



Newsletter

Basque Children of '37 Association: UK

www.spanishrefugees-basquechildren.org

No.3

March 2005

News

AGM and members' lunch

The Association held its second Annual General Meeting and members' lunch on 5 February 2005 in London, at the William IV on the Harrow Road. This year, the AGM was held in a separate room, and this was a great improvement on last year.

There was a long report by the Secretary, which was evidence of the manifold activities and events that the Association had been involved with during the past year. Details of these will be found elsewhere in the Newsletter. She closed her report by countering the somewhat pessimistic attitude adopted by certain members who say that all this comes too late, by the remark that it is always better late than never and if the work of the Association succeeds in bringing *niños* together and providing helpful information to future generations, then it will surely be fulfilling its mission and is a thoroughly worthwhile undertaking.

The AGM was followed by the lunch, which was taken at a leisurely pace, enlivened by renderings of Basque songs sung by the Martínez brothers! It is a pity that more members do not come to the AGM and lunch, as, apart from being a convivial occasion, it gives them the opportunity to participate in the Association by voicing their interests and concerns.

Blue plaque for Caerleon

by Josefina Savery

Sunday 17 October 2004 was a beautiful autumn day in South Wales and the sun shone brightly on Pendragon House, Caerleon, on the gathering of *niños vascos*, their supporters and well-wishers. Some *niños* had stayed and grown up in South Wales, married and brought their own families. They had come together to celebrate Caerleon's welcome to the Basque children in 1937 and to unveil a plaque in commemoration of their stay.

Caerleon was a little bit of heaven after the horrors of the Civil War in Spain. The original house where they had been looked after for



Niños outside Pendragon House, Caerleon, after the unveiling of the blue plaque.

the first two years, Cambria House, had been demolished, and the remaining children were either adopted or moved to 18 Cross Street in November 1939.

The plaque was commissioned by the Basque Children of '37 Association: UK. It acknowledges the help and care of local organisations and volunteers, providing a tangible memorial of a historic event and of the selfless assistance given by these local people. The Caerleon Civic Society and the Caerleon Neighbourhood Fund contributed generously to the cost, as did the publishers Warren and Pell.

Well over 100 people were present, including grandchildren of the *niños* as well as local representatives of the Caerleon Civic Society, Liz Luck and Norman Stevens, the Caerleon History Society, Newport Deputy Mayor Councillor Alan Morris, the former Chairman of Gwent County Council, Jim Kirkwood, Miss Rosemary Butler, Brenda and Alan Horton, the present owners of Pendragon House, Alan Warren, publisher, whose idea it had been to erect a blue plaque in Caerleon, and members of the International Brigade Memorial Trust and the Basque Children of '37 Association: UK.

In his opening speech, the Deputy Mayor said: "The bravery of the parents who had to do what no parent should be asked to do, which is to hand over their children to the care of others, was matched during the years of the Spanish Civil War only by the compassion of Caerleon."

The plaque was unveiled by Councillor Gail Giles, who as a mature student at UWCN had brought to light in her dissertation the history of the Basque children in Caerleon. In her excellent speech, she gave a short history of the Basque children in Caerleon and linked it to the present-day sufferings of children around the world as a result of war and





Pictured on our Christmas card: from left to right Genoveva Gallego, Ma Teresa Cisneros and Ma Luisa Gallego.

From the Secretary

The Association continues to go from strength to strength. Messages are received on a daily basis from relatives of the *niños*, historians, teachers, other interested parties, and we are asked for all sorts of information. This interest has been fuelled by our website and by the various public occasions, such as the unveiling of the blue plaque at Caerleon and the exhibitions we have held at Southampton.

This year, we sent a Christmas card to all our members depicting three little girls in the Cambridge colony, as well as a card listing forthcoming events organised by the Association for the next six months. The programme of activities is varied and there is something on offer each month. In March Paul Preston is giving the annual lecture for the IBMT (International Brigade Memorial Trust) which members of our Association are invited to attend; in April our President has organised a wine-tasting event; in May a blue plaque is being unveiled in Cambridge and there is a showing of Steve Bowles' film "La Generación del Guernica" at the Imperial War Museum and in June Adrian Bell is giving a talk to the Association. Rich pickings indeed!

