



Newsletter



Basque Children of '37 Association UK

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www.basquechildren.org

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News

Launch of new website

by Carmen Kilner

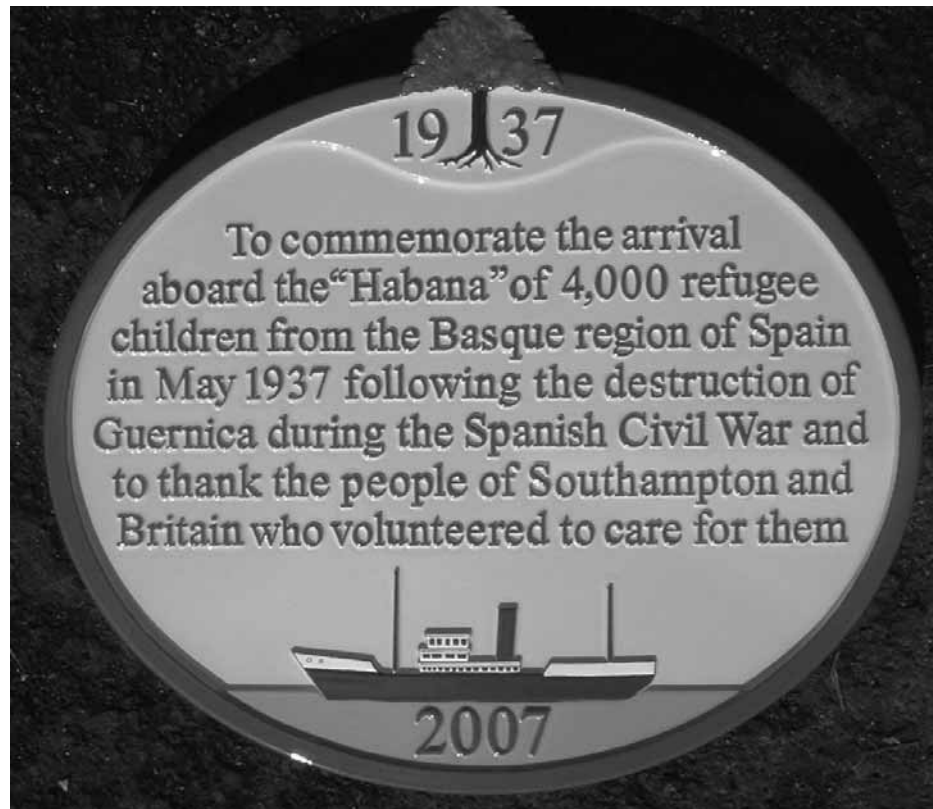
On 25 March the Association's new website went live on the internet. Since the Association was first founded in 2002, we have piggybacked on the website created by the Moreno brothers, and used it as a mouthpiece for our Association and its events. However, the Moreno site has a far wider remit than ours, covering adult Spanish Republican exiles to Britain and Republican slave labourers in Britain, as well as the Basque children.

As we have grown, it has become clear that it was appropriate for the Association to have its own dedicated site, focusing on the exodus of the *niños* from Bilbao on the *Habana*, and their subsequent exile in Great Britain.

We hope that those of you that have access to a computer will have a look at our website – www.basquechildren.org – and look at all the interesting sections that we have put together. Amongst other things you will be able to read about forthcoming events and activities, see what is happening on the research and archiving fronts, look at past Newsletters, consult the bibliography, view the photo gallery and read articles about the different colonies. It is still very early days and there is a lot of information still to be added, but we have made a start, and that is so often the hardest step to take. We hope to keep adding background information at a steady rate and also to keep you updated with "Latest news" on our home page. You will also be able to download and print membership, gift aid and standing order forms.

This is an exciting new addition to our Association, and we hope that you will let as many people as possible know about it, in Britain, Spain and elsewhere.

The creation of the website has been possible due to the efforts and technical expertise of Joseph Kilner, the grandson of two maestros Eduardo Sánchez and Ana María González.



This plaque is to be unveiled on 26 May by the Spanish Ambassador at a commemorative event to mark the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the Habana. It was designed by Association committee member Herminio Martínez. See page 3 for more details of the event.

Recovering memories: the IBMT lecture

by Colin Carritt

It is all too easy to forget the past, to move on. But not without understanding and not in ignorance. The guest speaker at the annual International Brigade Memorial Lecture (organised by the International Brigade Memorial Trust) held at the Imperial War Museum, London, on 3 March was Julián Casanova, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Zaragoza.

His subject was the celebration of Spain's increasingly confident democracy and the opening up of the history of the Spanish Civil War.

This, he said, was achieved through respect for and access to archives and

museums and, above all, through historical education.

Casanova began by outlining the unity of purpose and optimism of the Second Republic from 1931 to 1933, which was followed by increasing uncertainty from 1934 to 1936. Tensions were evident between the armed forces, the bourgeoisie and the Republic's reformist government, and also on the left between the Anarchists and the Socialists.

