



● Wednesday 17 May: Closing of the colloquium.

You are welcome to attend any of the events. Times are provisional, so for more detailed information nearer the time, please telephone Natalia on 01865 459744 or alternatively, telephone the school on 0208 9692664.

## For your diary:

**1 July** – Exhibition of our display boards at the Spanish Civil War event, Festival of Socialism, Wortley Hall, near Sheffield.

**15 July** – Commemoration ceremony at 1pm at Jubilee Gardens, South Bank, London, to honour the International Brigaders.

**23 November** – The Universities of St Andrews and Stirling are holding a joint event on the Spanish Civil War at the National Library of Edinburgh, where there will be an exhibition of our display boards.

## Blue plaques

We are hoping to be able to erect a blue plaque at Elm Trees, one of the Hull colonies. We are very grateful for the work that the late Rob Wardle did writing to the relevant authorities and are now looking for sources of funding.

## Reviews

### Radio waves

*The Basque Children of '37. Written and produced by Simon Evans, narrated by Michael Portillo. Broadcast on Radio 4 at 8pm on 7 November 2005. Reviewed by Martin Murphy:*

This programme tells a story which is familiar to all the members of our Association but is still largely unknown to the public at large. Simon Evans, the producer, has served history well by recording for posterity the voices of some of those survivors who as children seventy years ago lived through the experience of siege, evacuation and exile. The voices include those of Koke Martínez, Bene González, Flori Díaz, Mercedes Porras, Mari Sanz, Herminio Martínez and Miguel San Sebastián, all of whom recall the past with dignity, restraint and even humour. Within the time limits allowed him, Simon Evans has produced a fair and moving record.

The narrator, Michael Portillo, begins by describing the scene in the Oxfordshire village of Aston in July 2003 when a group of

veterans were reunited at their former colony for the unveiling of a plaque on the house where his mother worked as a volunteer. But he goes on to set this little colony in the much wider political context of its time, against a background of shifting government policy and volatile public opinion. It is a surprise to learn that opposition to the evacuation of the children from Bilbao was not confined to bureaucrats and British supporters of Franco: a representative of the Save the Children Fund, Mr Golden, declared that he would rather see the children “die in their own land than rot slowly in England, where they would deteriorate physically, mentally and morally”. Mr Golden underestimated the resilience of children in general, and these children in particular.

The witnesses we hear include not just the evacuees but also some of those who remained behind in Bilbao and some who returned there in 1939 to endure the grim aftermath of the war. In Britain the children became pawns in a propaganda battle. Franco was emerging as the victor, and the Conservative government was anxious to ensure that he remained neutral in the coming conflict with the Axis powers. The continuing presence of the refugee children in Britain was an embarrassment to these appeasers. As early as August 1937 a Spanish Children's Repatriation Committee was formed in opposition to the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, and one of its leading members, Arnold Wilson, the Conservative MP for Hitchin, argued in a letter to *The Times* that there was no need for the children to remain in Britain now that the situation in Bilbao was “completely normal”. Some of the interviewees in this programme tell how they returned at the supposed request of their parents, only to find that no such request had been made. The campaign in Britain for the children's return was backed by some sections of the Catholic press here, perhaps as a result of pressure from the Vatican, which recognised the Franco régime in August 1937. But as Wilfrid Roberts acknowledged, this attitude was not universally shared by the Catholic community in this country. The fact that 400 children were able to remain in Britain was due to the persistent and courageous advocacy of Roberts and his colleagues.

## Testimonies

*Hijos de la Guerra: testimonios y recuerdos by Jorge M Reverte and Socorro Thomas.*

**Reviewed by Natalia Benjamin:**

This is not a story of the Spanish Civil War, rather a book of the testimonies of different people who were children at the start of the conflict. Coming from all parts of Spain, it mattered little which side their parents were

on, each one suffered the same dramatic effects that the war indelibly impressed upon them: death, imprisonment, hunger, betrayal. The common denominator was fear. The authors state that their intention is to “transmit the message to the new generations that there is nothing glorious about war, even less so when it is a civil war.”

The authors offer a moving, at times spine-chilling, account by their witnesses. These reflections are recalled today by old men and women who were then between 5 and 12 years old. Some were luckier than others and were able to stay with their parents, others' parents were shot for being “reds” or masons, and those with no relatives had to be looked after by charitable institutions. This is a book that needs to be read: as the authors conclude, it is “una bofetada y un homenaje simultáneos al ser humano.”

## Accounts

Abridged version of accounts for the year ended 30 November 2005 adopted at the Annual General Meeting on 18 March 2006:

	2004	2005
<b>Receipts:</b>		
<i>Subscriptions, donations and book sales:</i>	£1,765	£2,219
<i>Grant from Basque Government:</i>	–	£1,114
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>£1,765</b>	<b>£3,333</b>
<b>Expenditure:</b>		
<i>Blue plaques:</i>	£222	£1,499
<i>Display boards:</i>	£294	£138
<i>Newsletter:</i>	£80	£162
<i>Postage, copying etc:</i>	£496	£929
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>£1092</b>	<b>£2,728</b>
<b>Surplus for the year:</b>	<b>£673</b>	<b>£605</b>
<b>Bank balance:</b>	<b>£739</b>	<b>£1,344</b>

Copies of the audited details may be obtained from the Secretary.

## Obituaries

We very much regret to announce the deaths of the following:

- María Angeles Olozaga
- Rob Wardle
- Luís Sobrino
- Ana María González.