

by Martin Murphy

Gavin Henderson, the second Lord Faringdon, was a surprising supporter of the Spanish Republican cause. Educated at Eton and Oxford University, he was in his youth one of the “bright young things” later made famous in the works of his contemporary, Evelyn Waugh. But by the time he inherited his millionaire grandfather’s title in 1934, he had become an active member of the Labour Party and a pacifist. At the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, he went out to Aragón to serve in a field hospital, and back in Britain did much to publicise the struggle.

Lord Faringdon found himself the owner of Buscot Park, a mansion and an estate between Faringdon and Lechlade in Oxfordshire. Early in 1938, Poppy Vulliamy – a lady who never took no for an answer – suggested that he might find room for a group of Basque boys in her care. After a cold winter, first at Great Yarmouth, later at Tythrop Park near Thame, they were homeless. Lord Faringdon offered them a lodge beside the lake on his estate, and there they arrived in March 1938. It was in some ways an idyllic spot, but the living conditions were spartan, and the older boys – city lads, old beyond their years, who had shouldered men’s responsibilities under siege conditions – did not take easily to their new status as “children”, or to institutional life in isolated rural surroundings.

One of these boys was José Sobrino Riaño, the 15-year old son of a Bilbao foundry-worker – a boy still remembered for his exceptional intelligence and force of character. Within only two or three weeks of arrival he became seriously ill and was removed to the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford, where he died on 31 March. His companions attended his burial at Rose Hill cemetery, Oxford, on 23 April.

The circumstances of this tragic event were recorded, unforgettably, in Luis Cernuda’s poem “Elegía a un Muchacho Vasco, Muerto en Inglaterra”. Cernuda, stranded in England by the war, had joined the colony at Eaton Hastings as a teacher some time in March. Surviving *niños vascos* cannot remember him, but he must have made an impression on José Sobrino, because when the boy was

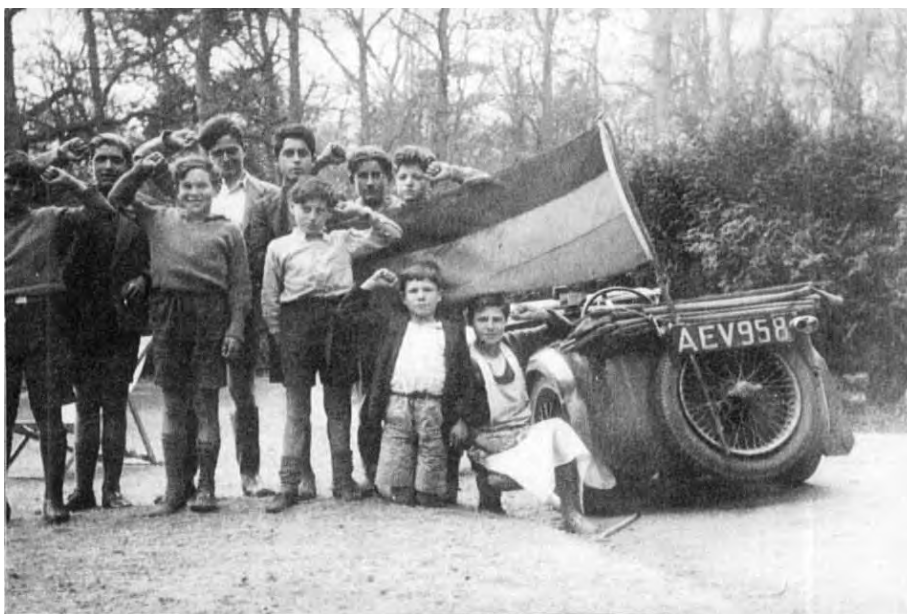


Arturo Barea.



Luis Cernuda.

The exiles of Eaton Hastings



Some of the *niños* at Buscot Park with a Spanish Republican flag.

dying, he asked to see “Señor Cernuda”, and to hear him read a poem. Then the boy turned his face to the wall, to spare his visitor the pain of seeing him die. All this is told in the poem:

*Volviste la cara contra el muro
Con el gesto de un niño que temiese
Mostrar fragilidad en su deseo.*

The experience affected Cernuda so deeply that he could not return to the colony.

In 1939 the boys still remaining at Eaton Hastings moved to Shipton-under-

Wychwood, and their place at Basque House (as the lodge by the lake is still called) was taken by a small group of adult refugees, mainly Catalans. They included the poet Domènec Perramón, the journalist Eduardo de Ortañon, Fermín Vergés, and another poet – Castilian by birth and Andalusian by adoption: Pedro Garfías. Born in Salamanca in 1901, Garfías became a poet and a communist early in life, and made his name as the author of a volume entitled “Héroes del Sur”. With the gift for poetry

went an addiction to the bottle, which made him a genial but quite unemployable companion. His friend Giner de los Ríos later wrote: “A Pedro, el alcohol le daba bondad y hondura. Él, hablando en estado de embriaguez, representaba el hombre sano y honrado que todos hubiéramos querido ser.” Garfías spoke no English, but according to the legend later embroidered by Pablo Neruda, struck

up a friendship at Eaton Hastings with the landlord of the local inn. Long after closing time the two soulmates would pour out their feelings, each in a language unintelligible to the other, and yet communicating with the heart.

In his few short months in the English countryside, Garfías produced what Damaso Alonso once described as “el mejor libro poemático del destierro”, the long poem “Primavera en Eaton Hastings”. In it, past and present continually dissolve into each other. The green lawns and trees of Buscot Park are transformed into the landscape of “mi blanca Andalucía”. Gradually the melancholy nostalgia of the early verse gives way to grief and anger:

*Solo en medio de un pueblo que duerme
en esta noche*

Yo he de gritar mi llanto.