Professor Casanova explained that the rift between Anarchists and the Republican government was not as stark as described by Orwell and, with over 1 million affiliated anarchists in Catalonia, it would have been surprising if they had shunned all opportunity to take part in the Republican government. He takes issue with those historians of the conflict who claim that the



From the Secretary

Unbelievable as it seems, we are fast approaching the 70th anniversary of the exiled *niños* arrival in this country. We first started planning the commemoration of this momentous event over two years ago. Now, there is less than one month to go.

Why did we choose to hold the commemoration in Southampton rather than Eastleigh? Better public transport means that Southampton is more accessible to those coming from far away. But, more importantly, it was at Southampton that the *niños* first set foot on English soil, before being taken to the camp at Eastleigh. (Where the North Stoneham camp was there is now a large supermarket!)

The event on 26 May, detailed in this Newsletter, will be a fitting tribute to the *niños*. The Basque government has pledged half of the necessary funding and the Association will apply to the Spanish Government for additional grants.

Excitingly, the projects we have been working on to mark the anniversary are nearing completion: the *Recuerdos* book will soon go to the printers; the choir from the Spanish School in London will record "Songs of the Basque Children" at the end of this month and the re-edit of "The Guernica Children" DVD is well under way. I hope that you will want to have copies of these items, which you will be able to purchase on 26 May. If you cannot make the 70th anniversary commemoration, we can send the book, CD or DVD to you by post.

The impending anniversary forces us to consider again the tragic events of 1937 that forced the *niños* to leave their homes for the UK. The destruction of Guernica on 26 April was the catalyst to the Basque government's decision to evacuate the region's children. The evacuees left behind parents, sometimes siblings, and all that was familiar. They entered a world of strange language and customs, leaving behind their childhood and growing up prematurely. "Expedition to England" – these were the words on the hexagonal disk that the children wore pinned on their clothes. Let us not forget that this "expedition" had far reaching consequences for each and every child.

Happy anniversary!
iAgur!

Natalia Benjamin

Natalia Benjamin



The Hull plaque (left) being unveiled by Carmen Coupland (on ladder). Pictured top are the *niñas* at the Hull colony in 1937. See facing page for story.

► tensions between Anarchists and the Republican government cost them the war. He is in no doubt that it was the policy of non-intervention by the western democracies that was the major determinant in Franco's success.

During the civil war there were, inevitably, many civilian casualties. But what was so appalling about the Spanish conflict was the vindictive policies of Franco during and after the war. Repression was instant, justice was summary, murder, rape and torture endemic. The Catholic Church was complicit in this orgy of revenge and operated an open policy of humiliation of the defeated.

Reconciliation was impossible in such an atmosphere. The euphoria of the Second Republic evaporated and for the next 40 years hatred and anger degraded into a silent resentment. Finally, for many, denial and obliteration of historic memory took over – but not for the relatives of the "disappeared", whose deaths had not even been registered and whose graves were unmarked.

No one knows how many unregistered deaths took place but between 1936 and 1945, as many as 140,000 extra-judicial registered death sentences were carried out on Republican sympathisers. And after 1945, and for years and years thereafter, how many more? Perhaps another 50,000.

In 1977 when democracy finally returned to Spain, the calls for the recovery of historic memory became louder until the government could resist no longer and framed a bill. It still languishes, yet to be passed into law and fiercely contested by, amongst others, the Catholic church.

Despite Professor Casanova's pessimism about the future of the bill, he believes that the publication of much evidence is now unstoppable. Many older people are talking about their memories and recording them. He said that the most important thing was not reparations but the preservation and accessibility of archives and museums and the education of children concerning the true nature of the Francoist period of Spain's history.

26 May 2007

70th anniversary commemoration in Southampton

When we wrote the last Newsletter, all we knew was that the Basque Children of '37 Association UK wanted to have a suitable event in Southampton to mark this momentous occasion. Since then, decisions have been taken, arrangements have been made, the deposit paid and we really think we have come up with an exciting programme worthy to commemorate the events of 70 years ago. It promises to be a truly memorable day. We have over 200 people attending, from the UK and several other countries, including a contingent of 20 from the Basque country.

There is still a great deal to be done and the committee has been working very hard to make this a success. The event is being held at the Solent University Conference Centre, Southampton, where there will be an exhibition of photographs and newspaper cuttings about the different colonies which can be seen throughout the day.

The event will open with speeches, followed by unveiling of a commemorative plaque by His Excellency the Spanish Ambassador Carlos Miranda. After lunch there will be a showing of the new edition of the film "The Guernica Children" by Steve Bowles, followed by closing speeches and a last chance to see the special exhibition.

Apart from Carlos Miranda, several other dignitaries, both local, national and from Spain, also hope to attend.

All of those who have now registered to attend will be sent a letter at the beginning of May giving detailed instructions and a plan of the venue.

