

## From the Secretary

Five months have passed since we held the very successful 70th Anniversary Commemorative Event at Southampton. It seems that we have needed all that time to recover from the hard work it entailed – we were exhausted! But we can now look back on the event with great satisfaction, in the knowledge that it was an unforgettable day. Even the capricious weather was on our side: the day dawned bright and sunny, and moreover, remained fine.

The programme was full and everything went without a hitch. *Niños* came with their families, wanting them to know about their story; friends and other interested parties came too from all over England. There was a sizeable contingent from Spain, and some came from as far afield as Venezuela, Mexico and Brazil. For name badges, the *niños* were given facsimiles of the hexagonal disks they had had to wear when they arrived as children in 1937, with the correct number. The exhibition of display boards was the focal point at the beginning, as guests met over coffee old friends that they hadn't seen for a long time. Then followed the speeches and the unveiling by the Spanish ambassador Carlos Miranda of the wonderful plaque that Herminio Martínez had designed.

A last minute addition to the programme was a dance group *Kezka Dantza Taldea*, together with two *txistularis* from the Elgoibar band, who lead the assembly to the dining room across the park like the Pied Piper. They danced and played at strategic points in the programme, including after the desert, when they invited *niños* to join them. We were amazed and enchanted by their springiness. Another impromptu event was the erection of

some bell tents and the sign of the children's camp in the park by the scouts, which moved many of the *niños*. After lunch, during the showing of Steve Bowles' re-edited documentary "The Guernica Children", the audience was visibly moved, finding the film disconcertingly heart-rending.

A video was made of the day's events and when it has been copied, it will be available at cost price. All the projects we had planned for 26 May were completed on time: the book "Recuerdos", the CD "Songs of the Basque Children" and the DVD of "The Guernica Children" which is now an hour-long feature documentary. In addition, Adrian Bell produced a second edition of his seminal book "Only For Three Months" which includes much new material.

Another event organised to celebrate the Anniversary was the festival run by Eastleigh Borough Council from 10-13 October entitled "Los Niños de Guernica". The programme was vibrant and exciting and has, again, introduced a whole new audience to the story of the *niños*. You will be able to read all about it in the next Newsletter.

What now for the Association? Various plans are afoot for the future, including a "Viva la República" fiesta with poetry, song and dance in April. Please give us any ideas you might have, and send in contributions for the next Newsletter.

Saludos y agur,

*Natalia Benjamin*

Natalia Benjamin

▶ personas perdieron su familia, su cultura, en muchas ocasiones hasta su lengua. Organizando este día en homenaje a ellos podíamos darles una pequeña alegría."

A las cinco de la tarde, un grupo de cuarenta "niños" hicieron su entrada en la tribuna del hemicycle. El vicepresidente del Parlamento, el socialista Miguel Ángel Martínez, les dio la bienvenida y les presentó como "unos niños que entre 1936 y 1939 salieron huyendo de España, de los bombardeos fascistas, fueron evacuados y encontraron la solidaridad y el cariño de familias en el Reino Unido. Hoy, con más de 75 años todos ellos, han venido a visitar el Parlamento, a estar entre nosotros y creo que es muy importante que les rindamos homenaje a ellos, y sobre todo, a la solidaridad del pueblo británico que les acogió y les dio la familia que se les había negado en su país". Fue este un saludo realmente excepcional, ya que en el Parlamento Europeo únicamente se saluda a las delegaciones oficiales, nunca a las personas individuales.

Los "niños" se reunieron con los eurodiputados españoles Iñigo Mendez de Vigo y Rosa Díez y con el británico Gary Titley. "Quise elaborar un programa lo más ilustrativo posible de la actual pluralidad de Europa", concluyó Alejandro Cercas. "Sólo puedo decir que para mí a sido uno de esos días en que me he sentido orgulloso de ser eurodiputado."

## Remembering the International Brigades

by Marlene Sidaway

The annual commemoration at the International Brigade memorial in Jubilee Gardens, London, was this year particularly moving, with Jack Jones, Life President of the International Brigade Memorial Trust, welcoming the large crowd and IBMT Chair Sam Lesser giving a rousing speech.

Dolores Long, daughter of British Battalion Commander Sam Wild, read the names of all those Brigaders we had lost in the last year and, before the minute's silence, Bernado Fernández laid a wreath on behalf of the Spanish embassy, after which Penny Feiwei and Dolly West laid one on behalf of the Trust.

Roman Márquez, who is one of only three surviving militia men and women who took part in the events in Catalonia and Aragon in 1936, then thanked all those who had volunteered to go to the aid of his country.

He reminded us all how deeply those of his countrymen who were fighting for the Republic valued the sacrifices and bravery of the volunteers, who went to a strange country, knowing little of the language or the dangers, prepared to die for an ideal and to help the Spanish people in their hour of need.

Geoff Cowling, the former British consul-general in Barcelona, spoke of Hitler's bombers who had used the skies of Spain to practise

their later bombardment of Britain and made the point that the last battle of the Spanish Civil War should always be regarded in history as the first of the Second World War.

