



# INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE MEMORIAL TRUST

Patrons Ken Livingstone  
Prof. Paul Preston

Charity no. 1094928

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## INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE MEMORIAL TRUST

37 Reginald Road, London E7 9HS

Tel/Fax: 020 8555 6674

E-mail: [marlenesidaway@hotmail.com]

President: Jack Jones

Secretary: Marlene Sidaway

Treasurer: Peter Crome

Committee Members: David Marshall, Sam Lesser, Richard Baxell, Rodney Bickerstaffe, Tish Collins, Pauline Fraser, Katie Green

Co-opted Members: Gerry Abrahams, Jim Jump, Dolores Long

The next few months will be very busy, starting of course with the Ebro Battle *Hominaje* in Corbera on 4/5 July. Those who are going should have details enclosed with this newsletter – if not, give me a ring immediately.

The Rt Hon Chris Smith MP will be the speaker at the July meeting (19th) in Jubilee Gardens – see back page. I have booked the restaurant in the Travel Inn just behind the memorial for afterwards, and there should be more space for us all there. Alan Warren will also launch the reprint of the "Book of the XVth Brigade" at the meeting.

Try and support the Landscape Institute's exhibition and workshops (see back page) as whatever happens to Jubilee Gardens will affect our memorial.

The response to Jack's appeal from trade unions has been very good indeed (see page 2) and we have been heartened by their requests for more information about the Trust for younger union members.

To that end, Jim (Jump) has produced leaflets which give full details about the Trust, its aims, objectives, contact and website addresses etc. If you would like some for distribution, please let me know. They will also be available at meetings; as will the copies of Helen Graham's recent Len Crome Memorial Lecture which Peter has had printed.

Geraldine (Gerry) is arranging the AGM in Glasgow on 11 October, with Councillor Charles Gordon. Although the programme isn't finalised yet, it looks like being a great social occasion as well as our AGM, so come and spend a weekend with friends. If you need accommodation overnight, please let Gerry know as soon as possible.

Once again this year, we laid wreaths at the Soviet War Memorial at the Imperial War Museum and the memorial in Jersey on the same day, Liberation Day, 19 May.

Recently we have become aware of two more British veterans of the International Brigade, Jock Stockwell (who now lives in the US) and LC Gibson, and Irish veteran Michael Brennan. If you know of any others who may enjoy being in touch with comrades through the Trust, please tell them, and indeed any others who may be interested in our work.

All good wishes. Salud,

Marlene Sidaway



left to right: Conrad Singer, Jack Edwards, Sam Lesser, Steve Fullarton, Jack Jones, Bernard McKenna, Cyril Sexton, Michael O'Riordan, Bob Doyle and Dave Marshall.

## Rededication of IB memorial at Transport House

On Wednesday 5 March 2003 Brigaders from all over the UK and Ireland celebrated the rededication of the memorial to the International Brigade members of the Transport and General Workers Union when it was unveiled in the foyer of Transport House in London.

The memorial, designed and constructed by Arthur Dooley, is based on his mag-

nificent IB memorial in Glasgow.

Originally unveiled in June 1990 in the International Room at the former union headquarters in Smith Square, it was moved to the TGWU headquarters to Palace Street, and finally after some restoration and a showing at the Imperial War Museum, to its current home at TGWU headquarters in Holborn.

## Second Len Crome Memorial Lecture

A packed audience at the Imperial War Museum heard Dr Helen Graham give the second Len Crome Memorial Lecture on the topic of the return of Republican memory. She began her lecture by focusing on Amparo Baray n, the subject of a book published in 1989 by her son, Ram n Sender. The publication of this book, *A Death in Zamora*, marked the start of the long, slow and painful recuperation of Republican memory, as Dr Graham put it, which has only recently led to widespread demands for reburial and public recognition of Republicans murdered by Franco's death squads.

As one of the foremost historians of the Spanish Civil War and the long period of francoist repression that succeeded it, the audience were prepared for an erudite account by Dr. Graham. They were also treated to an impassioned presentation, which was as much from the heart as from the head. It was particularly fitting that the lecture should have been given by a female historian about a female Republican in view of the date the lecture took place: 8 March, International Women's Day. Copies of the lecture are available to members on request from Dr Peter Crome, IBMT Treasurer.

Pauline Fraser

# Brief notes

## Jack Jones appeal

We are grateful for the support of the following trade unions to Jack Jones appeal for donations:

● NASUWT ● ISTC ● UNIFI ● ASLEF  
● FBU ● T&G ● UNISON ● GMPU  
● BECTU ● GMB ● RMT ● NUJ ● UCATT  
● FDA ● MSF.

