

These notes accompany an exhibition of the *Basque Children of '37 Association: UK*, Shipley Library, June 20-25th 2005
and a public meeting with
Adrian Bell, author of 'Only for three months: the Basque children in exile', at Shipley Library, 7.30pm, Thursday June 23rd

Basque child refugees in Bradford and Keighley, 1937-1939

"They came in May, war-haunted, in fear, hungry and ill-clothed. To-day they are living in some eighty different centres scattered all over the country, supported by the ordinary warm-hearted people of Great Britain. Their health and happiness depends on this practical sympathy."

Basque Children's Committee appeal, 1937

In September 1937, the Dr Barnardo children's home on Manningham Lane, Bradford, and the Morton Banks Sanatorium in East Riddlesden were turned over to voluntary groups to house children from northern Spain. Four thousand had arrived in Southampton in May, in the aftermath of the bombing of Guernica, Durango and other Basque towns by the fascist army of General Franco which eventually overthrew the elected Spanish Republican government in 1939. Twenty children stayed in Bradford. The Morton Banks colony was the largest in Yorkshire, hosting nearly one hundred children.

Both homes closed when they were requisitioned for the Second World War in 1939. By then many of the children had gone to parents in refugee camps in France or back to Spain. Other children stayed in Britain in colonies that remained until after the war, or were 'adopted' by British people.

These notes describe how people around Keighley and Bradford supported child refugees from the Basque country. Most of the evidence is taken from copies of the *Telegraph* and *Argus*. There must be other records of the children staying in this area, such as fund-raising concert programmes, letters or photos. We would like to hear from anyone who can provide us with these archives.



An Exchange of Smiles.—The Mayor and Mayoress of Keighley (Mr. and Mrs. T. Warlie) with some of the young Basque refugees on whose behalf a concert was given at the Morton Banks Methodist Schools last night.
Telegraph and Argus reporter.

The notes on these pages give a flavour of the impact of the Basque children on Bradford and Keighley. They are mainly selected from the Telegraph and Argus which was the daily newspaper of the area then as now. In the Spring of 1937, the Spanish Civil War was the main news almost every day. Some individuals in Britain had already volunteered to fight alongside republican militia in Spain in the International Brigades. The plight of children escaping bombing gave many more people in Britain an opportunity to offer their help. During the summer of 1937 clothes collections supported the children in their first camp in Southampton.

The T&A reported British government refusal of assistance to the children, claiming it would be interference in Spanish affairs. The children's needs became a humanitarian issue supported by individuals from many local organisations.

Nonetheless, local views were divided. The government's attitude did not help the children's case, and occasional unruly behaviour in the first children's colonies was given prominence in the news alongside the fund-raising efforts.

When children arrived in Bradford and Keighley, however, they became the focus of more helpful reporting. Their language, songs, interest in sport and attendance at local schools were all covered positively. Children were 'adopted' by local individuals and organisations who promised to provide ten shillings (50p) a week for their upkeep, and treats on birthdays. Two of the children were adopted by a youth club organised at the T&A itself.

The children made friends at local schools. Some went to Bradford Belle Vue Girls School. They are remembered from outings with the Clarion Cycling Club, and from playing in Lister Park. Their homes employed a matron, but were also cleaned and looked after by volunteers. Others offered services of dentistry, boxing, and interpreting.

Newspaper reports do not tell the whole story. To the happy photographs must be added the worry, heartache and no doubt misery of children away from their homes (paralleling the Kindertransport and British child evacuees). There were surely many other unsung fund-raisers and supporters.

May 27th 1937. After her appeal to make clothes for the Basque children, **Mrs Margery South** received support from two working class women and the sewing circle from **Greenfield Congregational Church**.

June 12th 1937 **Bradford Labour Party Women's Section** raised £11 from door to door collections, a whist drive and flower sale, to be given to "the committee responsible for the maintenance of the 4000 refugee children resident near Southampton."

June 16th 1937 **Mrs Marjorie South** of Bradford Women's Committee for Aiding Spanish Refugee Children reported that 250 yards of donated material had been used to make seventy garments for the refugee children by girls of Bradford Grammar School and Bolling High School, and women from Eldon Terrace Women's Home.

June 16th 1937 **Sir Eugene Ramsden**, Conservative MP for Bradford North, sent tents to Southampton.

July 3rd 1937 Reader's letters reveal contrary attitudes. **Constance Hill** of Shipley says: "The Spanish children now in England are innocent victims of a war which was not of their seeking. Only a warped judgement would describe as impudent the attempt to feed and clothe these children until such time as they may be able to return to Spain. All too often the plea that "charity begins at home" serves as a cloak for uncharitableness. It is a sad commentary on any man's outlook that he can put national boundaries to his compassion" .

Harold Duce of Lapage Street, Bradford, writes: " This sloppy sentimentalism on behalf of foreigners makes one wonder what has come over the nation. Can it be that association with the hordes of foreigners now swarming this country has caused that peculiar mentality?"



Basque children, refugees from Spain, who are being cared for at Morion Banks, among the spectators at the Keighley v. Bramley football match at Lawkholme on Saturday. "Telegraph and Argus" copyright

September 13th 1937. Twenty Basque children arrive that night in Bradford and will be housed at the old Dr Barnardo's Home in Manningham Lane, which has been loaned free of rent and equipped to receive the children. The refugees are from seven to ten years old and two señoritas are accompanying them as teachers. Language teachers from the Grammar School and Belle Vue School will also act as interpreters. Mrs **Isabel Davison** of Leeds helping as matron. Meetings about finances with **Mr CRM Bentley** of Bradford.