We are all looking forward tremendously to this event! It is going to be

a wonderful occasion, with several family groups of three generations! We hope it will be a unique opportunity to meet old friends, make new ones, to inform and educate, and generally enjoy spending a day together!

Commemorative items for sale

There will be a stall selling the new "Recuerdos" book, the CD of "Songs of the Basque Children", the DVD of the re-edited version of "The Guernica Children" and the second edition of Adrian Bell's book "Only for Three Months", as well as special stamps and commemorative envelopes (see below).

We can't tell you yet what the prices will be, as they haven't yet been finalised. If you would like to reserve these in advance, just write to one of us. After 26 May, we will also send you an order form on request to anyone who is unable to attend, but would like to buy something. There will be a charge for postage and packing, but we will keep that as low as possible.

If you are on the web, then details will appear there as soon as they are available, together with a downloadable order form, and a new "Shop" page.

Cinderellas and smilers

To commemorate the anniversary, Cliff Kirkpatrick, a member with a special interest in Spanish philately, has been assisting in the production of some special commemorative stamps called "smilers". These will consist of a Help the Basque Children "Cinderella" and a first class stamp. Cinderellas are labels that resemble postage stamps but are not valid for postage, like, for example, Christmas seals. The Basque Children's Committee produced three cinderellas in 1938 to raise funds for the upkeep of the children (see article in Newsletter no.3). We shall also be printing some commemorative envelopes for the anniversary that will be specially franked "Southampton 23 May 2007".

The stamps will be available for sale singly at £1, in sheets of 20 for £16, and the envelopes will be £2.50 each. We shall be selling them at the commemoration in Southampton on 26 May, or you can order them from Carmen Kilner (Treasurer), tel: 020-8224 7959 or [treasurer@basquechildren.org]. Postage and packing will be £1.

Professor Casanova then showed a series of three short films contemporary to the civil war, before fielding an enthusiastic question and answer session. Despite the veterans of the International Brigades becoming fewer, their numbers have been replaced by younger students of the civil war and by many Spanish comrades, amongst whom were several members of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK.

Unveiling of plaque in Hull

On Friday 10 November 2006, a blue plaque was unveiled at the former Elm Trees in Sutton-on-Hull, to commemorate the stay of 40 Basque children and to remember the generosity of local volunteers who cared for them. It was the fourth such plaque to be erected by the Association and was funded by the Ministerio de la Presidencia.

The children stayed in two houses in Hull: at Hazeldene in Pearson Park, which was given over to the children by a local builder Robert Tarran, and also at Elm Trees, a large mansion in Sutton-on-Hull belonging

to another builder, Dennis Sewell. It is now a nursing home, the Sutton Village Care Home.

Rob Wardle, a local man whose father lost his life fighting in Spain with the International Brigades, had campaigned to get a plaque erected in memory of the children. Sadly, he died in December 2005, but his widow Audrey vowed to see his ambition come to fruition and did much of the organising.

Present at the ceremony were the Mayor of Hull, Sr Don Luís Álvarez from the Spanish Consulate in Manchester, Mr and Mrs Sewell and their son Douglas, as well as Soledad Orton, now aged 92, one of the *maestras*.

The plaque was unveiled (although the curtain got stuck!) by Dr Carmen Coupland, daughter of *niña vasca* María Ángeles Dueñas Montes, who stayed at Elm Trees with her sister Dolores and who, because she could not be repatriated, was taken in by the Sewell family and later trained as a nurse at Hull Royal Infirmary.

Carmen told the gathered crowd about the generosity of the people of Hull. "One of the things my mother spoke about was how kind

the people were," she said. "They have the eternal gratitude of the Basque children... I used to go and have tea with the Sewells and called them grandma and grandpa."

After the unveiling, the crowd went across the road to the Sutton Exhibition and Resources Centre where the Mayor, himself from a refugee background, gave a speech emphasising the importance of such ceremonies, followed by Association Secretary Natalia Benjamín talking about the work of the Association.