## Railwaymen and seamen in Spain

The RMT is hoping to have a memorial to their members who went to Spain. Does anyone know of members of the National Union of Seamen or National Union of Railwaymen who went? If so let me know, or contact Jim Carmody at [jamescarmody@yahoo.co.uk].

## Book exchange

Please don't forget the book exchange if you have Spanish Civil War books and pamphlets etc. and you want to find a home for — there is usually someone else wanting that special title! Contact Christopher Hall at 286, Brantingham Road, Chorlton, Manchester, M21 0QU or [christoff\_hall@yahoo.com].

## Niece of Ralph Fox

Ann Brett-Jones, a niece of RALPH FOX, recently published a very interesting article about him in the Spring Bulletin (No.137) of the Marx Memorial Library if you would like a copy (£1.50 +P.P.) contact Tish Collins at MML, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU. Tel. 020 7253 1485.

## Costa Brava accommodation

If you need accommodation for a group of up to 21 people in Girona, Josep Verdager is offering special rates for members of the IBMT. He has country houses, beautifully converted, in Sils, a

village situated 15 kms from the Costa Brava coast.

La Bella Dona has seven rooms, an average capacity of 14, but could manage up to 21. Normal Price £1,015 (IBMT members: £750) Ca 1 Estrada-1 has six rooms for 13 people, cost £675 (£472) and Ca 1 Estrada-2 has five rooms for 11 people at £675 (£400).

These special prices are from 30 August-31 October, but he has two free weeks in July for which special rates apply.

Contact: [info@masiescatalunya.com]

Website: [www.masiescatalunya.com]

NOTE: Those attending the Ebro *hominaje* may be interested to know there is availability in the week 5-12 July. Also, Ryanair flies into Girona, which is about one hour from Barcelona.

## Clem Becket

David Hallam is writing a book about speedway ace CLEM BECKET who died in the Spanish Civil War. We have had previous enquiries about him, so if you have information about Clem, please contact David at 54 Lightwoods Hill, Smethwick, West Midlands B67 5EB.

## Jock Stockwell

Ulrich Kolbe from Germany, recently returned from New York where he attended the annual reunion of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and Harry Fisher's memorial, is making a documentary/oral history archives project. He interviewed veterans including JOCK STOCKWELL, originally from Scotland, who fought with the British Battalion and now lives in the US. If anyone remembers Jock and would like to get in touch, we'll pass on the correspondence.

## Jack's 90th birthday

Jack's 90th birthday was celebrated in great style, first at the re-dedication of the IB memorial in Transport House and later at a splendid party at the TUC headquarters in Congress House. There were distinguished guests from governments past and present, some of whom Jack had helped start out on their political careers, as well as trades union colleagues and friends. We also celebrated Jack's birthday with a cake especially made with the IB banner on it, at the Len Crome Memorial Lecture on 8 March. The lecture was a great success, with a capacity audience enthralled by Professor. Helen Graham's lecture. Then on 31 March there was a reception at 10 Downing Street and

a dinner hosted by Granada Television which was filmed and shown with a short film, Jack Jones at 90, a montage of his life and times. Clearly, Liverpool and the North West are as proud to have him as a son as we are to have him as our President.

## Websites

● Ciaran Crossey is responsible for the website Ireland and the Spanish Civil War which contains information and links for Irish involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

[http://members.lycos.co.uk/spanishcivilwar]

● ALBA (Abraham Lincoln Battalion veterans) has expanded its website to create educational packages telling the history of aspects of the IB and encouraging its use for students, teachers and the general public — [www.alba-valb.org] then click on Education, then For Your Liberty and Ours. One completed online package is Jewish Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. Others planned include Posters of the SCW, Women during the SCW, African Americans in the SCW. We were asked if we wanted to fund a chapter on British volunteers, but the committee agreed the money would be better spent developing our own website.

● Don't forget the lists of sites Bernard Monaghan has collected. Bernard is particularly interested in posters of the Spanish Civil War and has a vast collection. He is willing to collaborate with other Trust members on sites of posters. E-mail: [bernard@monaghan2000.freerve.co.uk].

● Warren & Pell Publishing's website, which contains details about the reprint of Book of XV International Brigade, is [www.warrenandpellpublishing.co.uk].

● John Corcoran has created a website of a recent visit to the battlefield at Jarama with an accompanying text: [www.comms.dcu.ie/sheehan/photos/jarama.htm].

## Michael Cohen

In the Obituaries section of the previous newsletter, I referred to Michael Cohen as a Morning Star photographer. He was in fact the staff photographer of Searchlight magazine. My apologies to Gerry Gable and staff at Searchlight.

