



IBMT Newsletter

www.international-brigades.org.uk

Issue 24 / Autumn 2009

INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE MEMORIAL TRUST

Graeme Robertson/The Guardian



Veterans at the Spanish embassy; seated from left: Thomas Watters, Lou Kenton, Joseph Kahn, Sam Lesser, Penny Feiwei, Jack Edwards and Paddy Cochrane.

We've come home, Brigaders tell ambassador as they receive their Spanish citizenship

¡Hemos llegado a casa!

By Jim Jump

The promise made by the Spanish Republic more than 70 years ago was fulfilled on 9 June when surviving British and Irish International Brigaders were awarded Spanish citizenship.

In an emotionally-charged ceremony at the Spanish embassy in London, the veterans were presented with their Spanish passports by ambassador Carles Casajuana.

There were tears among many onlookers as IBMT Chair Sam Lesser, speaking in fluent Spanish on behalf of the other Brigaders, declared: "Hemos tardado un poco, pero creo que hoy podemos decir que hemos llegado a casa." ("We're a little late, but today I believe we can say that we have come home.")

Ambassador Casajuana made it clear that

the honour being bestowed on the veterans was a token of appreciation for all the 2,500 volunteers from the British Isles who went to Spain to help the Republic from 1936-39.

"This is an act of recognition, an act of gratitude to a group of extraordinary men and women," he said.

Referring to the defeat of the Republic and to the heavy casualties suffered by the International Brigades, he added: "Your efforts were not in vain. Your ideals are part of the foundations of our democracy in Spain today."

Sam Lesser also recalled the huge sacrifices made by the volunteers, particularly the more than 500 from Britain and Ireland who were killed in Spain. "They lie for ever in the olive groves and in the sun and shade where their blood is mingled in the Spanish earth."

Spanish citizenship was conferred on International Brigaders by the Ley de la Memoria Histórica (Law of Historic Memory), which was passed by the Cortes (Spanish parliament) in October 2007 – though it took more than 18 months for this provision of the act to be put into effect.

There were seven veterans at the embassy in June. An eighth Brigader, Les Gibson, was unable to attend for health reasons. All are now in their 90s or, in the case of Penny Feiwei and Lou Kenton, aged 100.

A Spanish passport was also posthumously awarded to Jack Jones, who died in April, and was presented to his son, Mick.

A decree in 1996 gave all International Brigaders honorary citizenship. However, full citizenship could then only be claimed if they renounced their nationality.

The granting of unconditional Spanish citizenship marks the honouring of a promise to this effect made at the farewell parade of the International Brigades in Barcelona on 28 October 1938 by the Spanish Republican government.

See a video of the event at: [www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2009/jun/10/spain-international-brigade-veterans].

Keeping alive the memory and spirit of the men and women who volunteered to defend democracy in Spain from 1936 to 1939

International Brigade Memorial Trust

www.international-brigades.org.uk

Charity no: 1094928

Patrons: Ken Livingstone and Paul Preston

Chair: Sam Lesser

Secretary: Marlene Sidaway

37 Reginald Road, London E7 9HS

020-8555 6674

secretary@international-brigades.org.uk

Treasurer: Mike Anderson

16 Meadow Way, Heathfield,

East Sussex TN21 8AL

01435-864 978

treasurer@international-brigades.org.uk

Membership Secretary: Mary Greening

2 Woodford Close, Radyr Way,

Cardiff CF5 2PH

029-2019 5412

memsec@international-brigades.org.uk

Other committee members: Mike Arnott, Richard Baxell, Rodney Bickerstaffe, Jack Edwards, Pauline Fraser, Mick Jones, Jim Jump, Dolores Long/Hilary Jones (jobshare), Duncan Longstaff, Manus O'Riordan, Richard Thorpe

Annual membership rates are £15 standard; £7.50 for concessions; £20 family (single household); affiliating organisations by arrangement. Further details and membership forms are available from the Membership Secretary.

IBMT NEWSLETTER

The IBMT Newsletter is published three times a year and is sent free to all members of the IBMT.

Members living overseas can access the current issue by using a password on the IBMT website. Back numbers can be downloaded from the IBMT website on [www.international-brigades.org.uk/newsletter.htm]. For information about receiving the IBMT Newsletter on tape, contact the IBMT Secretary.

Send all items for the next issue to the editor by 24 December 2009 at the latest.

Editor: Jim Jump

6 Stonells Road, London SW11 6HQ

020-7228 6504

editor@international-brigades.org.uk

By Marlene Sidaway

Jack Jones tribute

Unite is organising the tribute to our late President, Jack Jones, on 5 October at the Royal Festival Hall, beginning at 12.30pm. Mick Jones has set aside 100 tickets for the IBMT, so please let me know as soon as possible if you wish to go.

Of course much of the afternoon will concentrate on Jack's career in the union, and it is hoped that the Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, will be among the speakers, but there will also be an opportunity for us to celebrate his life in a less formal manner as we remember his warmth and generosity of spirit and particularly his work for the Trust.

Annual General Meeting

The earlier date chosen for our Jubilee Gardens commemoration seemed to work well and enabled us to be represented at the Durham Miners' Gala, as well as the Tolpuddle Festival.

Mick Jones, Val Warrender and I were at Durham and were really touched by the welcome our banner received, which bodes well for our Annual General Meeting there on 10 October.

David Hopper and the Durham Miners' Association have been very generous and supportive and I'm grateful to them and to all in the North East who are arranging the events for that weekend.