England inspired Garfías not because of what it was, but because of what it was not. Later in 1939 Garfías and his companions left England for a new life in Mexico.

Eight years later Lord Faringdon offered a home to the last of the exiles, Arturo Barea, who spent the final 10 years of his life (1947-1957) at Middle Lodge, down the road from Basque House. By that time, Barea had published his masterpiece, the trilogy “The Forge”, “The Track” and “The Clash” which wove his own life story into the story of Spain in the Twenties and Thirties. The book achieved tremendous success everywhere except in Spain, where it was not published until 1978.

But Barea was also famous in Latin America for the talks he broadcast for the BBC South American Service every week from 1940 until the year of his death. He set himself to be the interpreter of the English character and way of life, and to do this by means of anecdotes: “Cuentecillos de mi Pueblo”. Modern critics might find the picture he paints to be a little rosy, but Barea was an idealist, and he felt profoundly grateful to England for having given him a home, in which he was able to produce his best work.

Of the three writers of Eaton Hastings, he was the only one who put down roots, and so it is fitting that he lies in English ground in the cemetery at Faringdon.

Further reading

● Rafael Martínez Nadal, “Españoles en la Gran Bretaña. Luis Cernuda, el Hombre y sus Temas”, Madrid: Hiperión, 1983

● Arturo Barea, “Palabras Recobradas: textos inéditos”, ed. Nigel Townson. Madrid: Debates, 2002

● Pedro Garfías, “Primavera en Eaton Hastings”, ed J M Barrera. Málaga: Lopez, 1994.

of the dictatorship or when Franco died. It was moving to see how these exiles in far-flung places like Mexico and the Soviet Union maintained Spanish communities and customs. Congratulations must go to everyone in the UK for ensuring that the story of the *niños* who came to Britain, along with plenty of photos and artefacts, has a prominent place among the displays. An excellent book accompanies the exhibition though, like the exhibition itself, it is only in Spanish.”

Tree of Guernica



The Tree of Guernica, symbol of Basque freedom and sovereignty, has died. The high temperatures recorded last summer finished off the old oak tree, which had been ailing since 1970. Only the

intensive care provided by the specialists since it had been discovered that the tree was seriously affected by the yellow mushroom fungus had enabled them to prolong the life of the ancient tree. This spring, however, seeing that its leaves had not begun to sprout, the specialists certified its death.

The 146 year-old oak was the third known Tree of Guernica, in a tradition going back to the Middle Ages. Beneath its boughs, successive kings of Spain have had to swear to respect the special rights of the Basque people and all the Lehendakaris have had to take their oaths of office. The Assembly House still preserves the fossilised trunk of the tree's predecessor, known as *El Viejo*, that lived from 1742 to 1892. Moreover, there are records of another, previous tree called *El Padre*, which is said to have lived for 450 years.

The tree will be replaced by one of its 15-year-old offsprings, which is planted in one of the special nurseries belonging to the Provincial Council of Vizcaya. It will occupy the same place as its predecessor, that is, in front of the oath-swearing stand at the entrance to the Assembly House, but it will not be planted until the beginning of next year. Before this, it will be necessary to replace the earth contaminated by the fungi, install a drainage system and provide the new tree with more space.

Wales and the Civil War

by Alan Warren

Glamorgan University at Pontypridd hosted a Day School on Saturday 31 July 2004 to

publicise Professor Rob Stradling's new book “The Dragon's Dearest Cause: Wales and the Spanish Civil War”.

Those present were privileged to listen to Hywel Francis MP and Professor Stradling debate the matter of Wales and the Spanish Civil War to an audience of approximately 25 people, chaired by Dr Keith Davies from the University of Glamorgan.

The participants engaged in a question and answer session after the debate, which for some strange reason, seemed to focus more on the Irish and the Spanish Civil War than the Welsh!

Professor Stradling's position concerning the role of Frank Thomas in the Spanish Foreign Legion on the Nationalist side is well known, and his more recent work concerned the activities of O'Duffy's Blueshirts on the side of Franco and that of Frank Ryan on the Republican side with fellow Irishmen serving with the International Brigades.

The recent inauguration of the Waterford Memorial to International Brigaders caused Professor Stradling to question why a memorial to O'Duffy's Blueshirts was not present in Ireland. This started a discussion from the floor on the Irish situation, and provided an interesting session.

Rob Stradling's new book “The Dragon's Dearest Cause: Wales and the Spanish Civil War” will be published by the University of Wales press in August 2004, price as yet undetermined.

Overseas Basque benefits

The Basque government has recently approved a set of benefits aimed at Basque people living abroad who are going through times of extreme economic need. The aim of this initiative is to provide welfare benefits and protection to those Basques who live outside the Basque Autonomous Region and in this way meet one of the commitments that appear in the act regulating relations between Basque institutions and Basque groups in centres overseas.

It was precisely to find out more about the socio-economic situation of these Basques and to draw up a list of potential recipients of social benefits that the Basque government sent out a survey to a total of 25,000 people, to which around 12,800 replied. According to the results of this survey, around 2,000 Basques said they were living in extreme conditions with incomes of under 100 dollars.

The survey results show that there are several reasons why people have reached this situation: monetary swings and economic problems in some Latin American countries, as well as age, lack of financial resources, health crises and accidental incapacitation.