

Museum of Childhood Ireland Project (MCIProject) exhibition:

Children in War: The Basque Children of '37

Report by Carmen Kilner

It is now time to give you an update on this exhibition has been organised jointly by MCI Project and the BCA'37 UK, and is currently entering the third month of its one year tour of Ireland.

Thursday 18 July 2019

We started with a grand opening in Dublin at Europe House, home to Ireland's European Commission, where the first viewing was accompanied by cheese and wine (a good Rioja, of course!). The event was well attended with many highly interested people amongst which were the ex-taoiseach Bertie Ahern and the director of the *Instituto Cervantes de Dublín*, Victor Andresco. All came because of the Basque Children's story; all led to some animated discussions that we had to bring to an end so that we could show Steve Bowles' documentary "The Guernica Children".

As always, this very moving film provoked strong emotions and provided the subject for the subsequent Q&A session where the invited panel consisted of Drs Stewart Reddin of University College Dublin, Gisela Holfter of the University of Limerick, Adrian Bell author of *Only for Three Months* and me.

Stewart Reddin spoke about his research of a Basque family that fled to Ireland during the Spanish Civil War and made their lives there, becoming Irish Citizens; this provided a fascinating counterpart to the story of the Basque Children in the UK.

Similarly engaging was the intervention by Gisela Holfter whose areas of expertise include "Exile Studies" and particularly "German exiles to Ireland". She pointed out that both the bombing of Guernica in April 1937 and Kristallnacht in November 1938 acted as the catalysts for the subsequent evacuations of children to UK from Spain and Germany.

Adrian spoke about the Basque children's acceptance, or not, by the British Government and the problems associated with the varying standards of care at the 'colonies' depending, as they did, on local interest, support and experience. I spoke about our association.

There was a lively Q&A session that had regretfully to be drawn to a close.

Such was the interest and enthusiasm of all those attending that we are minded to hold some closing event in Dublin in July next year - I would certainly be delighted to return to this beautiful and hospitable city!

Our new exhibition

This consists of a semi-permanent set of connected panels that can be dismantled and transported from one site to another - giving essentially the same exhibition at each site. The equipment and printing costs and Courier services for this exhibition were generously funded by monies raised by the Museum of Childhood Ireland Project.

The exhibition continued in Europe House, Dublin for a month until it was moved to Cork where it exhibited from 17th - 30th August at Cork City Library as part of their Heritage Week 2019. It continued its peripatetic journey to spend another successful fortnight, this time at Limerick City Library (31st August - 16th September), and then on to Galway City Centre Library where it will stay a month until mid October. From there it continues to tour Ireland: Leitrim; Derry; Belfast; Warrenpoint; Drogheda; Offaly; Carlow; Wexford...

Wherever it goes the exhibition raises interest and awareness. I am delighted that this is the case as I had been concerned that interest might be limited as no children were evacuated to Ireland due to the prevailing politics of both the government and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Museum of Childhood Ireland Project wanted to redress this and highlight the plight of the children of Guernica as it is a history not widely known in Ireland. As Ireland did not take any Basque child refugees, the MCI Project started with the question 'Why?' to better understand the political/ historical context and to open/ facilitate discussions and thinking around contemporary issues for refugees, especially children.



L-R: Drs Adrian Bell, Stewart Reddin, Gisela Holfter.



Far right - Victor Andresco, Director del Instituto Cervantes, Dublin



L-R: Ex-taoiseach Bertie Ahern, Carmen Kilner (BCA'37 UK), Majella McAllister (Museum of Childhood Ireland Project)

