

Report on the Screening of Steve Bowles' "The Guernica Children"

By Tom Wardle



Tom Wardle



The Venue

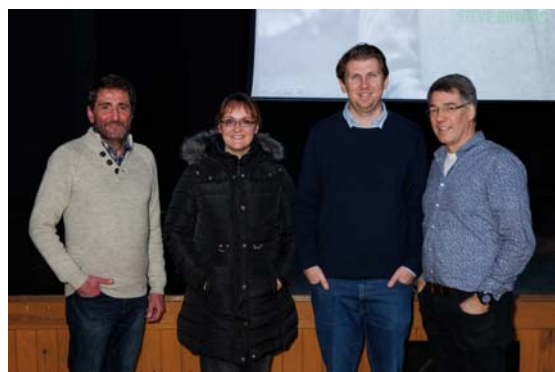
After the arrival of nearly 4000 Basque Children refugees in May 1937, they were accommodated at the North Stoneham Camp, a hastily-assembled camp of 500 bell tents, in today's Chandler's Ford. Through a succession of local events, Chandler's Ford Archives have been exploring and documenting the various ties between the town and the Basque Children.

Between November 2022 and February 2023, an exhibition on '*The Basque Refugee Children in Chandler's Ford*' was kindly hosted by Chandler's Ford Library. This was arranged by Stuart Allen and Ainhoa Nicholl of the Chandler's Ford Archives, with a new information panel commissioned especially. In January 2023, the exhibition was visited by Mayor of Eastleigh, Councillor Adam Manning, who met library staff, members of Chandler's Ford Archives and the Basque Children of '37 Association.

On Saturday the 28th of January 2023, Hiltingbury Community Centre (AKA the Hilt) in Chandler's Ford kindly hosted a screening of '*The Guernica Children*', directed by Steve Bowles. The event was a resounding success, drawing in a very large crowd and sparking a range of questions about the Basque Children's camp in Chandler's Ford.

The attendance for the film was remarkable, with over a hundred people fitting in to the Hilt. As well as local attendees, there were Basques in the audience (from Santurtzi no less), and descendants of the niños still living in Hampshire.

'*The Guernica Children*' was very well-received, as ever. The audience were noticeably touched by the moving scenes of children being separated from their parents. Perhaps unexpectedly, there were a good number of laughs too, with the audience enjoying seeing some of the now elderly niños recounting the mischief of their youth.



Having introduced the film, I fielded questions from the audience afterwards. The attendees were curious to know about the number of children who stayed in Britain after the end of World War Two, and how the niños kept in touch with their parents. One lady asked about the children's religion and the role of different churches in caring for the children.

An interesting discussion also emerged about Chandler's Ford and its ties to the Basque Children, which I delegated to Stuart, the local expert! Whilst many attendees professed to having known very little about the presence of the Basque Children in Chandler's Ford, others shared anecdotes passed down between generations.

Such events always lead to new avenues of inquiry and these events have been no exception. Undoubtedly the most stunning revelation has been that for many years, we have been mistaken about the location of the North Stoneham Camp, believing that it was on the site of Asda. Nevertheless, using aerial photography, Stuart Allen has been able to pinpoint a more exact location on Chestnut Avenue. Fittingly, part of the camp is today a children's play area. In recent months we have been in contact with archaeologists who have expressed an interest in carrying out an excavation at North Stoneham Camp.

On behalf of the Basque Children of '37 Association, I would like to sincerely thank Stuart and Ainhoa from Chandler's Ford Archives, the volunteers and staff at Chandler's Ford Library, the Mayor of Eastleigh, the volunteers at the Hilt, and everyone who came to visit the exhibition or watch the film.

With this discovery, Chandler's Ford has to take its place together with Southampton and Eastleigh as one of the most significant places in the history of the Basque Children.

Tom Wardle, Southampton, February 2023.