Salud,  
Marlene

### IBMT Newsletter

Editor: Geraldine (Gerry) Abrahams

E-mail: [gerry@reelscoop.freerve.co.uk]

Production Coordinator: Jim Jump

E-mail: [jimjump@mac.com]

# President's message

Our annual memorial meeting this year will mark the momentous Battle of the Ebro in which so many of the British and Irish International Brigaders were killed, wounded or captured. It proved to be the last great stand of the government forces against Franco and his allies.

The British and Irish Battalion played a brave and noble part despite the fact that the forces of the Republic suffered from inadequate heavy artillery and airplanes compared with the enemy.

In the early stages of the battle we made considerable progress, taking advantage of the surprise element but the forces against us were massive. In Franco's ranks, men from the Italian army predominated along with vicious Moorish troops and Luftwaffe (German) and Italian air forces.

The temperature was 30° centigrade and over, so much so that our lads in charge of all too few machine guns we had, needed to urinate on their weapons to cool them down!

We had little water to drink and limited rations. On one occasion the mule bringing up a supply on its back fell



down the steep hillside and our much-needed food was lost!

Due to the rough and hilly terrain there was little cover and it was virtually impossible to dig pits or trenches – so there was little defence against the superior enemy artillery and aeroplanes. The shelling and bombing was continuous and relentless as we tried to advance in the early days to try to take Hill 481. We got to the heights but ultimately failed against overwhelming resistance.

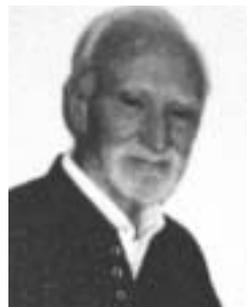
The determination of our forces was considerable and many lives were lost both before and during the attack on hill 481 and later in the Sierra Pandols. In the latter case a number were taken prisoner and very badly treated.

The bravery and commitment demonstrated by the members of the British Battalion then and throughout the war will be remembered at our annual commemoration on July 19th.

Once again we will renew our pledge to “keep green the memory of those who died”.

Salud,  
**Jack Jones**

## Obituaries



### Jim Brannen

JIM BRANNEN (91) of Attleborough, Norfolk, left Manchester for Spain in January 1938 after leaving a note for his mother saying he was going on holiday. He saw action with the British Battalion in Teruel, Calaceite and Gandesa, and famously got lost on one occasion, but found a French Battalion — whose food, he said was wonderful!

While crossing the Ebro in 1938, he was wounded by a stone ricocheting from a rifle shot. The stone was removed by Spanish doctors in the hospital at Matero (now kept by his son) and he was able to take part in the farewell parade in Barcelona in October 1938. During WW2 he was with the Fleet Air Arm and served in the USA, the Pacific, Malaysia and Australia.



### Benny Goldman

BENNY GOLDMAN (86) left Manchester for Spain in 1936. He was the secretary of the YCL's Lancashire branch and was warned by party organiser Mick Jenkins to think carefully before he volunteered; but he felt it was his job, his duty, to go. After three weeks of training he saw fierce fighting holding a bridge over the Jarama river, and with no

cover, many of his comrades were lost. Two weeks later he was wounded in the head, but after some pretty basic first aid, he was back at the front within a week.



### Jack Shaw

JACK SHAW (86) A Jewish lad from East London, he was arrested during the battle of Cable Street, and imprisoned for three months. Later, whilst working in the Merchant Navy, he jumped ship in Alicante and joined the British Battalion in Albacete. He was at the end of the battle of Jarama but saw most action at Villanueva de la Ca ada

and Brunete where he was a runner for Major Jock Cunningham. He was one of the few survivors of the first assault on Mosquito Ridge where the battalion was repulsed, with heavy losses. Owing to his relative youth, he was sent home and returned to London at the end of 1937. During WW2 he was with the Welsh Fusiliers in Burma with the Indian Army.

### Also...

● JIMMY BURNS, a supporter of the International Brigade, has died in Aberdeen at the age of 66, writes *Tommy Campbell*. Glasgow-born Jimmy was instrumental in establishing the 15th International Brigade Memorial Library which is now located at the local trades council office, John Londragan House, at 22a Adelphi, Aberdeen. Jimmy was a committed socialist and anti-fascist. The local May Day Peace, Politics and Poetry event was dedicated in his honour with a selection of International Brigaders poetry read on the evening.

● We were saddened to hear of the deaths of LENA ALEXANDER, widow of the late secretary of the International Brigade Association, Bill Alexander, and SADIE THOMAS, widow of Fred Thomas. Both were great inspirations to their husbands, totally loyal and supportive companions, as well as winning the respect and affection of all who met them.

# Can you help?

## A Morris

● Anthony Richards of Narberth in Pembrokeshire is looking for information about International Brigade volunteer Mr A Morris from Cardigan, Wales, who was killed in Spain. Please write to Anthony at Oaklea, Lampeter Velfrey, Narberth, Pembrokeshire SA67 8TS. Tel: 01834 861044.

