

Annual review 2017

BCA'37 UK - the Association for the UK Basque Children

What's been happening in the Association.

2017 was largely taken up with our involvement in over 20 events commemorating the 80th anniversary of the arrival on 23rd May 1937 in Southampton of almost 4,000 people: *niños*, *maestras*, *asistenetas*, and priests aboard the *SS Habana*. However there was also other work to do:

1. We have now concluded our changeover and become **BCA'37 UK - the Association for the UK Basque Children**, an unregistered charity. The changes we made in 2013 to our constitution included abandoning a listed membership, which meant that we were no longer eligible for registration with the Charities Commission. We continue as we have for the last five years with the same aims and activities, but with a greater emphasis on educational aspects.
2. In March last year we started our **eNotices**. This was an attempt to keep people informed with the rapidly changing programme of anniversary events. At its peak, mid year, we were sending these out fortnightly, but as the events rate slowed, so did the frequency of the eNotices. They are produced in both English and Spanish and have proved effective and popular. We now have a wide readership of over 300 people - both in the UK and Spain. We will continue producing them as and when necessary, probably every month to six weeks - but we'll see how things go.
3. We have revamped our webpage, with the help of our brilliant webmaster **Willie Black**, and made it more accessible and searchable. We have been congratulated on our website, especially by the media and academic researchers. We record our thanks to Willie for his time and expertise in running and maintaining our website.
4. A major addition to our resources has been the inclusion of the "**List of passengers on the Habana**", which was painstakingly put together by **Gerald Hoare**, and then with more sweat and tears put on the web with the help of Willie. This is proving to be a valuable resource - however it has thrown up inconsistencies in the original lists used. We now have access to the original 1937 records held by the Archives of the Basque Government in Bilbao, so we can expect further research on this front.
5. Posters are the mainstay of the exhibitions that we display around the UK and the Basque Country. **Dolores Phelps**, daughter of a *niña*, is an artist, lecturer in art and a graphic designer who has given us invaluable help. As a result we have produced several new posters, and new information pamphlets for the association. We wish to record our thanks to her.
6. We continue with a constant stream of enquiries about family relations, which are now usually dealt with by **Simon Martinez**. He is continuing and expanding the access to *fichas*. These are information cards collated by the Basque Children's Committee (BCC). The information on the *fichas* was started before the children embarked from Santurce and updated until the children left for Spain, or, if they stayed in the UK, until 1950s. They are kept in Madrid. At the moment we can only access the *fichas* for those children who stayed in the UK. We can also access information about the accompanying adults: teachers, assistants and priests.
7. We continue to work with schools with much success. Several schools have expressed an interest in a return visit in a couple of years, when a new cohort of sixth formers will become available.

8. We continue to be a popular source of information both here and in Spain for journalists and writers for newspapers, TV, radio and film. All the TV, radio and press reports related to our events and others can be found on the 'Recent News and Events' page on our website. We hope, in time, to compile a selected list of these which we will highlight on our website and the relevant eNotices.
9. Through this year's events and exhibitions we have consolidated many old contacts and made several valuable new ones both in the UK and Spain. We have a new link at the **University of Suffolk**, through **Dr Ed Packard**, a young History Lecturer with a special interest in the Basque Children in Suffolk. Another new link is with **Marian Aréchaga, Curator of the Edinburgh Spanish Film Festival**, Department of Hispanic Studies at Edinburgh University. In the Basque Country we have consolidated links with the **Dr Luis Mari Naya** of the **University of the Basque Country** in San Sebastian, and made new links with the **British Council in Bilbao** and the **Archives of the Basque Government** - also in Bilbao. I was privileged to be asked to speak at all three institutions.
10. An unexpected but much appreciated event was that we were contacted by the **East of England Co-operative Society** who had moved into what used to be the Wherstead Park colony home. They had discovered their link with the *niños* and wanted to organise an event together with us to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the children arriving at Wherstead Park. In 1937 the Co-op were part of the BCC and supported and funded *niños* - the East Anglian Co-op provided bread for the *niños* on a daily basis. Now, in 2017, they funded an excellent event on June 10th with a plaque, talks and exhibition and generous hospitality. Another very generous event was organised by **Gail Giles. The Caerleon Arts Festival Week** apportioned and funded an entire day, July 10th, to the Basque children. Our thanks to all.
11. The gifted duo **Na-mara, Roberto Garcia** (son of a *niño*) and **Paul Mc Lennan**, have continued as excellent ambassadors spreading our history through folk song in their many live and radio appearances and interviews.
12. Archives. Simon has continued to forge stronger links with **Karen Robson the Head Archivist of the Special Collection** at the University of Southampton.
13. As you all know **Natalia Benjamin** was for many years the secretary, archivist and chief source of knowledge for the Association. Since the 75th anniversary her deteriorating health has precluded her from active involvement, though she still maintains a keen interest in our activities and is involved as and when she can. Her remarkable memory is still often called on by us. Natalia was an avid collector and archivist of all things related to the *niños*: now Simon and I are going through her collection of papers, artefacts and ephemera and gradually translating them to our official archives in Southampton.
14. There are other 'hard workers' on our team whose work should be acknowledged: **Brian Devlin** - a relative newcomer to our team. Brian is working towards setting up a Children's War Museum - a difficult task in this financial climate - he has brought us many new contacts and helped set up several events - from talks at three Quaker Schools, and the event at the Bradford Peace Museum last year, to the exhibition at Dundee Library and the Edinburgh Spanish Film Festival this year. **Iñaki Azpiazu** runs and looks after our Facebook and Twitter sites for us - something totally out of my sphere of confidence. **Adrian Bell** continues to contribute excellent talks and has done so at several events
15. We continue to keep close links with the IBMT, which is not surprising as **Manuel Moreno and Jim Jump** are both part of the BCA 'family'. Manuel, together with Natalia, was a founder of the original Association and still continues to talk about the *niños* whenever given the opportunity.

16. This year, thanks to **Amaya López** and **Luis Jarero**, we were able to contribute more to the annual meal that they organise for the *niños* and their families. Two 'new' *niños* attended the event - it is almost incredible that we are still contacting *niños* who had previously had no contact with their co-evacuees, or with our association. Manuel Moreno organised a well received raffle, and we displayed our exhibition. We produced a leaflet about our association and made an appeal for funding and donations; despite not being very successful on the funding side, the leaflet was much appreciated and we went on to produce another more general one later in the year. We also, as has become usual, contributed financially to the meal.
17. One of the joys that this year has brought us has been the opportunity to meet *niños* and their families - many of whom have made a significant contribution to the success of our 80th anniversary events - such as: **Paco Robles, Herminio Martínez, Carmen Coupland and Koldo Sanz.**
18. Our association is run by the trustees, and we are pleased to be joined now by **Simon Martínez** as the newest and youngest trustee. Simon has been working with us for over a year now and has helped tremendously sharing the load of work with me. He now deals with most of the enquiries we receive and is setting up some major events for 2018 which we will list in the next eNotices and on the web.

We would like to thank ALL who have given freely of their time to make our association work successfully. We also appreciate that some are dipping into their own pockets to fund travel, overnight stays and other peripheral costs - that is not the way it should be, but without that we would soon be totally out of funds!

I hope that you will continue to follow and support us in the coming year.

On behalf of the trustees

Ana Maria del Carmen Kilner-Sánchez