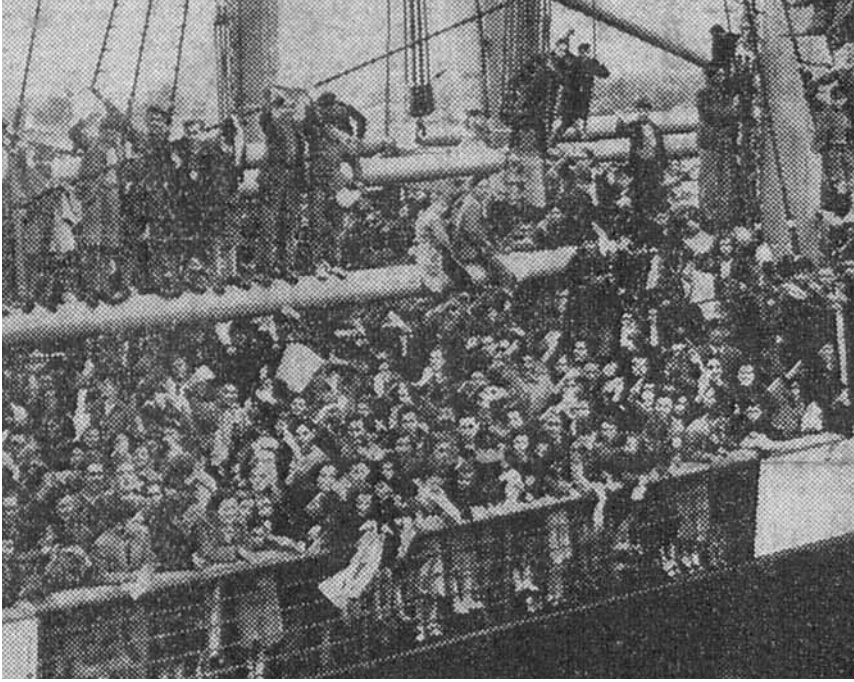
She had brought along a small exhibition of display boards showing the arrival of the children in North Stoneham and the Hull colonies which were much appreciated. There then followed light refreshments, generously provided by Audrey Wardle.

AGM and members' lunch

by Cliff Kirkpatrick

Thirty people, including seven *niños*, attended the Annual General Meeting and members'





Arrival of the Habana in Southampton in May 1937.



Basque Children of '37 Association UK

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- Membership Secretary: Carmen Kilner. Tel: 020-8224 7959. Email: [membership@basquechildren.org]

How to support the Association

Niños and their spouses/partners and widow/ers are honorary members. Annual subscriptions (which are renewable in May) for other family members and supporters of the Association's aims are:

- £10 for individuals
- £25 for institutions.

Contact Membership Secretary Carmen Kilner for membership application forms. These may also be found on the website.

Our aims

1. To reunite the *niños* of the Spanish Civil War who were exiled in Great Britain in 1937 and who did not return to Spain or who returned later, that is, those who had the common experience of being evacuated.
2. To preserve for descendants and future generations, through the collection of oral and written testimonies, the memory of the *niños*' experience of the period and their subsequent life in Britain.
3. To place the experience of the exile within its rightful historical context, so the *niños* should not be "*los olvidados*".
4. To provide a forum for discussion and to promote dialogue between *niños*, researchers and interested persons.
5. To encourage the collection and preservation of archives (photographs, letters, documents, films, songs, posters, oral testimonies, artwork etc) to be used for educational and historical purposes, eventually to be deposited in the Special Collections Division of the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton.
6. To locate commemorative plaques and to ensure their preservation and maintenance; to organise the setting-up of other dedicated plaques to commemorate the experience.
7. To liaise and collaborate with related societies of *niños vascos* in other countries.
8. To facilitate and support research into the history of the evacuation of the *niños vascos* who were sent to Britain.
9. To inform members about new developments in the knowledge of the period through publications, bibliographies, web pages etc.
10. To advance the education of the public, students and academics in the subject of the exile of 1937.

lunch at the Galicia restaurant, Portobello Road, London, on Saturday 17 February. The venue for both the AGM and lunch were the same – the upper level of the restaurant – and noise from *los españoles abajo* did interfere somewhat with the smooth running of the meeting. Even so, all the reports were delivered in a professional manner, Natalia Benjamin pointing out in her Secretary's Report what a great deal of work had been going on, especially in the last six months, to prepare for the anniversary celebrations.

Special thanks and unanimous approval were given to Herminio Martínez for his proposed design of the plaque planned to be unveiled at Southampton on 26 May during the 70th anniversary event. It was nice that Herminio was accompanied by his 15-year-old grandson who himself made a positive contribution to the proceedings.

Thanks from everybody present were also given to the talented Koke Martínez for the superb picture collage and poems which he kindly donated to the Association. The lunch afterwards was a memorable occasion, with a selection of *tapas* being promptly brought to the tables. It was so generous, in fact, that most people were already full before the main course was served.

As enjoyable as the meal was, it was the convivial atmosphere and stimulating conversations that made the occasion special and as the meal progressed the Martínez brothers were, as usual, on form with their singing.



At the lunch for members after the AGM.

Images and memories : symposium in Edinburgh

by Victoria Hislop

On 17 November 2006, eight members of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK attended a one-day seminar to mark the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War organised by the University of St Andrews, the University of Stirling, the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland.

After a welcome from Señor F Palomera Guez, Consul General of Spain (who also hosted a reception at the end of the day), the seminar began with a talk from Mike Arnott of

the TUC about his project to create an archive of material relating to the International Brigaders from Dundee. He spoke of the passionate commitment of those who went, referring to the fact that some International Brigaders, in spite of being arrested in Perpignan and deported back to the UK, still returned to fight in Spain, such was their determination to oppose fascism.