## Canadian volunteers

● Eric Ring is a member of the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion and is working on a history of the Canadian volunteers. Has anyone any information on Canadians who served in the British Battalion (or vice-versa)? Please try and help him. He'd also like to try and find out about the numbers of members of the National Unemployed Workers Movement who volunteered for Spain. His maternal grandfather was a NUWM member based in Airdrie and knew several members who fought. Among the 1,546 Canadian volunteers, about one third were members of the Relief Camp Workers Union, which was similar to the NUWM. Eric is coming to the UK in July/August and would like to meet Brigaders, particularly in Scotland, where he will be for most of the time. Contact him at: [eric\_ring@yahoo.ca].

## Andrew EJ Flanagan



● Olga Gascon Flanagan, grand-daughter of Andrew EJ Flanagan (left), real name Edward John Flanagan, who was with the British Battalion, is searching for more information about him. He was born 20 October 1917 in Birmingham and was wounded at Jarama in 1937.

After leaving hospital he married Sagrario Cabanero Valverde on 22 April 1937. He was with the British Battalion on the Aragon front, and was again wounded in the Battle of the Ebro and repatriated to England in December 1938. He died on 25 June 1982 in Birmingham, having spent his last years in St Joseph's Home, Birmingham. Any information please to Olga at [flanagan@menta.net].

## William Brent

● Dave Gibson is trying to find information on William Brent, from Barnsley, who was killed on the Ebro, spring 1938. Dave wants to commemorate William Brent, and others from

Barnsley who went to Spain. He is aware of another volunteer, Tommy Degnam, but would like to hear from anyone with information — or interested to help him commemorate them in their home town. Dave's e-mail is [d.gibson@barnsley.ac.uk] or 33 Western Street, Barnsley S70 2BT. Tel: 01226 205346.

## Alex Harvey

● Ann Bowes would like information about her uncle Alex Harvey who died at Jarama on 12/13 February 1937. Does anyone remember him? He was killed soon after arriving in Spain, so very little is known about him. He was originally from 326 Westmuir Street, Glasgow. Ann's e-mail is: [annbowes@rapidial.co.uk].

## Aid Spain

● Pauline Fraser is interviewing people who helped with the Aid Spain movement and would be interested to hear from anyone who has such recollections. She will also be visiting Wales in early August and intends to see the remaining Brigaders there and visit the memorials. Contact Pauline at [paulfraser@btinternet.com].

## Middlesbrough volunteers

● Alan Dent of 26 Scott Street, Bellfield, NSW 2191, Australia, wants information about volunteers from Middlesbrough in the Spanish Civil War. We can supply him with the names of most of the volunteers, Dave Goodman, John Longstaff, Dave Marshall and Bert Ovendon — also the ones on the plaque at Middlesbrough Town Hall. But perhaps you know more?

## South African involvement

● Marika Muller (Sam Lesser's granddaughter) is researching South African involvement in the Spanish Civil War. If anyone has any information, references or contacts who might be able to help, please contact her at [marika\_muller@hotmail.com] or write/telephone Marlene, who will pass it on.

## Finnish volunteers

● Huuska Veikko is researching Finnish volunteers in the International Brigade. In all, there were 350 Finnish-speaking men who fought in Spain, joining from merchant ships, the Soviet Union, USA and Canada, and they fought with several different battalions — the Lincoln-

Washington, the Mac-Paps, the Scandinavian, the Thlmann, Edgar Andr and the Polish. Huuska is particularly interested in tracing machine-gunner John Viitaniemi/Juho Viitaniemi, born 1911 in Ikaalinen, Finland, emigrated to Canada in 1927, and recruited in 1937. Contact: Veikko Huuska, Marskinkatu 15, 39500 Ikaalinen, Finland or e-mail [veikko.huuska@pt4.tempomol.fi].

## Georgio Tioli

● Vittorio Gabrieli is looking for information about Georgio Tioli, his brother in law, and who died in Barcelona in May 1937, a victim of the feuding between anarchists and communists. George Orwell recalls Tioli as our greatest friend in *Homage to Catalonia*. We know he spent time in England before the war. Does anyone have any information? Contact Vittorio at: Viadi S Domenico L/A, 00153, Rome, Italy.

## Laurie Green

● Laurie Green was a 13-year-old Catholic grammar schoolboy in West Kensington in 1937 when he collected money from his friends for Spain. He and his brothers collected money on their paper rounds and chalked and painted slogans like Bombs on Madrid will mean bombs on London on factory walls. These and other scenes are described in his as yet unpublished autobiography, *The Red Above the Green*.

## Tribute to Harry Fisher

A memorial was held on 4 May for Harry Fisher who died at age 92 shortly after attending the big anti-war demonstration on 22 March 2002.

