

THE BASQUE CHILDREN. THE ENGLISH EXILE

The Cervantes Institute, Manchester
27 September 2018
A report by Barbara Coombs

The evening event - including a wine reception and a talk about the exile of the Basque Children and their teachers and supporters - took place at the Instituto Cervantes in Manchester. The event supported by the BCA'37 UK and the Institute was attended by eighty people, young and old, English, Spanish and Basque.

Maria Luisa Toole and her four children (Maria, Carmen, Ana, and Sean), Manuel Moreno, and Simon Martinez are in the picture to the right. Maria is seated and is one of the remaining surviving *niños de la guerra*. All are seen holding flags of either the Basque Country, the *ikurriña*, or the flag of Spanish Republic, *la tricolor*.



Gerald Hoare, the son of one of the *maestras*, was also present but does not appear in the photo.

Simon Martinez, of the Association for the UK Basque Children, gave a talk about the Basque children. These are some of his comments towards the end of his talk which develop the theme of his understanding of what the exile meant for his father and also for Simon himself.

‘So what are my reflections on my father’s life, his relationship to his host country Britain and the country of his birth, Spain? And through him, what does it mean for me? I have inherited the foundations of my personality from my father. His robust sense of honour and pride in his achievements, his loyalty to his family, and his belief in doing the right thing. He had a very democratic thread to his personality. He would not not be put down or embarrassed by his difficult beginnings as a refugee and exile. This may not be what all the *niños* felt; everyone after all was and is different.

I am very indebted to the Association for the UK Basque Children, and to Manuel Moreno who was one of the founders of the Association. The Association helps research the lives and experiences of the Children. If you have been moved to find out more about your family, or about such things as the kindness of strangers who responded to calls to support the Basque children, then you can find out more on our website www.basquechildren.org, or you can buy something from our stall, or make a donation to support our work researching and telling this history.

The story I have laid before you has concentrated on the exile of the children and adults from Spain. Exile also has the meaning of banishment. These children, and my generation, were not wanted by Franco’s Spain. We were banished because of our commitment to freedom, fairness, justice. Happiness to live in our country was denied to us by the Franco dictatorship which sought to cleanse the ‘blood of the people of Spain’ by killing or banishing us -those of impure blood. There is still a journey to travel to ensure Truth and Justice, Truth and Reconciliation; a journey which started in 1975 and continues to this day.’