



Nazareth House Lancaster as it is today.



Marisa Iturriza and Simon Martínez of the BCA37UK

## **Refugees from the Spanish Civil War in Britain and Lancaster**

*Simon Martínez and Henry Holborn*

Thursday 11 August, 2 – 4pm

Friends Meeting House, Lancaster

Ten Basque girls and their teacher Ricarda Elexpuru arrived at the Lancaster Nazareth House as part of the 1200 children accommodated by the Roman Catholic Church. On a sunny summer afternoon Global Link hosted a meeting to explore the evacuation of Basque children during the Spanish Civil War to Britain and how 10 of them arrived in the county town of Lancashire.

In 1937 two public meetings were held in Lancaster. One addressed by the Duchess of Atholl, chair of the Basque Children Committee rallied support for the Government of Spain and the humanitarian efforts being organised in Britain which would bring the Basque children to the U.K. in May 1937. The other was addressed by Father Gabana who was pro Franco and had come to England to spread anti-leftist propaganda in support of the Nationalist insurgents.

Global Link through its Migration Stories North West invited the BCA'37UK to talk about the children and the circumstances of their arrival and welcome in Britain. Simon Martínez on behalf of the the Association for the Basque Children of the UK 1937 gave a general introduction and was followed by Henry Holborn whose talk included the history of the children in the Nazareth House Home and the Aid Spain activities in Lancaster. Migration Stories tells the stories of voluntary and forced migration to Britain and encourages the public to understand through these stories the present refugee crisis and the need to support present day refugees.

Amongst the audience was Marisa Iturriza whose father and two of his siblings were homed in Saint Peter's House just outside the north east town of Darlington at Gainford. Marisa has shared with the Association her account of her father's life which will soon appear on the website.

The questions after the talks included what was the importance of Basque culture and language to the children and following this from Rob David who is the historian of the Brampton Colony in Cumbria asking about work to learn more about the differences between the children as well as what they had in common. The Brampton Colony was

hosted by the the parents of Wilfred Roberts MP who was secretary of the Basque Children Committee. Amongst the 3862 children there were Basques, Catholics, socialists and communists, workers children and children of middle class parents. Some spoke Basque only, some Spanish only, and some both languages.

The Basque children resident in Lancaster were encouraged to join in with the English classes, and visited the local cinema. Out of the ten children and one teacher all but one child had returned to Spain by the end of 1939.

Simon Martínez  
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