*Manus O Riordan writes:* The news of Harry's death in struggle came as a great shock. I guess I thought he'd never die. But in so many ways, just like Joe Hill, he has not. There was an Irish-speaking writer from a now-uninhabited island off Ireland's Atlantic Coast who said that the reason why he had written his own memoirs in 1929 was So that I may be alive when I am dead. In like manner, with Comrades, as well as with its forthcoming sequel, our own dear friend and comrade Harry Fisher will indeed remain very much alive. Salud!

The full version of Manus O Riordan's Harry Fisher — an Irish Tribute and a host of other biographical material can be viewed at [www.harryfisher.net].

# Marx Memorial Library

## The International Brigade archive at the MML

After the death of Franco and the progress towards democracy in Spain, the International Brigade Association donated much of its documentary material to the Marx Memorial Library. This has formed the basis of the Spanish Archive, which concentrates on the years from the outbreak of the war in 1936 to the death of Franco in 1975. The first cataloguing was done by Nan Green, Secretary of the IBA, who had served in Spain with the medical units and whose husband, George, died there. Tony Atienza took over the cataloguing in 1984 and in more recent years Antoinette Ansaldo has given her time to this essential task.

Since 1975 the collection has doubled in size, enriched by the gift of numerous personal collections. These are listed in three catalogues

(published in 1986, 1990 and 1994) and we have recently produced a 34-page catalogue just of the books and pamphlets. Each of the catalogues were sent out free to every university and polytechnic in the UK and to specialist libraries abroad. A steady stream of students, researchers and family members have made their way here ever since. As the Heritage Lottery Fund-assisted cataloguing project progresses at the library, records of pamphlets and books will be available online at [www.marxlibrary.net].

Access to the archive is either through membership of an affiliated organisation such as the International Brigade Memorial Trust or university or trade union branch, or by individual membership (£10 per year, £5 for pensioners). Opening hours are Monday to Thursday, 1pm to 6pm, late night Wednesdays to 8pm and Saturday mornings, 10am to 1pm. The Marx Memorial Library is a registered charity.

This central archive covers all aspects of the

anti-fascist war in Spain 1936-39, the Aid Spain movement and the continuing struggle against Franco in the form of letters, roll of honour, dependants aid files, photographs, reports, ephemera, artefacts, pamphlets and books. The archive is also offered as a memorial to the 526 Brigaders from Britain who died in Spain.

Conservation is at the forefront of the library's concern and as an interim measure the pictures are being copied and originals stored separately. All items in the first catalogue are available on microfiche from Mindata Ltd of Bath.

It is important that papers, photographs and books continue to be sent to the library for inclusion in the archive. We strive to keep this as the most comprehensive of its kind, and I appeal to readers with such items to donate them and thus make them available to researchers and future generations.

*Tish Collins, Librarian, Marx Memorial Library,  
37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU*

## Slave Workers' Memorial, Jersey



**Spanish families of slave labourers at the Jersey memorial, including Gary Font (third from left) and Fernando de la Torre (seventh from left).**

This year on 9 May approximately 70 people attended the Slave Workers Memorial to commemorate the 75 Russians, 18 French, 9 Spanish Republicans, 5 Polish and Algerians who were casualties of fascism. An estimated 6,000 foreign workers were transported to Jersey, most in appalling conditions, and forced to build a fortress island under the personal orders of Adolph Hitler. Jersey was liberated on 9 May 1945. Since then the island celebrates its freedom, remembers the past and the price so many paid.

On 16 June 1960, the crew of a Russian timber ship, the *Jarensk*, arrived in Jersey and, on hearing that many of their countrymen had been slave workers there, pooled their money and a plaque was made and inscribed in Russian: Your motherland will never forget you.

Each year members of the Jersey Communist Party the French community, Spanish Republicans who remained here after the occupation, members of the Jewish community and a Russian Attaché from the Embassy in

London have laid flowers at the plaque. The memorial that stands today was built in 1975 with funds from the Public Health Committee, the plaques purchased by the nationalities concerned. The original *Jarensk* plaque is now with the Jersey Heritage Trust.

Francisco Font, one of many who campaigned for the memorial to be built, was first master of ceremonies at Westmount. One of 1,500 Spanish Republicans used as forced labour building fortifications around the island, with other Republicans he faced a nine-month ordeal on the island of Alderney where he witnessed atrocities and brutality. After his death in 1981, the late Norman le Brocq and then Stella Perkins presided over the ceremony. I took over the honour three years ago.

This year, Rob Smith, Joan Brown and Louise Osborne from the UK represented the International Brigade. Also present were Manuel and Juan Moreno and, as he has done for the last 17 years, Fernando de la Torre paid homage to Spanish Republicans. I am grateful to him for the friendships many of us have made.

