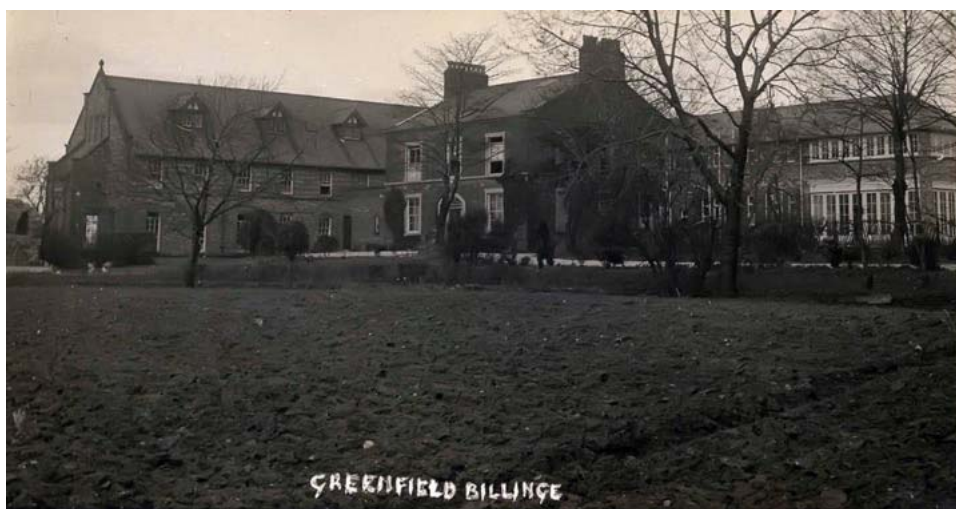


Basque Child Refugees at the Greenfield House Catholic Orphanage, Billinge

Sent by Begoña Abiega



Expedición a Inglaterra

The Basque Children Association of '37 UK has recently been sent photographs and text about the Greenfield Catholic Orphanage at Billinge, Lancashire. We are very grateful to Begoña Abiega whose father, Francisco Abiega Ojanguren aged 7 years, and aunt, Maria Angeles aged 10 years, came to Britain on the *SS Habana*. They both returned to Spain on 12.11.1937 after the war had ended in the Basque Country. Begoña has sent us her research about the children who came to Liverpool and district and were homed with the Roman Catholic Church there.

The story of the Basque Children at Billinge by *the makerfield rambler, (Flickr)*

“My father was housed at a school in Billinge with a few other Basque refugees in 1937. I’ve recently found out some Spanish Civil War Child refugees stayed at Greenfield House, Our Lady’s Convent, for some time so I guess that’s where he and his sister stayed. They lived in Billinge for only a few months but my father’s account of their stay there was always positive, and we’ll always be grateful to everyone who helped them and all the other children.”

(B, via sthelens-connect.net, 2018)

On 3rd June 1937 the *Liverpool Echo* reported that “arrangements are being made to care for 280 refugee children from Bilbao on Merseyside. One hundred of them will be looked after by a committee presided over by Mrs Charles Booth, and 180 are being accommodated by various Catholic institutions (viz) Nazareth House, Great Crosby, 50; Nazareth House, Ditton, 10; Leyfield Schools, West Derby, 30; Knowle Park, Woolton, 30; Greenfield House, Billinge, 30; St Edward’s, Broadgreen, 20; Catholic Girls’ Orphanage, Druid’s Cross, 10.”

On 26 June the *Liverpool Daily Post* reported the arrival at Lime St Station the previous evening of a “contingent of 180 Basque children who are to be cared for in various Roman Catholic institutions in Liverpool and district.”

“Awaiting the arrival of the children were Dr Downey, Archbishop of Liverpool, Monsignor Dean, Rector of Upholland College, Father Curry of the Archbishop’s secretarial staff, Father de Jose Amanda, a Basque priest who for the past six years has been chaplain at Lourdes Hospital, Liverpool, Father John Bennett, administrator of the Catholic Children’s Protection Society, Mr W Kieran, secretary of the society, Councillor Thomas Hogan, and nuns from several homes to which the children were being sent

When the children left the train it was interesting to observe their varying reactions to their new surroundings. Many of them looked a little bewildered, some wept, others smiled happily, while one party of boys, none over fifteen years old, puffed contentedly at cigarettes.

During the journey from Southampton the contingent was in the charge of Father Iberi, a Capuchin Father from Lekharoz College, Navarre, and Father Cineunegui, a secular priest of the diocese of Vitoria. The children, each of whom was already labelled, were quickly marshalled into parties and driven away in motor-buses to their new homes.

Archbishop Downey said to the *Daily Post* ‘The English hierarchy was not consulted about the Basque children coming to this country, but now that they are here, we are naturally doing all that we can for them, especially to preserve their faith. We have undertaken to provide for a great many of them in our Catholic homes and institutions in various parts of the country. I think the sooner we are able to restore these children to their relatives the better. Meanwhile we should be grateful for any contributions towards the expense of looking after them.’

The photograph from the *Daily Post* shows the 180 children being met at Lime St on 25 June 1937. Archbishop Richard Downey wearing a large hat is centre left.