Middlesbrough's Dorman Museum and Teesside University would like to have any letters, photos or other memorabilia about the Teessiders who went to Spain. If you have anything you would like to be preserved in this way, please get in touch with me. Copies would be acceptable if you wish to keep what you have, but it is important that people in that area know about the local volunteers and this is an ideal way to do it.

There are various events planned for the weekend of 9-11 October in Middlesbrough, Durham and Newcastle. See facing page for more details and see the note about letting me know if you need transport.

Exhibition

We had hoped to have our travelling exhibition ready for the AGM. It is all going well, but editing what needs to go in from the vast amount of material available takes time. It has also been

Treasurer Mike Anderson writes:

Members are reminded that their subscriptions for 2010 will be due by the end of January next year.

In 2010 for the first time members will be able to pay their subscriptions by direct debit, which in future will be the Trust's preferred method of payment.

The Trust is changing its bank to enable us to have the benefit of direct debit. Members will be notified of the new banking arrangements in good time to pay their 2010 subscriptions.

decided to increase the number of panels and to push back the deadline until the new year.

The many donations we received when Jack Jones died have been added to those received from unions and individuals in response to his appeal letter for the exhibition and so the exhibition will be dedicated to his memory.

"Goodbye Barcelona"

Judith Johnson and Karl Lewkowicz have written a musical about the Spanish Civil War – "Goodbye Barcelona" – which received its second rehearsed reading at the Arcola Theatre in London at the end of August.

Given by an excellent cast of singers and actors, it has good music and lyrics and tells a truthful and absorbing story. Hopefully it will receive a full production next year.

Secretary

As many of you know, I have been working away from the office on several occasions during the past year, and it was this need to take up work opportunities as they came along that prompted me to indicate that I planned to step down as Secretary this October.

Thanks to Jim Jump and other members of the committee, it has been possible for me to work as an actress and still continue as Secretary, so I shall seek re-election for another year. The Trust has been such a big part of my life for the past 10 years and would be very difficult to give up. I'm very grateful to the wonderful IBMT committee which has enabled me to do both. We still hope to establish an office in central London and, when that happens, we will reconsider arrangements.

Roy Evans



The IBMT banner was on show at the Durham Miners' Gala (above) in July and at the trade union movement's Tolpuddle Festival (right) in Dorset later that month. In Durham, it was carried by Val Warrender (left) and Marlene Sidaway and in Tolpuddle by Jim Jump (left) and Chris Tranchell.





Spanish ambassador Carles Casajuana looks on as Sam Lesser addresses the gathering at the Spanish embassy in London during the ceremony conferring Spanish citizenship on International Brigade veterans.

By Sam Lesser

The presentation of Spanish citizenship to International Brigaders in June was a wonderful gesture of thanks by our Spanish friends for the part played by the volunteers from Britain and many other countries in the fight against Franco.

Although only seven of us could attend the ceremony to receive our Spanish passports, it was made clear by the Spanish ambassador and by the Brigaders themselves that this was an honour that applied to all 2,500 volunteers from the British Isles who went to Spain more than 70 years ago.

It was sad, however, that Jack Jones passed away just a few weeks before the ceremony. Under his guidance, the IBMT made great strides in educating people about the International Brigades.

I was pleased that there were so many

Spaniards at the embassy reception. They were drawn from all parts of the Spanish community in London, including of course those who fled Franco and settled in Britain and who became our comrades in those dark years of the Franco dictatorship. Here was another sign of the international solidarity forged between our two peoples during that tragic civil war and its aftermath.

I was delighted that a few weeks later the ambassador attended our annual commemoration at Jubilee Gardens and laid a wreath. It was a well-attended event and there were many new and young faces in the crowd. With the IBMT's membership continuing to grow, this is hopefully a sign that the role played by the Brigaders and all those who helped the Spanish Republic will continue to be remembered.

It is heartening that so many young people are aware of the fight against fascism last century and aware too that fascism is a danger to which we must still be alert.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Programme for the AGM weekend in Durham

Friday 9 October

● 3pm: Middlesbrough Town Hall; rededication of the International Brigade memorial plaque (see photo and caption on right) and presentation of memorabilia; light refreshments.

● 4.30pm: Coach to Durham.

● 7pm: Film show/evening meal in Durham (details to be confirmed).

Saturday 10 October

The Durham Miners' Association has generously agreed to host our Annual General Meeting at their offices in Durham and the social at a nearby club that evening.

Mick Jones has designed a plaque which will be unveiled at the offices that day and there will also be a symposium on the North East's contribution to the Spanish Civil War, to which members of the general public will be invited.

In view of this, the timetable for the day is as follows:

● 12.30pm-2pm: AGM in the Miners' Hall, Red Hill, Durham DH1 4BD.

Agenda:

- Chair's opening remarks
- Apologies for absence
- Minutes of previous AGM
- Matters arising
- Secretary's report

– Membership Secretary's report

– Treasurer's report

– Election of officers

– Any other business

– Date and place of next AGM

– Chair's closing remarks.

● 2pm-3pm: Lunch.

● 3pm-3.30pm: Unveiling of plaque.

● 3.45pm-6pm: Symposium.

● 7pm-11pm: Social at Nevilles Cross Social Club, South View, Durham DH1 4PJ.

Sunday 11 October

● 11.30am: Coach to Newcastle.

● 12.30pm: Ceremony at the International Brigade memorial, Civic Centre Gardens, Newcastle.

● 1.30pm: Lunch.