Regards to all Brigaders and their families. I look forward to seeing you all again at the Jubilee Garden memorial. A special thank you to Marlene for her support.

*Gary Font*

**Individual resistance in Jersey:** According to Bob le Sueur, a high proportion of men of military age had left Jersey before the Germans arrived and were serving in the armed forces. Around 42,000 remained, sometimes outnumbered three to one by Germans. Unified resistance was difficult, but individual resistance was almost universal. The island's head of government, Alexander Cartouche, ordered that all sterling currency in the banks to be stamped so that the Germans could not use it in neutral countries. Young people cut telephone wires and slashed tyres, others helped and hid escaped slave labourers. Others listened to the BBC and distributed the news, an offence punishable by imprisonment.

# Book reviews

## TO MAKE THE PEOPLE SMILE AGAIN: A MEMOIR OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by George Wheeler (Foreword by Jack Jones)  
Zymurgy Publishing, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
Reviewed by Dolly Westshaer

George Wheeler was 24 when he left Battersea for Spain in 1938, fired by a speech made by Aneurin Bevan in Trafalgar Square.

The book covers his reasons for going, his journey, his introduction to the International Brigade, the fighting, and finally his journey to/ imprisonment in the concentration camps of San Pedro de Cardenas and San Sebastian.

As an anti-fascist, George had seen the rise of Mussolini and Hitler, the attack on the legitimate government of Spain and the effect of the non-intervention policies of Western Europe. Like the others who went from Britain (of whom 526 were killed) with around 40,000 from the rest of the world, he saw the need to go and defend democracy, and defend Spain.

He describes the journey through France, the support of the French working class, the horrendous climb over the Pyrenees, the training camps and finally the battlefields. He describes the warm friendships that grew between Brigaders, and the welcome of the Spanish peasants. He fought at the Ebro from July 25 1938, including the fight for Hill 481, until September 1938 when he was captured by the fascists and imprisoned in the concentration camps. He describes graphically the attempts to denigrate and dehumanise the prisoners. When he finally arrived home in April 1939, he was welcomed with the words: Where the hell have you been?

This book is especially important to me because George was taken prisoner and released on the same day as my father, Frank West, and I learnt more about that battle and imprisonment than from my dad. This is not a detailed military account of what happened but the reactions and observations of a young socialist from Battersea. It reveals the loss of his naivety; his anger at the deaths of his comrades, the warmth and generosity of the Spanish people and his class-consciousness. He is still an anti-fascist: I can tell that because I know him.

## TELEGRAM FROM GUERNICA: THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF GEORGE STEER, WAS CORRESPONDENT

by Nick Rankin  
Faber

Reviewed by Paul Preston

Guernica, April 26 1937 was the first time that aerial bombardment wiped out an undefended civilian target. Partly because of Picasso's searing painting, it is remembered as the place where the new and horrific modern warfare came of age. In fact, international awareness of the enormity of what had happened to the sleepy Basque market town owed as much to a Times correspondent as to Picasso. The paper's special envoy with the Republican forces in Bilbao was the 27-year-old South African journalist George Lowther Steer, now the subject of this splendidly readable and often moving biography by Nick Rankin.

Most crucially, he was in Bilbao too on the night of April 26 when news came in that Guernica was burning. With Noel Monks of the Daily Express, Christopher Holme of Reuters and Mathieu Cormon of the Parisian *Ce Soir*, he drove to Guernica. Arriving at 11 pm, Steer stayed until the early hours of the morning of the 27th interviewing survivors. Back in Bilbao, he also spoke with many of the refugees who had reached the capital. His factual dispatch, which appeared on April 28 in *The Times* and the *New York Times*, subdued in tone, has been described as probably the most important report filed by a newsman during the Spanish Civil War. More than any other commentator at the time, Steer not only conveyed a vivid picture of the horror of the atrocity but also demonstrated that

it heralded a new kind of warfare. Organised by the same Colonel von Richthofen who later planned the attacks on France and Poland, the idea was to clog the roads with refugees and thereby create havoc for the retreating Basque Army. Steer sensed it was a practice run for something sinister.

Steer stayed in Euskadi through the Francoist advance on Bilbao and the Basque retreat westwards into Santander. At the end of June, he went to Paris and rapidly wrote *The Tree of Gernika*, and dedicated it to Margarita snatched away. As Rankin, with deft quotations, demonstrates, it was beautifully and incisively written, a moving defence of Basque nationalism and a heart-breaking account of the reasons for its defeat at the hands of Franco. Thereafter, in the most original and equally gripping part of his book, Rankin follows Steer through several more wars. He worked for the *Daily Telegraph* in Africa, then went to Finland where he covered the Winter War. Rankin portrays a man drawn always to the doomed struggle of small nations facing overwhelming odds. That commitment would lead to full-scale action when Britain became one of those small nations facing invasion. He joined the British Army, was commissioned as an officer in the Intelligence Corps.