In the next presentation, Andrew Ginger talked about some of the films of the post war period in Spain and the way in which they portrayed survival and oppression. He spoke about the importance of recorded image and sound to create a sense of shared memory and we heard a recording of the Falangist victory song "Cara al sol".

Alison Ribeiro de Menendez then gave a fascinating talk on the theme of "Remembering and Forgetting" in relation to contemporary Spanish fiction. She focused on "La Malamemoria" by Isaac Rosa, a bestselling novel in Spain, which tells the story of a writer who is commissioned to write a "fake" autobiography of Franco's hit man. It deals with the paradox of the archive as somewhere where something can be both uncovered and concealed, and the consequences of burying the past.

Next Bill Kidd spoke on how the third generation of descendants of the Retirada are taking an increased interest in their history in the Pyrenées Orientales, illustrated by the number of new memorials being erected.

He told the particularly inspiring story of a Swiss woman, Elizabeth Eidenbenz, who did a crash course in midwifery and turned a derelict chateau near Elne into a maternity hospital, where around 20 refugee women gave birth every month during those years of exile.

Steve Bowles then showed his very moving documentary "The Guernica Children" which vividly portrays the evacuation of several thousand children from Bilbao to Great Britain and includes interviews with several of the Basque refugees, now adults, who were involved in it.

The seminar concluded with an inspiring presentation from Daniel Gray of the National Library of Scotland, who played a number of archived recordings from those who were involved in the civil war. He talked about the way in which an archive could be compiled from even the smallest notes and recollections and how everything helped to build up the bigger picture.

Further honour for Leah Manning

by Ron Bill

Dame Leah Manning, who was the MP for the Epping constituency, including Harlow, from 1945 to 1950, continues to be commemorated.



Leah Manning.

In 1998 a new building at Cambridge Regional College was named after her. In 2002 a square in Bilbao was named Plaza Mrs Leah Manning, to commemorate her efforts in evacuating the 3,800 children from Bilbao in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War.

The latest honour came on Friday 9 March 2007 when a room at Homerton College, Cambridge, was named the Leah Manning Room. Ron Bill and Stan Newens, authors of the book, "Leah Manning", spoke to assembled guests about her life and work, particularly in Cambridge and Harlow.

Natalia Benjamin spoke about Leah Manning's role in organising the evacuation of the Basque children, and how the children arrived at Southampton and were dispersed in "colonies" around the country. Some stayed at what was called the Leah Manning House at Theydon Bois and a number were in the Cambridge colony, initially situated at Pampisford Rectory and later moving to Station Road in Cambridge.

Antonio Gallego, who was one of the *niños* in the Cambridge colony, was a guest at the event.

Last year, 2006, was the centenary of Leah's enrolment as a student for teacher training at Homerton College. The college fellows and trustees agreed to commemorate this event with a room bearing her name. So, a century on, she is honoured and commemorated by her former college – a splendid and deserved gesture.

Leah was one of a formidable generation of women who made a major contribution to the political and social advances of the 20th century. She was a determined, resolute and persistent advocate, always willing to help the humble and do battle with the mighty. She wanted a better and fairer society and a

peaceful world. Our best tribute to her is to continue to work for the many things she campaigned for throughout her busy, interesting and worthwhile life.

Film showings

There will be a showing of the documentary "The Guernica Children" on BBC4 on 25 April at 11pm. There will be a showing of the shortened version of film on BBC2 Wales on 5 April at 20.30.

Articles

The April edition of *BBC History Magazine* has an article by Steve Bowles: "Meeting the Guernica Children". An article by Nicola Lisle will appear in the May edition of *Family History Monthly*, which will be on sale from 12 April.

Registered charity: What does this mean?

On 25 August 2006 the Association became registered charity (number 1115920). This has several advantages:

Funding opportunities

● This first advantage, which has already benefitted us, is a higher profile when dealing with governments and other institutions. We have received grants from the Spanish government for which registration with the Charity Commission was essential and have been promised a grant from the Basque government. Many grant-awarding trusts are allowed (or choose) only to fund charities.

Tax benefits

● There are also taxation advantages. If we have funds on deposit at banks, we can now receive the interest gross without deduction of tax. The gift aid scheme allows the Association to also recover tax on subscriptions and donations received from individuals.

Forthcoming events

Oxford day school

A day school on the theme "Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War" is to be held at Rewley House, Oxford, on Saturday 28 April. To book a place, please telephone the course administrator on 01865-270 368. If you would

▶ like to receive funding for this, get in touch with the Association Treasurer.

Blue plaque at Worthing

The Association is funding a blue plaque to be put up in one of the colonies at Worthing, Beach House. It is hoped that the unveiling will be on 23 May. Please contact the Association Secretary if you were at the Worthing colony and/or would like to be present at the ceremony.

70th anniversary event at Southampton

On 26 May there will be an event at Solent University Conference centre to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Basque children's exile to Great Britain. With over 200 people attending, we are not in a position to take any more multiple bookings; it may, however, be possible to accommodate ninos and their spouses or individual members of the Association. Please get in touch with the Treasurer as soon as possible. See preview on page 3.