September 14th 1937. Children include **Petra Rodrigues, Esperanza Caceres, Gregoria Agreela, Luzdivina Antolin, Balbina Currabillaz, Carmen Agreda, Josata Gomez.**

September 24th 1937. Keighley volunteers prepare a Hospital Board sanatorium at Morton Banks, to house 100 Basque children up to age 14.



There is a house for the staff, two long one-storey buildings which can be separated to form four wards, and these will be devoted to sleeping accommodation. Not far away is another one-storey building for use as a dining hall in the day time and for recreational purposes during the evening, and there is another which will be used as a school where the children will receive lessons from a Spanish teacher, who is being supplied by the Central Committee.

October 1st 1937. **Luis Bersaluce**, Morton Banks camp chef, is to marry **Maria Allende**, assistant cook. News of honorary posts: **Dr Cocker** as 'M.O.' and **Mr Sutcliffe Ramsden of Keighley** as dentist.

October 14th 1937. **Bradford Trades Council Executive** "decided to circulate with agendas copies of an appeal by the Bradford Committee for the Basque children".

November 10th 1937. A whist drive organised by **Mrs Hoyle** of the **Girlington Women's Liberal Association**, was held yesterday, in aid of the Basque children in Bradford.

October 28th 1937. **St Mark's Church, Manningham** holds party for Basque children.

15th October 1937, Telegraph and Argus columnist

BASQUE CHILDREN'S "COURT."

THE Basque children at Morton Banks camp are creating a favourable impression in the Keighley district by their good manners. From the moment of their arrival they appear to have set themselves out to convince the public that they are better than they have been "painted" in some quarters.

At all events, the Morton Banks camp is a pattern in the way of orderliness, discipline, and a cheerful compliance with the orders of the day. There are, as might be expected, minor breaches of the regulations occasionally, and it is interesting to note how the offenders are dealt with.

The children have formed their own "Court of Justice." They have selected from among themselves a "Court president," and they have their own officers. Every boy or girl who offends the disciplinary code of the camp is summoned before the "court," and if after a trial the verdict is one of "Guilty," then the punishment takes the form of depriving the culprit of something he fancies—perhaps his favourite piece of sweet cake, or some other eatable. Whatever the "sentence" is, it is duly carried out.

October 27th 1937. **Alicia and Araceli Morales**, nine-year old twin girls adopted by the Bradford T&A 'Nignog club'. They are the first of the Basque children in the care of the Bradford Basque Committee to be adopted.



November 12th 1937. National and local news of first group of children to return. Some children in tears; "They are more afraid of Franco's rule than they were of Franco's bombs" said Leah Manning. The **Rev Balmer** said: "Only six out of ninety are returning from Keighley; four out of twenty at Bradford; one out of twenty-five at Leeds."

November 30th 1937. Four Basque girls sang at the annual dinner of the **Bradford South Division Women's Liberal association**, which adopted one girl for a year. "After singing in Spanish, they sang "Sweet and low" in English. Their English pronunciation was quaint but creditable, and it greatly delighted the company."

December 7th 1937. A considerable number of local grocers are working together with the refugee aid in Bingley, displaying special boxes for people to donate goods for Spain before Christmas.

January 7th 1938. In accordance with Spanish custom, the young Basques who are being cared for in Bradford had a festive day, culminating in a party in celebration of the feast of the Epiphany.



December 15th 1937. **Bolling School** magazine report of Xmas Party for Basque children, "Our mutual inability to understand each other's language caused much amusement and the willing interpreter was in great demand. The guests each received a present from the Christmas tree."



(From Bolling School Log for December 15th 1937)

<u>COUNCIL MEETING.</u>		20th OCTOBER, 1938.	18
Textile Hall, Bradford.		Mr K. ATKINSON in the chair.	54284/13
BRADFORD BASQUE CHILDREN'S HOME	Miss M. A. Jordan appealed to delegates to assist in raising money for the upkeep of the Bradford Basque Children's Home, and urged delegates through their shop stewards to make regular collections for this object.		

October 1938. At **Bradford Trades Council**. **Miss J A Jordan** appealed to delegates for the upkeep of the Bradford Basque Children's Home. The same meeting discussed support for refugees from Czechoslovakia.

Thanks to: Bradford Central Library, including the help of Helen Broadhead, Susan Cayton and Paula Truman; West Yorkshire Archive Service at Canal Road Bradford, including the help of Tish Lawson (Bolling School and Trades Council records); the Telegraph and Argus for permission to reproduce their material (all photos in these notes are from the T&A); library research by Len Collett, Merle Collett and Anton Grizzle; helpful comments from Myna Trustram and Natalia Benjamin; and especially the Bradford Immigration & Asylum Support & Advice Network (BIASAN) for funds to extend the exhibition and bring it to Refugee Week in Bradford.

Notes researched and compiled by Ludi Simpson

More information about the Basque Refugee children in Britain:

Basque Children of '37 Association: UK, www.spanishrefugees-basquechildren.org. Membership £10, provides a newsletter, educational and social events. Secretary: Natalia Benjamin, 8 Hernes Road, Oxford OX2 7PU. n.benjamin@ntlworld.com

Only for three months: the Basque children in exile by Adrian Bell, Mousehold Press, 1996, £6.95, ISBN 1-874739-05-6

Can you help find information about the Basque children in Bradford and Keighley?

- Do you know any of those involved? Can you find any records, photographs, advertising or any other material related to the children or the support they were given in Bradford and Keighley? Or do you have personal memories of them?
- Copies of the Telegraph and Argus held in Bradford Central Library have more information: we have only looked up to January 1938.

The *Basque Children of '37 Association: UK* would like to hear from you!