In June 1940, on the basis of his previous experience in Addis Ababa during the Italian invasion, he was selected to accompany the Emperor Haile Selassie to the Sudan, as the first step on the road back to Abyssinia. As a staff captain, he worked with the eccentric Colonel Orde Wingate whose column of Sudanese and other irregular troops kept large numbers of Italian troops occupied. In 1943, Steer managed to get himself posted to Burma with the staff of the now Brigadier-General Wingate, who was engaged in a daring guerrilla campaign behind Japanese lines. By the time he was killed, not in action but in an automobile accident, on Christmas Day 1944, Steer had reached the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. A career of courageous crusading journalism truncated when he was just 35 years old, he will be remembered for his own two great books and this worthy tribute by Nick Rankin.

## AN INSPIRING EXAMPLE: The North East of England and the Spanish Civil War

by Don Watson and John Corcoran

This book covers every aspect of the campaigns for Spain in the North East such as the Brigade, the Basque refugee children, and the SS *Linaria*. It uses contemporary press coverage and photographs, together with oral history and interviews with two International Brigade veterans. *Cheques for £6.99 (inc. p&p) to Don Watson, 65 West Bromwich Road, Walsall WS1 3HR.*

*John Corcoran's e-mail is [johngee59@eircom.net] or 64 Lartigue Village, Listowel, Co Kerry, Ireland.*

## SILENCES FROM THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by Jane Duren (Introduction by Paul Preston)

Enithermon Press, £7.95

Reviewed by Martin Green

Jane Duren's father, a musician and composer, fought in the Spanish Civil War with the Republican Army and went into exile after Franco's victory. He met and married her mother in England, and lived in the United States, Cuba, Chile and finally Greece but never returned to his native country. He never talked about his military experience, which is why Jane found it necessary to write a collection of poems that traces his steps through the campaign. Her poem-sequence is, in a sense, a journey in her father's footsteps. Paul Preston's introduction will enable those without knowledge of the Spanish Civil War to get an immediate and compact summary.

# More brief notes



Sol Frankel with his son-in-law Alan at the Republican memorial, Elche.

## Celebrating at Elche

Paco Escudero, historian/journalist and teacher at the University Cardenal Herrera, Elche, Alicante, has written a novel *Pasajero 2058* about his grandfather, chronicling a Spanish youth's participation in the war, his captivity, and his contact, under moving circumstances, with British members of the International Brigade. Now engaged in a factual account of the British participation, he and his colleague, Linda Palfreman, came to interview Brigaders and others, and he arranged a conference and tribute to the International Brigade.

*Linda writes the following:* I would like to take this opportunity to thank Brigader Sol Frankel for his participation in Elche's April celebrations of the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic (14 April 1931). During his stay Sol, accompanied by his son-in-law Alan, was received by the Mayor of Elche and the Socialist Party, which funded the visit. Sol laid a wreath at the local monument dedicated to the Republicans who gave their lives in the defence of this and many other Spanish cities, and was guest of honour at the conference which was an expression of gratitude to all those British men and women who risked their lives in defence of the Republic. Special thanks were also given to comrades George Wheeler and David Marshall for their invaluable collaboration. Salud comrades and many thanks.

## 'Red Bessie' in Edinburgh

American playwright Jack Gilhooley's play *Red Bessie* will feature in this year's Edinburgh

Festival. It tells of Bessie rallying of support for the SCW, persuading two of her cousins to go and fight, one of whom was killed there. She continues to be enamoured with youthful ideals over the next 20 years, despite the McCarthy witch-hunts in America. It's a two-hander, and Bessie and her partner (later husband) sing a great selection of songs woven into the action. The play has been very well received and one reviewer wrote: Through Bessie's storytelling, singing through her tears and laughter, through her very life, a life spent committed to the Party, we learn seminal events in American history.

Brigaders are offered free seats and Trust members are offered reductions, so go along and have a good night, and a sing-along with friends.

Incidentally, if anyone can offer accommodation, or knows of some reasonably priced, please e-mail Jack at [jackgilhooley@comcast.net](mailto:jackgilhooley@comcast.net), or let me know and I'll pass it on. *Red Bessie* is at the Gilded Balloon, South Niddrie Street at 1.15pm-2.15pm daily from 1-25 August.

*Marlene Sidaway*

## Irish memorials

Ciaran Crossey, with the help of Manus O Riordan, has compiled a list of memorials to the International Brigades in Ireland.