Ceremony at Jubilee Gardens, London

On Saturday 21 July the International Brigade Memorial Trust will be holding a ceremony at Jubilee Gardens, South Bank, London, to honour the British International Brigaders. It starts at 1pm and all are welcome.

Personalities

Frida Knight

by Natalia Benjamin

Frida Knight was the daughter of a Cambridge academic and Dean of Trinity College, Dr Stewart. In spite of her privileged background, she spent much of her life fighting for the oppressed, being greatly influenced by the Depression of the 1930s and the poverty she saw around her.

In her twenties, she worked for a time in a deprived area of Manchester before studying music in Germany, where she witnessed the rise of Nazism. These experiences persuaded her to join the Communist party.

When the Spanish Civil War started, she was working with a theatre group in the north of England, and in York she persuaded the Archbishop to chair a meeting to raise funds



Frida Knight.

for medical aid to Spain; in Hull she helped form the Spanish Aid Organisation. For the next three years, Spain was never out of her life. She gave up her job to work for the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, with which she became actively involved. In 1937, she was asked to drive an ambulance to Spain, and, leaving it at a hospital behind the lines, she made her way to Madrid, staying there for three months in the thick of the bombing. There she worked in the Press Office, sending information about the war back to London and broadcasting from the badly bombed radio station every night. She returned to England to try and inform the British public about what was going on in Spain.

Her parents spent a great deal of time with the Basque children refugees in Cambridge, often inviting them to their house at the weekends. Her mother, Jessie Stewart, edited a book, "Recuerdos", about the Basque children's colony in Cambridge. One of Frida's jobs for the NJCSR was to organise the fund-raising tours of the Basque children's concert parties, which were enormously successful and which were a major source of raising money for the children's keep. Another job was to visit the different colonies scattered around England and report on them to the committee. If, as was occasionally the case, there was an unfavourable report, the children were found homes in other colonies.

About her involvement with the Basque children, Frida had this to say: "Many remember Cambridge as a happy home and a refuge from the horrors of civil war. If we did nothing else in Cambridge for the Spanish people, this would have been a valuable contribution to their cause."

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Frida, then aged 29, went to France to help her left-wing colleagues, and was arrested and imprisoned with another British woman. Later, they managed to escape, getting in touch with the French Resistance who gave them forged papers and they reached the unoccupied zone of France before managing to return to London, where for the rest of the war, Frida worked for the Free French.

In the post-war period, she became the author of many musical biographies, including one on Beethoven, and a study of the French

Resistance. She was a founder member of the Cambridge Peace Council and later in life, campaigned with the CND. Her whole life was dedicated to the pursuit of justice, and to the end, she opposed and campaigned against any form of oppression. She was a truly remarkable woman.

Accounts

Here is an abridged version of accounts for the year ended 30 November 2006 and adopted at the Annual General Meeting on 17 February 2007:

	2006	2005
● Receipts		
– Subscriptions and donations:	£2,125	£2,007
– Grant from Spanish Government:	£1,752	£1,114
– Other:	£30	£142
– Totals:	£3,907	£3,333
● Payments		
– Blue plaques:	£721	£1,499
– Newsletter:	£376	£162
– Postage, copying etc:	£744	£702
– Other:	£183	£365
– Totals:	£2,024	£2,728
● Surplus for the year	£1,883	£605
● Bank balance less accrued costs	£3,227	£1,344

Copies of the audited detailed accounts with the Trustees' Report may be obtained from the Treasurer, tel: 020-8224 7959, or the Secretary, tel: 01865-459 744.

Renewal of annual subs

Membership year beginning 21 May 2007

Annual subscriptions are due for renewal for the membership year 21 May 2007 to 20 May 2008. The rate remains the same as last year, £10 for ordinary membership and £25 for institutional membership. *Niños* and their spouses are exempt from subscription dues, but like all members who wish to receive Newsletters and details of forthcoming events, they need to re-register every year to keep our information up to date. However, even if you are exempt, we welcome donations: contributions towards postage, printing etc, would be much appreciated, especially if you live abroad.

There is a form printed on the loose sheet insert to send with your subscription/donation

to the Treasurer, Camen Kilner, at the address on the form. If you keep forgetting to pay, why don't you pay by standing order? If you circle "yes" on the membership renewal form, then you will be sent the form. We will only send a receipt if you request one; if we have your email address, then we will be able to send the receipt by email. Please make sure you write your email address clearly and update it if it has changed.

Gift Aid

Now that we have charitable status, we would like to ask all UK taxpayers to sign a Gift Aid declaration. It doesn't cost you anything, but it means that we can get back 28p for every pound you pay us either in subscriptions or donations. A form is printed on the back of the renewal of membership form. This only has to be done once, so if you have already signed a form and sent it to us, it will be valid until you cancel it.

