

## Nazareth House, Carlisle and Convent of Mercy, Wigton

### Rob David

The Carlisle Nazareth House and Wigton Convent of Mercy received children who had arrived at Carlisle Station on 27 June 1937 and were certainly up and running by 2 July 1937 when the *Carlisle Journal* reported the children's arrival there some days previously.

Miss Quinlan (Ministry of Health inspector) visited these two colonies in August 1937. They differed from Brampton in being run by Roman Catholic sisters who took in the Basque children alongside the orphaned children who already resided there. At Carlisle 14 boys and 11 girls (27 children according to the Generalate Archive - see below) joined the 174 children already in residence, and at Wigton ten girls lived alongside the other 36 children. Each group was accompanied by a Spanish teacher. The Basque children had their own sleeping accommodation, with in each case the Spanish teacher sleeping in a partitioned cubicle at the end of the girls' dormitories. The inspector considered facilities and behaviour were good, and the children's health raised no concerns. Education was provided by the Spanish teachers in rooms set aside as schoolrooms for the Basque children. It seems that the children benefitted from an environment that was already looking after children, and at Wigton it was observed that 'all the children play together and appeared very happy and friendly', while at Carlisle it was said that 'the Basque children enjoy the English food'. Interestingly Lady Roberts visited Wigton, but nothing is said about what she may or may not have learnt about running hostels for children! (TNA: MH57/323).

Independently of the Dalston meeting for financing Brampton the Catholic community in Cumbria was being approached by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lancaster during the autumn of 1937 to support its centres in the diocese which were hosting Basque children, including those at Carlisle and Wigton. In December 1937 the Sisters of Nazareth in Carlisle received a donation of £300 from the Bishop of Lancaster, Bishop Thomas Pearson, which was their 'share of a collection made in the diocese for the Basque children'. This would have been enough to keep the 27 children

for nearly six months. However with the repatriation of many of those housed at these catholic institutions over the winter of 1937-38, this donation would have stretched further and the need for the diocese to raise further substantial sums was reduced, leaving the field clear for Brampton. [\[i\]](#)

In January 1938, 13 children from Nazareth House and 4 from Wigton returned to Spain (Wigton Advertiser, 15 January 1938). I have not found any further mention of either colony.

[\[i\]](#) Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth: Generalate Archive: Carlisle History of the Foundation, FZC/1/3. This contemporary record of events at Carlisle Nazareth House describes the arrival of 27 children on 26 June 1937, an outing to Allonby on 4 August 1937, and the repatriation of many of the children in December 1937 and February 1938, as well as the December donation from the diocese. I am grateful to Christine Hughes, Senior Archivist, for this information. Also to Lorna Mullett for information on Bishop Pearson.