



Some of the niños by the gatehouse of Buscot Park, Lord Faringdon's estate.

In a country churchyard annexe

by Adrian Bell

Among the graves that surrounded All Saints' Church in the Oxfordshire village of Faringdon there was no signpost directing you to the churchyard annexe, but the vicar was helpful: it was only a short distance back up the hill, he said, and he would take us there. Natalia and I explained that we'd come in search of a memorial stone that had been set there to commemorate Arturo Barea and his Austrian wife, Ilsa, who had lived in exile in Britain since March 1939, the month in which the Spanish Republic finally collapsed.

The vicar was surprised: he didn't know of any such stone; nor was he aware that one of Spain's most celebrated novelists of the 20th century might have been buried in this patch of rural England. It would help to locate it,

he said, if we knew when Barea had died. We told him that Barea had died in 1957 and his wife some years later in Vienna, but the information we had was that the stone had been placed by a friend at the head of the graves of Ilsa's parents. They, too, had found refuge in Britain after the Nazis had occupied their homeland, and had lived with the Bareas until they died, within a few months of each other, in 1948.

The stone was visible from some distance off – a solid, rough-hewn lump of pinkish granite that contrasted with the polished, grey-white headstones of Faringdon's native parishioners. It carried no epitaph, simply their names – Arturo Barea and Ilsa Barea Pollak – and their dates. Surprisingly, both the stone and the Pollaks' graves appeared well tended.

Arturo Barea is best remembered for

his trilogy of autobiographical novels that are collectively known as "The Forging of a Rebel". Written in the early 1940s and skillfully translated by Ilsa, they were first published in English. By the end of that decade they had been translated into nine European languages and at that time Barea stood fifth on the all-time list of most-translated Spanish writers, but it was not until three years after Franco's death that they were finally published in Spain.

A Castilian edition had been published in Buenos Aires (and had circulated clandestinely in Spain), which was not surprising since Barea was enormously popular in Argentina. From 1940 right up until his death he worked for the South American section of the BBC's World Service and, under the pseudonym of Juan de Castilla, broadcast a weekly chat

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▶ about life in England. It was a job for which he was suitably experienced: throughout much of 1937 he had broadcast nightly as "the voice of Madrid". He described his BBC broadcasts as "little stories from my village", and from 1947 to 1957 "my village" was Eaton Hastings, five miles from Faringdon, and where the Bareas rented Middle Lodge, a house on the edge of Buscot Park owned by Gavin Henderson, the second Lord Faringdon.

In England Barea maintained only a limited contact with the many other Republican writers and intellectuals who'd been similarly driven into exile. He was, however, at home in English literary circles, or among the Middle European refugees whom he met through Ilsa when she worked at the BBC monitoring centre during the war. And unlike a number of other Spaniards who'd arrived in England at the same time, such as Luis Portillo and Pepe Estruch, he had no links with the Basque children who were still left in England – he did not teach in any of the remaining colonies, for instance, as they did.

And yet, there was a coincidental connection with the Basque children. Like a number of those children, he benefited from Lord Faringdon's Republican sympathies. Half a mile down the road from Middle Lodge there is a gate-house into Buscot Park. It was here in 1938 that Lord Faringdon provided accommodation for the 40 Basque boys who formed Poppy Vulliamy's colony. They were amongst the last contingent to leave the Eastleigh camp, and had lived a somewhat nomadic life since. Poppy took them from Eastleigh to another set of borrowed tents in another farmer's field, outside Diss in Norfolk.

Then, with the arrival of autumn, she secured a house – a redundant vicarage out on the marshes near Great Yarmouth. It was a roof over their heads, but with neither gas nor electricity, and with earth latrines that the boys had to dig at the bottom of the garden, it was little else. In the freezing winter of 1937-38, as the boys were breaking up what little furniture there was for firewood, Poppy sought out better accommodation. The account she gave to me ran:

"So I wrote to Lord Faringdon, and I said – I was very cheeky – I said, 'Call

yourself a socialist. Why are you living in that great big house all by yourself? Why don't you share it with my Basque boys?'

"He wrote back and said, 'How many Basque boys are we talking about?'