All the forms are also available on our new website [www.basquechildren.org].

Book reviews

Verdes Valles, Colinas Rojas; por Ramiro Pinilla (Tusquets, 2005)

Reviewed by Bernardo Fernández

Hace unas semanas le comenté a Natalia Benjamin que, en el libro que estaba leyendo con verdadera fruición, se mencionaba la salida del *Habana* de Bilbao en 1937. Con este motivo me pidió unas líneas sobre el mismo que me dispongo a escribir, no sin dejar claro que no albergo pretensión alguna de objetividad ni mucho menos de hacer una verdadera crítica literaria. Se trata simplemente de unas impresiones muy subjetivas, tanto que me he abstenido de leer ninguna crítica en preparación de esta pequeña crónica. Así que lo que cuento es lo que yo pienso y siento sobre este libro.

Se trata de Verdes Valles, Colinas Rojas escrito por Ramiro Pinilla, y editado por Tusquets. Se divide en tres volúmenes, subtítulos La tierra convulsa, Los cuerpos desnudos y Las cenizas del hierro. Son, en total, 12172 páginas!, pero les aseguro que a mi se me hizo corta su lectura y me dio mucha pena terminarlo...

No es fácil catalogar este libro, pero yo me atrevo a decir que es una verdadera epopeya del Pueblo Vasco en la que la grandilocuencia del estilo habitual de este género literario se sustituye por la ironía, el humor y la ternura como contrapunto a la tragedia que obviamente no podía evitar una obra como ésta. Y esa dialéctica atraviesa toda la obra desdoblándose en innumerables manifestaciones: los verdes valles y las colinas rojas, la margen derecha y la margen izquierda

de la Ría; la madera y el hierro; el caserío y la fábrica; la vida bucólica y rural y la revolución industrial; nacionalismo y anarquismo; vascos y maquetos, etc., etc., etc.

Es sobre todo una obra de ficción, con personajes imaginarios pero que se enmarca dentro de un tiempo histórico concreto en el que aparecen unos hechos y personajes históricos reales, lo cual no le impide al autor hacer incursiones hacia la prehistoria, la mitología o los orígenes genéticos de los vascos, o sea, de la humanidad...

El escenario de la epopeya es Getxo y alrededores, entre los que se encuentra Bilbao, si me permiten la licencia los orgullosos bilbaínos... Lo que pudiera parecer, a primera vista, un relato costumbrista, local o nacional adquiere, en la pluma de Ramiro Pinilla, una dimensión universal. Este Getxo me ha recordado el Macondo de García Márquez.

Me ha impresionado mucho el relato de los primeros tiempos del movimiento obrero en las minas de los montes de la Margen Izquierda, en el que el realismo no está exento de ironía, cuando el narrador es Roque Altube, del Caserío Altubena que por avatares amorosos se encuentra entre la solidaridad con los mineros y la vida apacible pero resignada del caserío. No es menos impresionante, en el segundo volumen, la desgarradora tensión dramática que se desencadena en el seno de la familia Baskardo Oiandía, -iqué personaje el de la amatxo Cristina!- entre el integrismo nacionalista vasco y el anarquismo libertario. Y iqué voy a decir de ese desenlace trágico del tercer volumen, resuelto en guerra civil, dictadura y aparición de ETA!

Mi impresión, al terminar de leer este libro, es la de que uno se encuentra ante una obra importante, de las que dejan honda huella en el lector, que no se olvidan nunca, y sobre todo, creo conocer y comprender mejor a los vascos.

Winter in Madrid; by CJ Sansom (Pan Books, 2006)

Reviewed by Tom Webb

The author has brought together all the ingredients of a best-selling novel, set in the harsh winter of post civil war Madrid. The months of November and December 1940 give us a story which is a thriller, a romance and a living history, set against the political background of Franco's dilemma of whether or not to enter the European war on the side of Germany.

The conflict between the Falangist and the monarchist elements of Franco's government and the power of the British Navy in restricting the supplies of wheat and oil allegedly destined for Spain all contribute to the confusion and uncertainty of everyday life in the capital.

The author describes vividly the suffering of the ordinary people. A serious lack of food and fuel, inadequate clothing and often insanitary accommodation. They are living in a state of

near starvation under a brutal, repressive government. Former Republicans are at the mercy of informers and concentration camp style prisons. Corruption is rife. The suffering of refugees, orphans and missing persons is well described by the author. There is a moving account of life in a prison camp for political prisoners, which takes place in bleak winter conditions near Cuenca.

Of the five main characters, four are British and the connection with Britain is maintained by the story being based on the British Embassy in Madrid, where Sir Samuel Hoare is Ambassador. The three male characters, in Spain for completely different reasons, had attended the same public school in England. By the winter of 1940, one is a spy, one is an ex International Brigader, the third is a business opportunist and it is interesting to read how their lives and current beliefs were formed during their schooldays.