Accommodation

● Events Durham coordinates accommodation in Durham's colleges. As it is term-time, there is no budget accommodation, but the following may be available:

– Durham Business School: £55 (single) and £90 (double) per night.

– College of St Hild & St Bede: £45 (single) and £65-£70 (twin) per night.

Contact Charlotte Kerr of Events Durham on 0191-334 2886 or email:



The memorial in Middlesbrough Town Hall was commissioned in 1939 by International Brigade supporters in the town. Carpenter Harold W Bennett carried out most of the work, with the gold lettering done by an International Brigader, Tommy Chivers. The plaque was kept in a private house but was apparently stolen in the 1960s. Amazingly, it was found by a school-teacher in a junk yard in Acton, west London, in 1983. She bought it and donated it to the International Brigade Association. The plaque was eventually unveiled in 1992. The inscription reads: "To defend liberty... They typified the real Britons' hatred of the tyrant; they went to safeguard peace and the arts of peace, that humanity might go forward. They went to help the defenceless Spanish people fight the invading armies. They went to save their loved ones and us from the horrors of fascism. Because they loved peace, they went out to fight – from Teesside."

[charlotte.kerr@durham.ac.uk].

● For hotel and B&B information, contact the Durham Tourist Centre; tel: 0191-384 3720 or email: [touristinfo@durhamcity.gov.uk].

NB: Members requiring transport from Middlesbrough to Durham on Friday or from Durham to Newcastle on Sunday should contact the IBMT Secretary (see details on page 2).

Maybe the British government was right over Spain after all

Let me first say that I'm a very proud IBMT member. The international volunteers who went to Spain to fight against fascism have been my heroes for many many years, for they put their lives on the line for what they (and we) believe in and they were ultimately proved to have correctly analysed the threat that fascism would present.

What troubles me is the prevailing view in various Newsletter articles and in contributions from the floor at IBMT meetings that, by developing and maintaining a policy of non-intervention, the British government and generally speaking the political establishment in the UK were lacking both foresight regarding the fascist threat and also the courage to counter it.

However, the IBMT may be viewing decisions with the benefit of hindsight. In 1936 it was less than 20 years since a generation of Britain's men had been cut down by the First World War and there was a desperate desire both in the political class and the country generally to avoid another European-wide conflagration. At that time it was not clear whether an accommodation could be reached with Hitler: the annexation of Austria and invasion of Czechoslovakia and Poland did not occur until 1938-39 – and only with the latter did the British government finally accept that a war with Germany was inevitable.

The question also needs to be asked whether Britain was militarily strong enough to engage the Third Reich at any period of time sooner than it eventually did. I would suggest not, given that ultimately in the period up to the United States joining the war in 1941, Britain's main achievement (albeit an incredibly inspiring one) was just to survive and ultimately to provide a springboard for the reinvasion of mainland Europe.

So where does this take us? I wonder whether, tragically, Britain's policy of non-intervention was a necessary evil which, whether it was intended as such at the time or not (and there were of course many in the British establishment who favoured Franco), had the consequence of buying Britain the vital time it needed to re-arm. Looked at in this light, can it be said that Spain's democracy was sacrificed for over 40 years so that Britain and Western Europe could ultimately retain their own?

Gary Willis
London

Rightly deserved

News has reached me that the International Brigaders have been presented with the Spanish passports which they so rightly deserve. I want to take this opportunity to express my pleasure at this news and believe that it is a act of true justice.

Carlos Miranda

Spanish ambassador to Nato (formerly the Spanish ambassador in London)
Brussels

Film review was prejudiced

I was disappointed to see the prejudiced and inaccurate review of "Madrid before Hanita" (Issue 23), which I have seen. The review contains serious errors of fact and bigoted anti-Israel views not found in the film. Hanita was not the first kibbutz – founded 1938; that honour goes to Deganiyah in 1910, 28 years earlier!

Whilst it is true that many of the Israeli volunteers were communists, they were also Zionists, otherwise why would these idealistic re-builders of "re-born Israel-in-waiting" have been in Israel in the first place, when there were other countries they could have gone to?

Of course the Zionist left leadership were disquieted that so many fighters should go to Spain in 1936; Israel was in the midst of a terror campaign being waged against it from the Arab population and leaving was a real security risk, but it was a risk taken anyway, based on the sound Zionist principle of helping a threatened democracy! Neither is it true that the volunteers were criticised for believing in co-existence with the Arabs; co-existence was very much the ethos of modern Zionism (from the 1870s) in Israel/British Occupied Palestine – and remains so to this day.

Zionism is not and never was a "project", an insulting term used by anti-Jewish propagandists; it is and remains forever



Eran Torbiner's film about the Jewish International Brigaders from Palestine can be purchased on DVD for £12; email: [erantor@gmail.com].

the national liberation movement of the Jewish people. It is the greatest anti-racist, anti-imperialist struggle in history because it has corrected the greatest injustice done to the Jews over centuries – the stealing of our land by the Arabs. If the left can accept all kinds of other nationalisms, but not the Jewish version, that is anti-Semitic discrimination. Your reviewer clearly reflects this immature anti-Israel view.

Martin Sugarman

Archivist and historian
Ajex (Association of Jewish Ex-Service Men and Women)
London

Eran Torbiner, director and producer of "Madrid before Hanita", replies from Tel Aviv:
Whilst it is true that Hanita was not the first kibbutz, it was the

single most potent symbol of the Jewish settlement in Palestine during the late 30s as part of the Zionist response to the Palestine Arab revolt of 1936-1939. Significantly, Sugarman's reference to the Arab revolt as a "terror campaign" speaks volumes of his political agenda.

