

Restoring Arturo Barea's Headstone

by Adrian Bell

On the morning of 4 December 20 or so people assembled in the churchyard of All Saints in the Oxfordshire village of Faringdon. All were admirers of the Spanish writer Arturo Barea who died after 18 years of exile in England, and in the tradition of visiting the grave of relatives on All Saints' Day they gathered around the headstone that commemorates his life and work.

This simple, granite headstone had been placed in the churchyard by Olive Renier – a friend of Arturo and his Austrian wife since the darkest days of WWII when they found themselves working together for the BBC's radio monitoring service. She arranged for it to be located next to the graves of Ilsa's parents who had accompanied their daughter and her Spanish husband into exile.

Arturo Barea is best known for his magnificent trilogy of autobiographical novels that go under the collective title of "The Forging of a Rebel", all written in England in the first years of his exile, and first published in English, translated by Ilsa (it was not published in Spain until three years after Franco's death). He also had a coincidental relationship with the Basque children: during the last ten years of his life he rented a cottage on the estate of Lord Faringdon, just half a mile down the road from another estate cottage which the English aristocrat with Spanish Republican sympathies and who had worked in a field hospital on the Aragón front, had made available as a home for Poppy Vulliamy's colony of Basque boys.

Readers of the Newsletter may recall that when Natalia and I made a visit

there some years ago (Newsletter No. 6) we had some difficulty locating the headstone, not least because the vicar was quite unaware that such an internationally distinguished Spanish writer was remembered in his little churchyard in the depths of Oxfordshire. Another admirer who encountered similar problems was William Chislett, an English journalist living in Madrid. Only at the fourth attempt, and only after being given directions from Natalia, was he able to locate it last year. His pleasure was mixed with some sadness: the years had taken their inevitable toll and the headstone was in a somewhat dilapidated state. It was, he thought, as if Barea had been doubly forgotten.

On his return to Spain he determined to have the headstone restored. He enlisted the support of his friend and a fellow admirer of Barea, the contemporary novelist Antonio Muñoz Molina. They both wrote articles in (respectively) *El Imparcial* and *El País*, and then came up with the idea of inviting a number of Spanish and British writers and historians to contribute to the cost of having the headstone refurbished. Natalia put them in touch with Martin Murphy, a retired historian in Oxford, who for years has been tending the graves of Ilsa's parents, and it was he who arranged for the stone to be cleaned and the engraving restored. Meanwhile William was busy securing the funds from some twenty-odd contributors, and together they arranged the simple and moving ceremony to mark the results of the work on the headstone.

On a bright but cold winter's morning in this most tranquil of settings, William Chislett read a section from Michael Eade's biography of Barea ("Triunfo en la Medianoche del Siglo"); Sebastian Balfour of LSE read a piece from "The

Forge", the first book in the trilogy, which tells of Barea's early life in Madrid at the beginning of the twentieth century; and Martin Murphy read the lines from Olive Renier's memoir in which she explained how she came to be moved to have the stone placed there: "I put up a stone but could find no words to express my feelings for those four people, whose fate (though they could be said to be among the fortunate ones) was symbolic of the giant lost cause of our generation – the fate of Spain, the fate of the Jews, the fate of social democracy in Germany, in Italy, in Europe as a whole."

The process of restoring the headstone has had a couple of quite unexpected consequences.

The first was that an English teacher in Spain, after reading Antonio Muñoz Molina's article in *El País*, wrote, offering him the typewriter on which Arturo had written his novels and the 800-odd scripts which he broadcast for the BBC's Latin American Service. She had been given it by a friend whose family had lived near, and become friends with the exiled writer. The story of the typewriter solved a minor curiosity for me: a while ago, in the BBC's archives, I came across some of his letters and was struck by the fact that all the accents were put in by hand. Of course they were: the typewriter was an English Underwood.

The second was that the Instituto Cervantes put on a short series of meetings reflecting on the experience of Spanish exiles in England. The first of these, at the end of last January, was about Barea, with William, Paul Preston and Michael Eade as its principle speakers. The lecture room was full and the talks provoked a lively question/answer session. Clearly, Arturo Barea has not been forgotten.



Before



After



William Chislett and Antonio Muñoz Molina
with Arturo Barea's typewriter



In the churchyard of All Saints, Faringdon,
4 December 2010

Education Pack for Schools

David Bond of the Hampshire Record Office has produced an attractive learning pack with a booklet and DVD about the evacuation and resettlement of the *niños vascos* in colonies across Britain. The stories of the refugees will resonate with today's schoolchildren as many will have come to Britain as migrants and refugees themselves. Schools will be able to use the learning packs as a case study for the wider study of refugees which is on the curriculum on various levels.

Obituaries

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

- Raimundo Revuelta
- Eugenia Oribe Llorente
- Eric Hawkins

El Niño Vasco (from "Lecturas Vascongadas" by Alejandro Manzanares, Barcelona 1935)

Niños de pelo rubio como las candelas, generalmente; de ojos claros, azules, por lo común; de rostro coloradote, sano, macizo, de mirada ingenua y de andar lento y pacífico. Nada se observa en ellos de esa peculiar inquietud y traversura que caracteriza a los niños de la ciudad o de los pueblos producto de la invasión de otras gentes del interior. El niño vasco tiene un sello inconfundible; su timidez. Es manso y confiado en su medio, en su lugar, si se ve rodeado de personas familiares o conocidas; cuando no, se manifiesta receloso, desconfiado y huye al cobijo de su próximo caserío apenas divisa viajeros extraños. Si le habláis en vuestra lengua os mirará algo huraño, reservado, con cierto sobresalto, e instintivamente dirigirá sus ojos hacia los suyos, asegurándose que están cerca para protegerle de sus presuntos temores. Pero ¡ah! Que si, en vez de eso, os dirigís a él en su lengua nativa y saludáis en su idioma, entonces le veréis que se os entrega sonriente, os cobra afecto, conversa con

vosotros y responde con naturalidad y soltura a cuanto le preguntáis. Y es que el idioma es el instrumento mas eficaz de penetración y la llave mágica y maravillosa que nos abre siempre de par en par las puertas misteriosas del corazón de la infancia..

