



Friends reunited at the anniversary lunch in May.

“Government, Politics and Humanitarianism” in which, though he is an objective and analytical historian, there were more than a few glimpses of his partisan sympathies towards the Republic and against the aggressive forces of Franco and his sponsors in Germany and Italy. He was particularly forthright about the shamefully inadequate response of the British Tory government to the catastrophic events at Durango, Guernica, and later Bilbao.

The second session, under the title “Bombing Children”, was by Valentine Cunningham, Professor of English at Oxford University, who was scathing in his contempt for the murderous tactics of Franco’s aerial bombardment of the Basque region. He went on to refer to the mountain of poetry, literature and art concerning events in the region, the most famous being the dramatic representation of the destruction of Guernica by Picasso.

Next it was the turn of two witnesses to the evacuation from Bilbao. First to speak was Helvecia Hildago, who was 14 years old when she set sail on the *Habana* with her two younger siblings bound for Southampton. Her father had died four years before in 1933 but the family were well known as committed socialists and Helvecia’s mother feared for the children’s safety if the Basque region was overrun by the fascists. Although Helvecia understood the necessity of evacuation, her younger brother and sister were desperately homesick and deeply traumatised by the events. All three were transferred to the colony in Carshalton where they slowly adapted to life in Britain.

Eventually, the children were adopted by the Cadbury family and provided with a good standard of living and education. Yet Helvecia said she had never really recovered from the enforced separation from her mother for those eleven crucial years of her life. By the time she was reunited with her mother in 1948, she was a mother in her own right.

The second witness was Herminio Martínez, who was just seven years old when he arrived in Southampton with his brother, Victor. His parents had been poor subsistence farmers herding sheep between Castile and Extremadura and they had arrived in Bilbao seeking work in the iron ore mines.

Both boys were sent to the Swansea colony and then to Tyneside. The local press was hostile and the colony was run on a very strict regime.

But then they were moved to Brampton near Carlisle where he came under the influence of Lady Roberts, the wife of MP Wilfrid Roberts – “a lovely buxom woman with a warm and generous heart”. In December 1939 he was due to be repatriated until it was discovered that his mother had been forced to request his return under duress by the local Nationalist officials aided and abetted by a priest threatening remaining family members with imprisonment.

Finally, Herminio was taken under the wing of a Methodist family in Leicester who were loving and kind.

The last speaker was Adrian Bell who spoke about the “Experience of the Basque Children in Britain”, explaining that the children’s experiences were very varied. There were some 70 colonies. Some were model establishments, well run, generous with their affections, and careful to retain the children’s Basque identity. Others were spartan and either lacking any discipline or harsh and inhospitable.

## Talks given...

● On 15 May, Herminio Martínez gave a talk about the Basque children at the re-opening of the Blackboys Youth Hostel in Sussex. Built in 1937 by Ettore and Antoinette Sommaruga of Poundsley Manor with the help of local people, the hostel catered for twenty-eight children. When the children left,

the hostel continued to cater for travellers, and was finally auctioned in September 2006. It was bought by Sam Type and Nick Sharples from Brighton, who have renovated the dilapidated building and re-opened it to the public.

● On 21 May at Avenue Campus, University of Southampton, distinguished film maker and member of the Association, Steve Bowles, delivered the annual Pérez de Ayala Lecture, established with the generous support of the Cultural Office of the Spanish Embassy. His subject was “The Guernica Children in Britain: a case of humanitarian need versus perceived political expediency.”

● On 5 September, Natalia Benjamin gave a paper on “The Basque Children in Great Britain” at the annual conference of the Association of Iberian and Portuguese Studies held at Oxford Brookes University.

## Anniversary lunch

The annual lunch of the *niños* was organised by Helvecia Hidalgo, helped by Herminio Martínez. This year it was held on 20 May in a restaurant in Bayswater, London, La Maja. About sixty guests came and a good time was had by all.

## Research: Hutton Hall

Peter O’Brien, self-styled “opsimath”, former Head of Department at a Sixth Form College and teacher of French and Spanish, is doing research into the Hutton Hall colony, near Guisborough, which was run by Ruth Pennyman. He says the Basque children were fortunate to land up in a well-run colony, and continues: “It seems to me that for a couple of years in the late 30s there was a movement which generated countless examples of idealism being translated into reality through genuine compassion, endless resourcefulness and sheer doggedness. Hutton Hall was one of these”.