It is also true that the kibbutzim are associated with the Zionist labour movement but, significantly, they were the brainchild of Arthur Ruppin – a non-socialist Zionist who envisaged them as an effective way of transferring land from Palestinians to Jews. Sugarman conveniently fails to mention that, without exception, all kibbutzim refused to accept Arabs as members and many were set up on land from which Palestinian peasants were driven off.

Having studied a wealth of evidence of the Israeli Union of Spanish War Veterans, including the interviews I conducted in person, I can vouch that almost all the volunteers from Palestine were communists.

"Zionist communist" is an oxymoron. Zionists put what they consider as Jewish national interests above all else, whereas communists put the internationalist interests of the working class above everything else, irrespective of the ethnic origin of the workers.

This difference is what motivated these Palestine communists to go to fight in Spain and this is what motivates communists, socialists and anarchists in Israel today to fight against the occupation in Palestine.

My privilege

At the general assembly of the AABI (Association of Friends of the International Brigades) on 27 June I announced my retirement as president for personal reasons. The new president is Ángel Rojo, previously the vice-president. As treasurer, I will continue to be a member of the executive committee for a while.

I want to give my heartfelt thanks to the IBMT for its collaboration with the AABI during the 14 years that I have had the honour to be its president. They have been years of much work, but also of great achievement because between us we have ensured greater recognition in Spain and beyond for the memory of the International Brigades and for their example of international solidarity.

For me personally, it has been a privilege to get to know the Brigaders and to work with all the associations which represent them, their friends and their families. I believe that we have created an international network in which we can preserve the values that compelled these volunteers for liberty to make the journey to Spain so many years ago.

Ana Pérez
Madrid

Thanks

Many thanks to all who sent their kind thoughts and condolences following Jack's death. They are much appreciated by all the family.

Mick Jones
London

Salford plaque honours ILP volunteers

By Hilary Jones

The newly-refurbished Working Class Movement Library in Salford provided the venue on 30 May for the launch of a new book by the Manchester-based IBMT member Christopher Hall on the members of the Independent Labour Party who participated in the Spanish Civil War.

“Not Just Orwell” explores the role of the 45 or so ILP volunteers who, Hall writes in his introduction, have been marginalised in accounts of the war. This led him to identify them and research their experiences. What he discovered was that their commitment to the anti-fascist cause was similar to that of members of the International Brigades, with around a third of the ILP volunteers serving in other units as well and around a third being killed or wounded while in Spain.

Many of them were from the Manchester area and they joined the militia of the POUM revolutionary communist party until it was forcibly disbanded in May 1937.

The event in Salford, which included the unveiling of a plaque in the library commemorating the role of the ILP in Spain, was opened by current ILP member Barry Winter. The plaque was unveiled by 95-year-old Roma Márquez, a former POUM militiaman and afterwards an officer in the Republican army.

There was then a minute’s silence for all British and Irish volunteers who had fought fascism in Spain.

A packed audience was treated to a short programme of songs by the acappella group, The Madonnas, who then accompanied an enthusiastic rendering of “The Internationale”.

See review of “Not Just Orwell”: page 10.



Jack Edwards (seated) and daughter Margaret Sampson with the Cuban International Brigade veteran Lípiz Rodríguez.

May Day greetings for British and Cuban veterans

British Battalion veteran Jack Edwards met Cuban International Brigader Lípiz Rodríguez in Matanzas, Cuba, during May Day celebrations on the Caribbean island this year.

Edwards was thrilled also to meet veterans of the Cuban Revolution at a reception in Havana’s Casa de Amistad (House of Friendship) in Havana. They included Comandante Victor Dreke, who fought alongside Che Guevara at the decisive Battle of Santa Clara in December 1958.

The trip to Cuba was arranged by Belfast & District Trades Council and was, for Edwards, the culmination of a lifetime ambition.

Sadly, Lípiz Rodríguez, one of the last three known Cuban veterans of the Spanish Civil War, died some three months later on 13 August, aged 91.

Rodríguez not only fought in the Spanish war, but beforehand also in Cuba against the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado. He was later a founder of the Cuban National Revolutionary Militia and last saw action in fighting during the attempted US-backed invasion at the Bay of Pigs in 1961.

In Spain, he fought under Buenaventura Durruti, the Anarchist leader, in Madrid in 1936 and from 1937, when all Republican military units were brought under a unified command, he joined the International Brigades, seeing front-line action at the Battle of Brunete in 1937 and at the Battle of the Ebro 1938.

His story was published in Cuba in 1994 in a biography by Arcadio Ríos appropriately entitled: “Fuego en la Sangre” (Fire in the Blood).

Talk on Reading Brigaders

IBMT members Mike Cooper and Ray Parkes gave a talk on 20 May to an enthusiastic and receptive audience at a meeting of the History of Reading Society. The talk was based on their book, “We Cannot Park On Both Sides”, an account of the Reading volunteers in the Spanish Civil War that was published in 2000.

Judging by the substantial numbers at the meeting – approximately 50, whereas the average attendance is less than 20 – and their lively and informed response, it was clear, said Cooper and Parkes, that the subject of the anti-fascist Spanish conflict remains as controversial as ever, 70 years after the ending of that war.