I found this book an entertaining read. There is plenty of deception and counter-deception and it gives a realistic account of Madrid just 18 months after the end of the civil war.

Poem

The following poem was written by the husband of Carmen Minton who was a maestra in the Ipswich colony:

To Our Basque Children

by Dan Minton

For us who were your parents surrogate
(Bad substitutes for your own mums and dads)
You still remain the charming girls and lads
Who shone like stars in those dark days of hate,
Innocent witnesses of a grim state
Of strife between contending "goods" and
"bads";
Men differ still on what is right, what adds
To human good: may they choose calm debate!
From chaos under canvas at Eastleigh
You moved to cosier camp at Wherstead Park,
For most of us the place where we first met;
Soon you were dancing in Room Twenty Three
Soon you were up to every kind of lark:
Let us recall the joys – the tears forget!

Obituaries

We very much regret to announce the deaths of the following:

- Ignacio Gómez
- Dolores Gómez Sobrino
- Octavio Casado
- Espe López
- Carito Rodríguez



From left: Niños from the colonies at Margate, Bray Court and Langham.

70th anniversary

In their own words

We thought that this 70th anniversary issue of the Newsletter should contain articles written by the Basque children themselves when they were young for the various papers they produced in the different colonies. These two articles appeared in *Amistad*, the paper they brought out in the early 1940s.

Why we left Spain

by Julio A (*Amistad* No. 15)

On 21 May 1937 we left Spain bound for England, fleeing from Fascism. We had to leave Spain, our Fatherland, and our parents, brothers and friends to escape from the peril that Fascism represents.

We had to leave Spain because though children, Fascism would not respect our lives, because our fathers and our brothers fought against them in an unequal struggle, that even though the world doesn't know it, has not finished yet. We came to England representing the Spanish people and their cause, even if we didn't know it then, for we had to show the English people that the "reds" were not savages and barbarians that Franco's propaganda made them believe. Four years has elapsed since then, and though at the beginning the people thought we were uncivilised, at last we have shown the English people that the difference between Spain and England is not much more than the language, and during this time we have made new friends for the cause of the Spanish people.

Many of those who came with us have returned to Spain, and by the letters they write we know that the work they started here has

not been abandoned, and will never be so, no matter which part of the world we find ourselves in.

Those who returned to Spain, as much as those who today remain in England, are very thankful to the English people and Spaniards in this country for the help they have given us during these four years.

"Why haven't you gone back to Spain?"

by two 16 year-old girls from the Barnet colony (*Amistad* No. 1)

A great many English people do not know the real cause which keeps us in this country and they want to know why we do not return to our families, now that the war in Spain is over.

But they do not understand that the situation of our country is now in worse conditions than during the period of the war. Because, if during the war we suffered bombardments and lack of food, clothes etc., at least we had the relief of finding ourselves with our families.

Now there is an even greater lack of things in Spain, and moreover we find ourselves separated from our families, for many of them are dead, others are prisoners and there are many who are themselves refugees in France.

It would be horrible now to return to Spain and find ourselves alone and without help of any kind. But we are full of confidence in the English people who up to now have helped us so much, and we sincerely hope they will continue to help us as in the past, and help us to carry our heavy burden of unhappiness as easily as possible.

Our own wish is that the day will soon arrive when all we refugees will be able to return to our countries, and that the time of wars will be ended.

Goodbye...

These farewells, both expressed by those who are going back to Spain and by those who are staying in Britain, were written in the Cambria

House Journal, the paper produced by the Caerleon colony, in the June 1939 issue.

...by one who is going

After spending two years of happiness and comradeship in Britain, two years during which we have been separated from our parents by this horrible war, a few days ago we had the sad news that 17 of us were to leave on the 21st of this month (May).

It is a great joy to go back to our parents, but it is a sad thing to have to part after living together like brothers and sisters for two years.

Still, however far away I may be, I shall never forget the friends I am leaving behind in Britain.

In the name of the 17 of us who are going away, I want to say Goodbye, and thank you for your hospitality. I want especially to thank the Welsh miners for the great help they have given us.

So, Goodbye, and thank you for all you have done.

...by some of those who are staying

● What a joy to the children to see their parents! I envy them because they can say "We are going to Spain", but I am sorry for them because they are going to territory governed by Franco. That is a horrible thing to think of... I cannot write any more, when I think that two happy years have gone by, without our thinking that such a sad day would come. We thought we should all be able to go back together to a free Spain.

● Our friends are glad that they are going back to their loved ones, their parents and their brothers and sisters, but they are sorry they are not going back to our Spain, and also they are sorry to part with these good people who have been so kind to us.

● This and the occasion when we said Goodbye to our parents are the two saddest farewells in my life, and by a coincidence the two days are exactly two years apart.

● Those of us who remain behind do not know where we shall go. There are some of us who cannot go back because their parents are in prison. If they went back, they would be destitute and despised...