

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

"Guernica" by Dave Boling (Picador, 2009)

Reviewed by Steve Bowles

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reviewed by Pilar P Soliño

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

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

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



All about my mother

by Gerald Hoare

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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