This, our third Newsletter, contains more material written by the members, which is gratifying. However, we would like to see even more participation. Anything will be considered, from a review to an anecdote of life in the colonies. It would also be worthwhile to get a lively discussion going through a correspondence page. I am sure that there are issues which are of interest to all that could be aired, so do get writing.

We are very aware that the year 2007 representing the 70th anniversary of the *niños'* arrival in Great Britain is on the horizon. We wish to commemorate this in an appropriate way, and have been thinking about ways in which we as an Association can mark this event. If you

have any ideas, please do let us know.

If the final paragraph of my last report spoke of my excitement at the discovery of new material, photographs, drawings, films, relating to the *niños*, this time, when I look back on the last six months, my excitement comes from the discovery of new *niños* who had lost contact with their fellow evacuees through the years. The blue plaque ceremony at Caerleon uncovered four *niñas*; the son of an 88-year-old Basque living in deepest Wales rang me to say that his father thought he was the only Basque living in the UK and just recently the son of a *niña* who had been in Caerleon but who now lives in Spain rang me. The three other discoveries centre, coincidentally, around the Langham colony. Through the IBMT ceremony in Cardiff and the one at Caerleon, there emerged a *niña* who had been an active member of the dance troupe at Langham; a *niña* from Langham, whose son had stumbled on our website, rang me from France. She had completely lost touch with all aspects of her life in England, and needed to come to terms with her past. The final discovery was sad – I was informed about the death of a *niña*, who had had no contact with any of the Basques since she had been "adopted". It transpired that she had been the youngest child at Langham, and the one appearing on the stamp that the colony produced. All these people, or their relatives, wanted to know more about their past and they asked for information. I was glad to be able to send them material from our archives.

It is gratifying to be involved in such a worthwhile cause. What has emerged very clearly is that there is a growing public awareness of the *niños'* story and that the first generation are really taking an interest in their parents' experiences. *iAgur!*

Natalia Benjamin

Natalia Benjamin

dictatorship, asking at the end for a minute's silence.

After the ceremony, there were refreshments at the Town Hall provided by the Caerleon Civic Society, which gave an opportunity for all those present, some of whom had not seen each other for decades, to get together. There was also an exhibition on display boards of photographs and newspaper cuttings about the *niños'* arrival in North Stoneham Camp and their stay in Caerleon.

Altogether, it was a truly memorable day! *Josefina Savery (Alvarez)* was one of the *niñas* in Caerleon. She studied at Birmingham University, got married and now lives in a town not far from Caerleon.

El Exilio de los Niños

This exhibition has been touring Spain for over a year now, having been to Bilbao, Barcelona, Salamanca, Seville, Badajoz, Valencia and Gijón. It is currently in La Coruña until 27 February, then it moves to Zaragoza from 7 March to 15 May. It is due to end in Madrid, from 23 May until 15 June, but the organisers hope to get the last phase extended.

Oxford day school

by Colin Carritt

Seven members of the Association attended a day school in Oxford at the end of October entitled "The Spanish Civil War: Atrocities and Propaganda". It was a stimulating day and not uncontroversial, particularly for those so closely related to the horrific events of 1936 and afterwards.

Overwhelmingly, the sympathies of the lecturers and the audience were with the Republican cause and the victims of fascism, but there was heated debate on the degree to which the Republicans exaggerated and manipulated the casualties in Madrid for their own propaganda aims. Many in the audience felt that the historian's focus on absolute objectivity took little account of the emotional realities of life in Madrid and elsewhere during the war. In particular our President, Manuel Moreno, spoke eloquently in defence of the posters and publicity put out by the government to counter the fascist bombing campaign targeted at civilians.

The second lecture produced chilling statistics on the level of Francoist repression in the period from 1936 to 1945. During that reign of terror, Franco executed somewhere between 108,000 and 140,000 citizens, including over 12,000 in Granada. Many of these deaths specifically targeted Freemasons and Communists. Under the Law of Political Responsibilities (February 1939) anyone not actively supporting the Nationalist cause