Following the illustrated talk, there was a brisk sale of copies of the book and postcards of the Reading International Brigade memorial, which is prominently located outside the town’s civic offices. The money raised will go towards the production of a badge with the names of the Reading volunteers inscribed on it.

Left: Roma Márquez (foreground) unveils the plaque at the Working Class Movement Library to the ILP volunteers. With him is Chris Hall, author of “Not Just Orwell”.



The memorial in Reading town centre.

During the course of the meeting it was revealed that a fourth name, John Beale, should be added to the list of Reading men killed in Spain: George Middleton, Archibald (Josh)

Continued overleaf



Penny Feiwei celebrates 100th birthday

International Brigade nurse Penny Feiwei celebrated her 100th birthday with friends and family on 24 April in Bournemouth. She is pictured here (left) with a copy of Max Arthur's newly published "The Real Band of Brothers", in which a chapter tells the story of her time in Spain, and (right) cutting her birthday cake with IBMT Secretary Marlene Sidaway.

Feiwei is the last known survivor of the 70 women from Britain who worked in the medical services of the Spanish Republic during the civil war. She arrived in Spain in January 1937 and served in front-line hospitals until spring of 1938 when she was badly injured in a bombing raid near Teruel. She suffered arm lacerations, broken ribs and abdominal shrapnel wounds and was evacuated from Gandía by HMS *Sussex* before being flown from Marseilles to hospital in London.



From previous page

Francis and William (Bill) Ball, whose names are engraved on the memorial.

Cooper and Parkes now aim to offer their talk to local schools and trade union branches.

To order a copy of "We Cannot Park On Both Sides" (£5 including p&p), contact Ray Parkes on 0118-950 7028 or email: [ray@rayparkes1.wanadoo.co.uk].

George Fletcher's footsteps

The children of George Fletcher, who was one of the leading officers of the British Battalion, have retraced their father's footsteps in a visit to the key sites of the Spanish Civil War.

For John Fletcher and his half-sister Helen Cadman, it was also an emotional reunion after a separation lasting 50 years.

George Fletcher, from Manchester and a British army veteran of the First World War, arrived in Spain in March 1937. He was wounded four times, for the first time at the Battle of Brunete in July 1937 where he was evacuated to the hospital at Huete with a shoulder wound.

Afterwards, he served in the fighting around Belchite, where he was again wounded. Promoted to captain in March 1938, he was put in charge of the battalion while Sam Wild, its commander, was recovering from wounds.

With the help of Spanish Civil War publisher Alan Warren, John and Helen found the exact

spots where the British crossed the Ebro in July 1938 in the advance to Gandesa and were later entrenched on Hill 481 during the Battle of the Ebro.

Helen and John met up in Madrid at the start of their 12-day tour, forming a bond which had been severed after the death of their father in 1957.

Tributes in Inistioge

The second annual George Brown commemoration took place in the International Brigades' native Inistioge, County Kilkenny, on 26-27 June.

Tributes to deceased Brigaders who had been present at the first commemoration a year previously, Jack Jones and Bob Doyle, were paid by Manus O'Riordan and Harry Owens respectively. Mick Jones also laid a wreath at the George Brown memorial that had been unveiled by the same two veterans in 2008.

The commemorative lecture on this occasion was given by Dr Emmet O'Connor, son of the late Brigader Peter O'Connor, on the theme of Irish participation both in the British and US battalions of the International Brigades.

In the following month there was an international conference on the Spanish Civil War, entitled "Agonía Republicana", organised by Trinity College Dublin, at which IBMT committee members Richard Baxell and Manus O'Riordan both spoke. For most participants, the highlight was the eyewitness accounts given by Brigader Jack Edwards and Republican army veteran Roma Márquez.

For a memorial in Renton

Drew McEwan has formed a group which aims to have a monument erected in the centre of Renton, Dunbartonshire, dedicated to the men and women who fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War.

McEwan explains: "Renton has a very illustrious past and through the Gibbons family we have a direct link to the men who fought in Spain. The Gibbons lived in Renton for many years. Danny Gibbons was one of three brothers who fought in the International Brigades. The fourth brother, Johnny, tried to volunteer but Harry

Pollitt [general secretary of the Communist Party] said: 'No, three from one family is enough.' Joe went to Spain from the US and served in the Lincoln Battalion. Danny and Tommy were with the British Battalion. Tommy was killed in the Battle of Brunete. Danny was wounded in the Battle of Jarama and after returning from Britain to the front line was subsequently taken prisoner and interned in a concentration camp."

The aim is to commemorate all those from West Dunbartonshire who gave their lives in the fight against Franco, including, as well as Tommy Gibbons, James Marshall and Joseph Harkins from Clydebank, John Lobban and Patrick Curley from Alexandria, Robert Glen from Dumbarton and George Degan from Balloch along with "those who also fought and lived to tell the tale".

To get in touch with the group, contact Drew McEwan at: Carman Centre, 175 Main Street Renton, West Dunbartonshire G82 4PF; tel: 01389-710 261 or email: [drew@carmansic.com].

£1,150 for IB nameplate

The locomotive nameplate "The International Brigades Spain 1936-1939" – (pictured below) together with the accompanying clenched fist logo – was sold at an auction of railway memorabilia in Waterloo, London, in February for £1,150.

The Virgin Trains locomotive was named by Jack Jones in 1998 at a ceremony in Stoke-on-Trent after Brigaders wrote to Virgin boss Sir Richard Branson suggesting the name. It had previously been called "BBC North West".

The class 90 locomotive operated on the London Euston to Glasgow line until 2004.