"And I said, 'Forty.'

"He wrote back again and he said, 'You'd better come up and we'll talk about it.'

"So I went up to see him in the House of Lords, and I was so nervous. He was in all his robes."

Lord Faringdon stopped short of sharing Buscot House with 40 Basque boys, but he offered them the gate-house and had a set of prefabricated garages erected in its garden to serve as dormitories. And he gave them the run of the park and its lake.

On our way over to Faringdon in our search for the Bareas' memorial we stopped at the gatehouse – to this day it is still known as "Basque House". The prefabs have long gone, but otherwise the house looks the same and the view down across the lake looks just as it did in the photographs Poppy took of her boys nearly 70 years ago.

The stone in memory of the Bareas had been placed in the Faringdon churchyard annexe after Ilsa's death in 1977 by Olive Renier. She had met them, and the Pollaks, when she and Ilsa sat together through their long shifts at the BBC monitoring centre in 1940, and befriended them in their first years in exile. Years later she wrote:

"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 causes 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."

Here was an epitaph that might equally have been spoken for the Basque children, and the private erection of that memorial stone a quiet gesture symbolic of the thousand acts of kindness that supported them through their time in England.

There is a coda to that morning in Faringdon. A few weeks later Natalia wrote to say th she had had a visit from Martin Murphy, a retired academic from Oxford, to whom we were indebted – he'd first brought to our attention the story of Arturo Barea's connection with Faringdon. He confessed that it was he who continues to clean the moss from the memorial stone and the weeds from the Pollaks' graves.

The Culvers' Staff

This number of the *Basque Home News* would not be complete without special mention of the staff without which all the resources and aspirations of the committee would amount to nothing, and the colony cease to exist.

For nearly two years we have been under-staffed, but at the moment we are more favourably placed in that we now have a "team" who have common ideals and the spirit of collaboration which makes for complete harmony by unity of purpose.

Mrs. Somerset, Scotswoman, with many of the characteristics of her race, is not only an efficient matron in the general sense, but also fulfils her office in a material sense. Her previous experience at Wickham Market colony has proved to be of great value in tackling the great diversity of problems to be dealt with daily and hourly in a children's home. It does need great tact, understanding and perspicacity, especially with regard to the complex natures of Spanish children. They will not mind hearing about their complexities, for they are rather proud of them, as also they are of "maytron" too.

Miss Vulliamy, resident secretary, friend and co-worker of Mrs. Somerset, in this as in Wickham Market colony, shares responsibilities with all the staff in that at times she undertakes the duties of all. Her versatility is such that she is able to deputise for any member of the staff if called upon. Her first-hand knowledge of Spain and Spaniards gives adequate basis for the application of her ideals in the treatment and guidance of "los peques" (little ones).

Now we have Mrs. Temple with us, she has joined the staff quite recently. Nurse Temple takes the title from some fifteen years' experience as a nurse in general hospitals. She is responsible for the health and welfare generally of all children; she is also responsible for the children's wardrobe and bathing arrangements, but like all other members of the staff is well able to deputise for any other member.

Nurse was a little startled at first by the boisterous life of a children's Home, but has now become used to the children and they to her, and she has already made her weight felt, in that she has effected some changes and they are for the good of the children.

It is perhaps appropriate to speak of the remainder of the staff as the Spanish group. Mari Cruz and Pepe are much more than teachers educationally. Both are idealists in different ways, and both are jealous custodians of Spanish prestige.

For three years they were the mainstay of the colony, indeed for a time they constituted our only staff helped by several senior girls then living in the colony. The children are most fortunate in having in Pepe and Mari Cruz a big brother and sister.

In common with all the other members of the staff and in keeping with their sympathies, they have dedicated themselves to the welfare of a handful of refugee children, rather than to take advantage of opportunities for self advancement offered them. Their sacrifice is in itself an example for "los peques."

The well-being of the Home is in safe hands whilst we are able to preserve our unique team of workers, and the continuance of it assured while we retain their services.

We thought our readers might be interested in this article about the staff at the Culvers (Carshalton) colony. It appeared in 1942, in the five-year commemorative issue of Carshalton Basque House News.