

Report on the event at Homerton College commemorating Leah Manning

held on 20th November 2018

Report by Carmen Kilner

On Tuesday 20th November at Homerton College, Cambridge, there was a commemoration of the life of Leah Manning (née Perrett), who graduated from this college in 1908. The event was part of the year-long celebration the 250th anniversary of the founding of Homerton.

The event in this beautiful college was opened with a short introduction and welcome by the Principal, Prof. Geoff Ward. The talks that followed were introduced by Dr Melanie Keene, one of the key organisers of the event.

Leah Manning's childhood and her significant achievements as an educator; lifelong political and humanitarian activist on behalf of children; and parliamentarian, were discussed by Dr Peter Cunningham. Dr Eneko Axpe then developed the theme of her humanitarian work for the Basque children and her role, together with The Basque Government and the Basque Children's Committee, in their evacuation from Bilbao to Britain in May 1937.

Gotzone Sagardui Goikoetxea, Deputy Mayor of Bilbao spoke representing the people of that town and expressing their thanks to the British people for the reception given to the Basque children from 1937 and during their stay, and how this was a recurring theme amongst all those who returned from the UK.

Aintzane Ezenarro Egurbide, director of Gogora, The Institute of Memory, Conscience and Human Rights, of the Basque Government, introduced a short video which the Institute have produced entitled "Mrs Leah Manning", which can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWnfvVzymj8>.

The room was packed with an interested and engaged audience, amongst them two *niños de la guerra* - Ma Luisa Toole and Herminio Martínez and several members of the second generation. The discussion that followed was very animated and wide-reaching with emotional and moving first person accounts by Herminio and Ma Luisa, the latter helped by her son Sean.

At the back of the hall was a small, interesting display marking various aspects of Leah Manning's life including her Red Cross certificate VAD nurse (Voluntary Aid Detachment) in World War 1.

There followed a reception when Prof Ward, Principal of Homerton College, unveiled an inscribed memorial tablet to Leah Manning which at some future point will be set into the wall of a new building in the process of being built.

It was, all in all, a very successful event. Whilst walking along the long corridors of Homerton, usually trying to find my way somewhere, I was pleased to see several works by *niño* Coqué Martínez dotted around, also to hear about others that are in offices and meeting rooms. Several years ago now, Homerton keenly accepted several works by Basque *niño*, Coqué Martínez, and after cleaning and re-framing they are on display so that they can now be enjoyed by a large number of students and staff. Coqué would have been delighted! Some of them can be seen here <https://homerton250.org/curiosity/coque-martinez-collection/>.

The evening's events were recorded by Basque Television and can be seen here – it is a little truncated!

<https://www.eitb.eus/es/noticias/internacional/videos/detalle/6006228/videoleah-manning-mujer-evacuo-4000-ninos-vascos-guerra-civil/>



Standing by the unveiled plaque to commemorate Leah Manning
L-R: Herminio Martínez, Ma Luisa Toole and son Sean, Prof Geoff Ward

As more photos are made available, we will add them to this report.

Carmen Kilner