Hornby models of the locomotive, including the nameplate, are still available in some model shops (reference Hornby R2109B Class 90).



George Fletcher's son and daughter, Helen Cadman and John Fletcher (right), with Manuel Olarte, the local councillor in charge of culture at Huete, south east of Madrid, where George spent some time in hospital.



● A collection of images archived by the Junta de Defensa de Madrid during the Spanish Civil War is now available on the Spanish Ministry of Culture's website. They include this photo of a rally in support of the International Brigades on 5 September 1937 in Madrid's Cine Monumental. See [<http://pares.mcu.es/ArchivoRojo/inicio.do>].

● A special "Paul Robeson in Spain" issue of *The Volunteer*, published by our sister organisation in the US, ALBA, is available online as a PDF. See: [www.alba-valb.org/resources/document-library/volunteer-june-2009]. ALBA has also launched a digital library, containing archives of selected US volunteers, at: [www.alba-valb.org/resources/digital-library] and is compiling an online database of the volunteers who served in the Abraham Lincoln and George Washington Battalions. Go to: [www.alba-valb.org/volunteers].

● From Brunete, Ernesto Viñas and Ángel Rodríguez report that they aim to make the website commemorating the 1937 Battle of Brunete bilingual. They run the site along with other local enthusiasts and welcome feedback and contributions. See: [www.bruneteenlamemoria.com].



● Respect MP George Galloway chose International Brigader and poet John Cornford (left) for BBC Radio 4's biographical series "Great Lives" in August. Presented by Matthew Parris, the programme also featured Professor

Stan Smith talking about the brief but inspirational life of Cornford, who died at the age of 21 in fighting around Lopera, near Córdoba, in December 1936. Listen online: [www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/boom17y6/Great_Lives_Series_19_John_Cornford].

● Stuart Walsh has emailed us to point out that Columbia University in the US has placed online a fascinating and often very moving archive of over 150 drawings made by children during the Spanish Civil War. See: [www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/children/index.html].

● Hank Geerts has contacted us to report that Amsterdam's International Institute of Social

History contains a wealth of primary source materials mainly on the Spanish Civil War that might help many researchers and historians. A guide to these collections is now on the institute's website at [www.iisg.nl/collections/spain-civilwar/index.php].

● Paul Philippou, author of "Spanish Thermopylae: Cypriot Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39" has written in to say that a list of International Brigade (and Anarchist, POUM and Spanish Republican army) volunteers from Greece is now available at: [www.alternative-perth.co.uk/hellenic%20volunteers.htm].

Cornell Capa/Magnum



● Previously unseen images from the Spanish Civil War by Robert Capa – such as this Spanish woman and child at a refugee camp in France in March 1939 – as well as by David Seymour and Gerda Taro can be viewed

on the New York-based International Center of Photography website. The photos are taken from the so-called "Mexican Suitcase", found in Mexico City after going missing from Capa's Paris studio early in the Second World War. Cataloguing the 126 rolls of film began last December and is now complete. See [http://museum.icp.org/mexican_suitcase].



● The two-part Scottish TV documentary, "The Scots who Fought Franco", on the Scottish International Brigaders was broadcast on 13 and 20 August and was well received by IBMT members north of the border. It can now be viewed in

eight instalments on YouTube. Based on Daniel Grey's acclaimed book, "Homage to Caledonia" (pictured), the programmes featured archive interviews with Brigaders George Gowans, Tom Clarke, John Longdragon, John Dunlop, James Maley and Steve Fullarton. "Homage to Caledonia" is now on sale in paperback for £9.99, published by Luath Press (Edinburgh): [www.luath.co.uk].

● There is an informative online video interview with Michael Petrou, author of "Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War", which was reviewed in our last Newsletter. See: [www.mefedia.com/entry/may-23-2008-michael-petrou/9700917]

● A BBC Radio 4 programme in May told the story of the Retirada: the flight of hundreds of thousands of Spanish Republican refugees into France early in 1939 and the harrowing conditions they endured in the camps where they were detained. It can be heard again at: [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/book3x23].

● **3 October 2009:** Lecture by Tom Buchanan, organised by Basque Children of '37 Association UK and titled "The Basque Refugee Children in Britain 1937-1939: Personal Memory and Public History"; 2.30pm at Kensington & Chelsea Library, Philimore Walk, London W8 7RY; details: [secretary@basque-children.org.uk].

● **5 October 2009:** Celebration of the life of Jack Jones, organised by Unite; 12.30pm, Royal Festival Hall, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX; limited number of tickets available from IBMT Secretary: [secretary@international-brigades.org.uk]; tel: 020-8555 667.

● **9-11 October 2009:** IBMT Annual General Meeting in Durham (AGM on 10 October) plus associated events; see page 3 for more details.

● **24 October 2009:** Unveiling of a memorial to the volunteers from Blantyre; 11am, Unison Office, County Buildings, Alameda Street, Hamilton ML3 0AA; a social event is also planned; details from: [stephen.smellie@southlanarkshire.gsx.gov.uk].

● **7 November 2009:** Event organised by the Belfast-based International Brigade Commemoration Committee to honour the lives of Bob Doyle and Jack Jones; 11am at International Brigade memorial, Writers' Square, Belfast; programme details to be confirmed; more information from Cianan Crossley via the website [www.geocities.com/irelandscw].

● **7 November 2009:** Unveiling of a plaque at the Battle of the Ebro cave hospital at La Bisbal de Falset dedicated to British medical personnel who served in the hospital; event organised by No Jubilem la Memòria in conjunction with IBMT; more information from [nojubilemlamemoria@yahoo.com].