- Dublin: Plaque at SIPTU head office in Liberty Hall. Unveiled by Dublin's Lord Mayor, 5 May 1991.
- Achill Island, Co Mayo: Memorial stone for Tommy Patten.
- Kilgarvan, Co Kerry: Plaque to Mick Lehane

at Morley's Bridge. Unveiled by Michael O Riordan, 7 May 1989.

- Belfast: There is a wall mural in the Short Strand area that includes images of Straney and Tumilson.
- Dunmurray, Lisburn: A memorial chalice and paten in the Church of Ireland. In memory of Rev Hilliard. Donated in the 1970s by Joe Boyd, a medic in Spain.
- Waterford: Plaque in ATGWU office.
- Dublin: Plaque in ATGWU office. Unveiled by Jack Jones, 1996.

### Related, but not a memorial for the IB:

- Dublin: Connolly Column, International Brigade, Spain, listed on plaque of sponsors on the James Connolly Memorial at Liberty Hall. Unveiled by President Mary Robinson, 12 May 1996, Connolly's 80th Anniversary.

On the (pro-Franco) *Bandera* side there is one memorial in Ireland:

- Dublin: A plaque on a seat in the Protestant Cathedral, to Sgt Major Gabriel P Lee, died of wounds 20 March 1937. One also exists at a church in Caceres, Spain.

## Reading memorial

Ray Parkes, Chair of Reading International Brigade Memorial Committee, has drawn our attention to the fact that the Reading memorial was erected by the Reading International Brigade Memorial Committee. According to Ray, Reading Borough Council donated the land on which the statue is sited, and gave leave of absence to Eric Stanford, a Reading Borough Council employee, to sculpt the monument. The statue was the product of four years of appeals, hundreds of letters, functions, fund raising events of various kinds — money raised by the committee which received donations from all over Britain, Canada, Spain, and Australia.

## Brigaders from Hull

Robert Wardle's father, also called Robert, was one of eight volunteers honoured in the memorial plaque at the Guildhall in Hull. He was one of the four who never returned, killed in action at Calaceite on 31 March 1938.

The April 2003 issue of *Hull In Print* magazine relates their stories and, Robert, interviewed by Steve Walsh, tells his father's story, from his journey to Spain via Paris to the fateful morning just before dawn at Calaceite when the battalion came face to face with a column of enemy tanks. In the ensuing slaughter at least 100 members of the Republican battalion were killed.

# International Brigade Memorial Trust



A ceremony to honour the 2,100 men and women who left these shores to fight side by side with the Spanish people in their heroic struggle against fascism 1936-39, and to remember the 526 who did not return.

**On Saturday 19 July 2003  
at 1pm  
at the International Brigade  
Memorial  
Jubilee Gardens  
(adjacent to the London Eye)  
London SE1**

Afterwards in the restaurant of the Travel Inn, London County Hall, Belvedere Road London SE1 (just behind the memorial – disabled access available)

Chairman: Jack Jones, President of the IBMT  
Speaker: Rt Hon Chris Smith MP.

NOTE: The Travel Inn has a selection of menus ranging from "a three-course meal for £15, two-courses for £6.50 and an extensive bar menu".

## Designs on Jubilee Gardens

Landscape Architecture South East, the London & South East Branch of the Landscape Institute, is organising an exhibition combined with a series of community workshops to demonstrate good practice in public space design. Jubilee Gardens is to be used as a demonstration site, and it is clearly in our interest to ensure that the area surrounding our memorial is attractive and accessible. We are pleased to have been invited to the Forum and Exhibition in the Bargehouse, Oxo Tower, on the South Bank, from Thursday 11 September to Monday 15 September. Members are also being sought to join the teams of professional landscape architects in the Process-Design Workshops on the weekend of 13/14 September. More details from Matt Davies, SEBLI, 135-139 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3BX or [matt@planet-earth.co.uk].

## International Brigade Memorial Trust AGM Saturday 11 October 2003 Glasgow

This year's Annual General Meeting will take place in Glasgow and we are hoping as many people as possible will attend. The programme is still provisional (full details in next Newsletter) but it promises to be a lively event, starting with the rededication of the magnificent IB memorial overlooking the Clyde. The AGM itself will take place in Glasgow City Chambers followed by a civic reception, a showing of David Leach's film and an evening of music and dance. Please let us know as soon as possible if you intend to stay in Glasgow on the Saturday night since we can arrange reasonably priced accommodation. Glasgow is one hour's flight from any London airport (less from Manchester, Dublin and Cardiff) and prices are very cheap if booked early. The train can also be very reasonable if booked in advance. Helpful websites: [www.ryanair.com], [www.easyjet.com] and [www.thetrainline.com]. For further information, please contact Gerry at 0141 632 3345 (e-mail on page 2) or Marlene (details on front page).