Finally, singer-songwriter Billy Bragg led the singing of "Jarama" and the "Internationale", the last notes of which rang out over Jubilee Gardens before the rain came down

## Oxford day school

by Colin Carritt

The Director of Studies of Oxford University's Department of Continuing Education, Tom Buchanan, is a leading expert on the Spanish Civil War, so we should not be surprised that, in this 70th anniversary of the evacuation of the Basque children to the UK, he should have run a day school, held on 28 April, on the children and their story.

Buchanan presented a paper on



At the Oxford day school (from left): Tom Buchanan, Herminio Martínez and Helvecia Hidalgo.



Friends reunited at the anniversary lunch in May.

“Government, Politics and Humanitarianism” in which, though he is an objective and analytical historian, there were more than a few glimpses of his partisan sympathies towards the Republic and against the aggressive forces of Franco and his sponsors in Germany and Italy. He was particularly forthright about the shamefully inadequate response of the British Tory government to the catastrophic events at Durango, Guernica, and later Bilbao.

The second session, under the title “Bombing Children”, was by Valentine Cunningham, Professor of English at Oxford University, who was scathing in his contempt for the murderous tactics of Franco’s aerial bombardment of the Basque region. He went on to refer to the mountain of poetry, literature and art concerning events in the region, the most famous being the dramatic representation of the destruction of Guernica by Picasso.

Next it was the turn of two witnesses to the evacuation from Bilbao. First to speak was Helvecia Hildago, who was 14 years old when she set sail on the *Habana* with her two younger siblings bound for Southampton. Her father had died four years before in 1933 but the family were well known as committed socialists and Helvecia’s mother feared for the children’s safety if the Basque region was overrun by the fascists. Although Helvecia understood the necessity of evacuation, her younger brother and sister were desperately homesick and deeply traumatised by the events. All three were transferred to the colony in Carshalton where they slowly adapted to life in Britain.

Eventually, the children were adopted by the Cadbury family and provided with a good standard of living and education. Yet Helvecia said she had never really recovered from the enforced separation from her mother for those eleven crucial years of her life. By the time she was reunited with her mother in 1948, she was a mother in her own right.

The second witness was Herminio Martínez, who was just seven years old when he arrived in Southampton with his brother, Victor. His parents had been poor subsistence farmers herding sheep between Castile and Extremadura and they had arrived in Bilbao seeking work in the iron ore mines.

Both boys were sent to the Swansea colony and then to Tyneside. The local press was hostile and the colony was run on a very strict regime.

But then they were moved to Brampton near Carlisle where he came under the influence of Lady Roberts, the wife of MP Wilfrid Roberts – “a lovely buxom woman with a warm and generous heart”. In December 1939 he was due to be repatriated until it was discovered that his mother had been forced to request his return under duress by the local Nationalist officials aided and abetted by a priest threatening remaining family members with imprisonment.

Finally, Herminio was taken under the wing of a Methodist family in Leicester who were loving and kind.

The last speaker was Adrian Bell who spoke about the “Experience of the Basque Children in Britain”, explaining that the children’s experiences were very varied. There were some 70 colonies. Some were model establishments, well run, generous with their affections, and careful to retain the children’s Basque identity. Others were spartan and either lacking any discipline or harsh and inhospitable.

## Talks given...

● On 15 May, Herminio Martínez gave a talk about the Basque children at the re-opening of the Blackboys Youth Hostel in Sussex. Built in 1937 by Ettore and Antoinette Sommaruga of Poundsley Manor with the help of local people, the hostel catered for twenty-eight children. When the children left,

the hostel continued to cater for travellers, and was finally auctioned in September 2006. It was bought by Sam Type and Nick Sharples from Brighton, who have renovated the dilapidated building and re-opened it to the public.

● On 21 May at Avenue Campus, University of Southampton, distinguished film maker and member of the Association, Steve Bowles, delivered the annual Pérez de Ayala Lecture, established with the generous support of the Cultural Office of the Spanish Embassy. His subject was “The Guernica Children in Britain: a case of humanitarian need versus perceived political expediency.”

● On 5 September, Natalia Benjamin gave a paper on “The Basque Children in Great Britain” at the annual conference of the Association of Iberian and Portuguese Studies held at Oxford Brookes University.

## Anniversary lunch

The annual lunch of the *niños* was organised by Helvecia Hidalgo, helped by Herminio Martínez. This year it was held on 20 May in a restaurant in Bayswater, London, La Maja. About sixty guests came and a good time was had by all.

## Research: Hutton Hall

Peter O’Brien, self-styled “opsimath”, former Head of Department at a Sixth Form College and teacher of French and Spanish, is doing research into the Hutton Hall colony, near Guisborough, which was run by Ruth Pennyman. He says the Basque children were fortunate to land up in a well-run colony, and continues: “It seems to me that for a couple of years in the late 30s there was a movement which generated countless examples of idealism being translated into reality through genuine compassion, endless resourcefulness and sheer doggedness. Hutton Hall was one of these”.