● **Until 31 December 2009:** Re-showing of 2008 successful exhibition, "Merseyside and the International Brigades"; People's Centre, 50-54 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5SD; weekdays 9am-5pm; email: [info@thepeoplescentre.com] or tel: 051-709 3995.

● **26/27 February 2010:** Battle of Jarama commemoration; Madrid and Morata de Tajuña; more details from Alan Warren: [hill705@gmail.com] and Severiano Montero: [seve.montero@gmail.com].

● **14 March 2010:** "The Brits Who Fought for Spain"; Renoir Cinema, Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AW; 10.30am for 11am; Matt Richards's 2009 film about the International Brigade volunteers from Britain; shown with "The Long Road to Spain" by Dan Carrier; more information on [www.socialistfilm.blogspot.com].

● **Until 18 April 2010:** "The Nature of the Beast" by Goshka Macuga at the Whitechapel Gallery, 77-82 Whitechapel High Street, London E1 7QX; features a tapestry of Picasso's "Guernica" and photos of International Brigaders at the exhibition of Picasso's painting in 1939 plus contemporary press cuttings and memorabilia. [www.whitechapelgallery.org].



Where are these banners now?

● Dolly West has written in wanting to know what happened to these banners from Hammersmith, west London (where she was a child during the Spanish Civil War – see facing page). The photos were taken in 1985 at the reception in Queen Elizabeth Hall in London’s Southbank on the day that the International Brigade memorial was unveiled by former Labour leader Michael Foot. Does anyone know the whereabouts of the banners? *Contact* [editor@international-brigades.org.uk].

● Tameside Trade Union Council is making efforts to have a blue plaque erected locally for International Brigader **James Keogh** who was killed on 31 March 1937. His family is backing the move. Support has also come from the local council, though officials favour a plaque for all the volunteers from Ashton-under-Lyne and Tameside. *If you have any more information about volunteers from the area or want to get involved in the campaign, contact Brian Bamford: [northernvoices@hotmail.com].*

● Cristina Fischer, of Rostock, Germany, is collecting material about the German communist Liselotte Hermann, who was executed by the Nazis on 23 June 1938. In her group of communists there was a man named **Eugen Beck**, born 1907, originally from Bad Cannstatt, Stuttgart. He was arrested by the Nazis in 1935 but managed to escape to Switzerland. He went to Spain and joined the Thaelmann Battalion. At the end of the Spanish Civil War he was held at the Gurs refugee camp in southern France. Christine has been told that Beck emigrated from France to Britain and lived there until his death. It is possible that he had a wife and children who still live in Britain. She would like to hear from anyone who has more information about Beck or his family. *Contact: [cris.fischer@t-online.de].*

● Will Boisseau is a postgraduate history student at the University of Southampton currently researching the effect of the Spanish Civil War on **Southampton**. He would be very grateful to hear from anyone with memories of the arrival of Basque refugees in the area, local support for International Brigade volunteers and any information about the volunteers themselves: David

Guest, Raymond Arthur Cox, Harold Laws and Ivor Rae Hickman. *Email: [wjb106@soton.ac.uk] or tel: 07969-048 139.*

● Lawrence Kirkby is trying to find out more about **Gordon Davidson**, a Scot living in the Lewisham area of London up to 1940. A scientist and graduate of Oxford University, he had been an ambulance driver in the Spanish Civil War. After 1945 he is believed to have worked in the petro-chemicals industry. *Contact: [lawrence.kirkby@btinternet.com] with any more information.*



“Spain, 1937”. The grandfather was politically active so an association with someone who fought in the Spanish Civil War would not come as a surprise. The grandfather’s name was **Donald (Donnie) Gillies**, a joiner from Plockton, Ross and Cromarty. *If anyone can help, email: [ariding@iconpolymer.com].*

● From France, David Hewson has written in to inquire about **Peter, PJ** or **Percy Harratt**. He had been in the British army, lived in Spain from about

1930 and was in Spain from about 1938-9. Does anyone know anything more about him? *Contact: David Hewson, Cabanot 36, 160 Beaumarchees, France; tel: +33 562 69 12 29.*

● From Buenos Aires, Professor Juan Carlos Cesarini says he wants to know more about an Argentinian volunteer called **Lamas**, who was a political commissar in the Adam Mickiewicz Battalion of the XII International Brigade and who was killed on 1 June 1938 in the Sierras Quemadas, Extremadura. *Reply to: [juancesarini@infovia.com.ar].*

● Syd Quinn is looking for advice on books containing photographs of the volunteers from the UK who fought in the Spanish Civil War, particularly ones of his father **Syd Quinn**. He is mentioned in “Apprentice of Freedom” by the late Judith Cook. *Contact: [s.quinn57@ntlworld.com].*

● Martin Laneville is researching the International Brigades with the aim of writing a book and is keen to hear from anyone who can help, especially from family members who have any correspondence from those who went to Spain. He would also like to know if any volunteers had **Norfolk** origins. *Email: [mlaneville138@btinternet.com] or tel: 01362-699 405.*

If you do not have an email to reply to queries, contact the IBMT Secretary (details on page 2) and your message will be passed on. Please share your information about Brigaders with the IBMT’s researcher, Jim Carmody. Send it to [jamescarmody@yahoo.co.uk].

