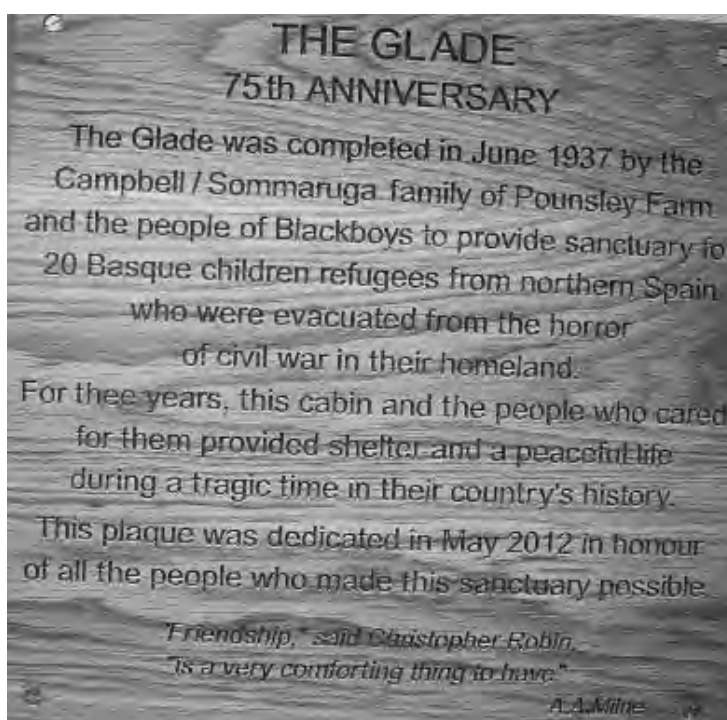
Plaque unveiled at Blackboys

On 16 May 2012, a wooden plaque was unveiled at the Glade, Blackboys, near Uckfield in East Sussex. Blackboys was one of the hundred or so colonies in Britain that housed the Basque children refugees in 1937 and the only one to have been specially built to accommodate them. It was built by the Campbell-Sommaruga family who lived at nearby Pounsley Farm. It is now used as a youth hostel.

The erection of the plaque was organised by Mike Anderson of the IBMT who lives locally and who, realising that two former Basque "children" residents of Blackboys would be in Britain to attend the 75th Anniversary commemorative event at Southampton University in May, thought it appropriate to take advantage of their visit to Britain (their first since leaving Blackboys in the late 1930s) to set up a plaque as he wanted visitors to the youth hostel and the local people "to know about this important piece of history".

Miren and Moisés Alonso had flown in from Michigan the previous week. They first met as children of 10 and 11 when they were both sent to Blackboys. After the war, Miren was repatriated, but Moisés could not go back as his mother had died, and when Blackboys closed he was sent to a Barnardo's home. He was unhappy there and ran away, ending up living on the streets of London. After meeting some Spanish fishermen, he became a seaman and ended up in New York. He started writing to Miren and the couple fell in love. He fetched her from Spain and they married and raised a family in America. They brought their two daughters and a granddaughter to Great Britain for the anniversary events.

Miren unveiled the simple wooden plaque and said of Blackboys: "I felt it was such a happy place. Returning is like a dream come true."



The wooden plaque at the Blackboys colony. 'The Glade' is a modern name; during the time it was a colony it was always called simply 'Blackboys'.



The Glade, Blackboys



Moisés Moragrega Alonso (right) and his wife Miren



The entrance area: *niños* everywhere




Keska Dantza Taldea



na-mara

University of Southampton

'Here, look after him':
los niños,
refugee children
from the
Spanish Civil War



Special Collections Gallery,
Level 4, Hartley Library,
University of Southampton

Open weekdays, 10 am to 4 pm,
8th May to 22nd June &
16th July to 27th July 2012

LOTTERY FUNDED



Vicente Romero Olavarria (left), a *niño* at Theydon Bois, and Len Palmer who used to visit the colony when he was 15.

Book Review

Memorias: the Basque children remember and are remembered, edited by Natalia Benjamin

Richard Baxell



Memorias:

The Basque children remember and are remembered
Los niños vascos recuerdan y son recordados

Edited by Natalia Benjamin
Foreword by Nigel Dennis

Memorias: the Basque children remember and are remembered is the second bilingual volume of reminiscences edited by Natalia Benjamin. It has been released to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the arrival in Britain of the nearly 4,000 Basque children in May 1937. Like its predecessor, *Recuerdos: Basque children refugees in Great Britain*, published five years earlier, the accounts in *Memorias* poignantly describe the experiences of the children following their evacuation on board the *Habana*, a month after the infamous destruction of the Basque market town of Guernica by the aircraft of General Franco's Italian and German allies. So dire was the situation facing the Spanish Republic that thousands of desperate parents had chosen to accept an offer by the Basque authorities to send their children overseas to safety. While the distraught parents believed – and reassured their tearful children – that it would only be for three months, the reminiscences recount in moving detail the impact on the children and families when the stay became much longer. Some children, in fact, stayed and made their homes and lives in Britain. That the children, taken far away from home and family, and whose memory of their own country was tarnished by the appalling carnage many of them had witnessed, managed to establish such strong bonds with both the people who helped them and the country that hosted them, speaks volumes of the kindness that many experienced.

By the time Natalia edited the recollections that appeared in *Memorias*, most of the *niños* were in the eighties and nineties, so she has included both newspaper reports and a number of moving testimonies by family members and individuals who became involved with the children in the various homes, called “colonies”, that were provided across Britain to accommodate the children following their dispersal from the emergency camp at Stoneham. These latter recollections are a particularly welcome addition, for they are often just as poignant as those

written by the children themselves and show how the affection could go both ways. “Pili and Espe, I am grateful to you for widening my horizons”, wrote one childhood friend of two of the children. To repeat the words of Tom Buchanan in his forward to *Recuerdos*, Natalia's collections of memoirs are undoubtedly ‘a magnificent monument to the children's remarkable journey and the warmth of the reception they received from many ordinary citizens.’

(Copies of *Memorias* can be obtained from Natalia: tel. 01865 459744 or email. natalia@basquechildren.org)



José Armolea, Venancio Zornoza, Tere Novatorska



Niños at the screening of *To Say Goodbye*

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

When history meets
memory and the arts:
The story of Spanish Civil War
evacuee children in film

Nightingale Building, Building 67

12 May 2012 | 6.30pm | Screening of *Ispansi* followed by Q&A session with director Carlos Iglesias

13 May 2012 | 9.30-4.00 | Film trailers, talks and presentations by students and directors Steve Bowles, Luis Argeo, Izaskún Arandia and Matt Richards

As part of the 75th anniversary commemoration of the Basque Children's arrival in Southampton (1937-2012), Modern Languages and the Special Collections of the Hartley Library have organised a symposium focused on the interplay between history and memory as it is projected in film.

Come and join film directors, students and the protagonists of this evacuation story and contribute with your recollections and views to this exciting encounter that will provide a unique insight into key events that have marked a shared chapter in the history of Southampton, the Basque Country, Britain, Spain and beyond.

Lunch will be available. For further details, a programme and to register, please contact:
Alicia Pozo-Gutiérrez | apg@soton.ac.uk or Irina Nelson | Irina.Nelson@soton.ac.uk



Anniversary lunch



Remembering the days in the colonies: viewing the BC'37A boards



The shop



Led by the dantzaris to Garden Court



One of the BC'37A exhibition boards



Bautista López and his daughter Amaya with txistulari and dantzaris