Memories of the child of a Brigader

By Dolly West

I remember going into my parents' bedroom in Shepherds Bush, west London, and seeing mum and dad (Frank West) sitting on the edge of their bed, he with his arm around her and mum crying. I was aged five at the time and have worked out that that must have been the day he told her he was going to Spain.

At that time there were boxes placed outside Co-op shops asking for a tin of food or sugar to be put in them to be sent to Spain. That campaign was called Food for Spain; another was called Milk for Children. Hammersmith also collected money to send ambulances for Spain.

Mum went to Victoria Station when the Brigaders returned home in December 1938, but we came back without dad. He had been taken prisoner on the day the British Battalion was withdrawn. And no one knew where he was or if he was dead.

He eventually returned home in the spring of 1939. By then I was eight years old. He had spent most of his last few months in the San Pedro de Cardeña prison camp.

When he came home we were living over a dairy and our kitchen was behind the shop. It had a range with a hearth which had been whitened by mum with a block of chalk. I can picture him sitting on a stool and my sister



Dolly West (foreground) at a fundraising event during the Spanish Civil War at the Communist Party premises in Shepherds Bush Road, near Hammersmith Broadway. The building was on the site of what is now the police station.

Eileen and I standing in front of him. But the thing I remember most of that occasion is the dead cockroaches on that white hearth.

He looked gaunt. Times were hard for mum. She couldn't get any UAB (Unemployment Assistance Board) benefit because he had gone to Spain. She did housework for a family on the Uxbridge Road for 8 pence an hour. It was hard work as there were no aids like vacuum cleaners and all the rooms had coal fires in them and they had to be cleaned and re-laid every day. Mum was ill with asthma and bronchitis.

Jean Massey helped mum a lot. Jean and Bill Massey were both Communist Party members and Bill was a very active trade unionist. "Aunty Jean" put us in contact with the International Brigades' Dependents' Aid Committee who gave mum some money when they could.

Jean was also a very active Co-operator. And through her contacts, Eileen and I were taken on days out to the seaside by the BFCY (British Federation of Young Co-operators). The Woodcraft people also helped us.

I was taken to the Albert Hall and Earls Court, where there were meetings to support the fight, with choirs and speeches and many coloured banners – and of course collections.

I am only aware of one other child of a Brigader who remembers his or her parent – or in this case both parents – going to Spain. That is Martin Green. His mother was of course Nan Green who was with the medical volunteers and later became the Secretary of the International Brigade Association. Martin's father, George, was killed in the same battle in which my father became a prisoner.

Are there any other children who remember their parent going to Spain?

OBITUARY

Koke Martínez

By Jim Jump

With his Basque beret, bushy beard and propensity to burst into song or recite a poem, the artist Koke Martínez, who died in April at the age of 82, was a prominent figure at IBMT events and the reunions of other niños vascos (Basque children), as they still call themselves despite now being all in their 70s and 80s.

He was one of 4,000 refugee children from the Basque Country who arrived in Southampton in May 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. Most were later reunited with their parents either in Spain or in exile, but Martínez was among the 400 or so who made their home in Britain.

Martínez was in a "colony" for the children in Carshalton which

was notable for the talented group of volunteer teaching staff. Among them was Pepe Estruch, theatre director and collaborator with Federico García Lorca, who recognised Martínez's gifts and helped him secure a scholarship from the exiled Spanish Republican government to study at Croydon School of Art.

Martínez's paintings were first displayed in 1944 at the Spanish Institute in London. More than a dozen solo and 20 mixed exhibitions in Britain and Spain were to follow over the next six decades. War, exile and childhood dreams and nightmares were recurrent themes in his work.

Aged 11, Martínez and two of his brothers had arrived in Britain from Bilbao on the steamship *Habana* with other children sent by their parents to escape Franco's bombing campaign



Koke Martínez pictured at work in 1948.

against the Basque Country. The family spent much of the Second World War in a French internment camp and afterwards lived in poverty; the three brothers in Britain were forced to make their own way in life.

From 1946 to 1984, Martínez

worked in London as a display artist, arranging exhibition stands and shop windows.

In accordance with his wishes, his ashes now lie in small plot 15 yards away from Karl Marx's tomb in Highgate Cemetery in north London.

Fighting with the revolutionaries



“Not Just Orwell: The Independent Labour Party Volunteers and the Spanish Civil War” by Christopher Hall; £14.99 (Warren and Pell, Barcelona, 2009)

Reviewed by Don Watson

Although “Homage to Catalonia” is arguably the best-known book in English about the Spanish Civil War, there have been very few studies of the group in which its author, George Orwell, fought. This book is the first detailed study of the Independent Labour Party contingent, which served outside the International Brigades and with the revolutionary Spanish POUM militia.

Author Chris Hall seems to apologise several times for the book he’s written – he knows that some IBMT members will not thank him for his efforts – but there is no need for that. The role of the ILP alongside its Spanish sister party, the POUM, has a significance out of proportion both to the small numbers involved (45-50) and their lack of military contribution.

Hall supplies a brief history of the ILP and its politics from the 1930s until the Second World War. Following its disaffiliation from the Labour Party in 1932, the ILP had fewer than 5,000 members by 1936, but it returned four MPs in 1935. Always internationalist, it naturally supported the radical forces in the Spanish Republic and threw itself into every aspect of the solidarity effort. There is a useful account too of the politics and development of the POUM and its role in the early revolutionary militias, also how it attempted still to exert some rank and file control over officers and commissars when the militias were absorbed into the Republican army.

Hall provides a summary of what is currently known about each of the ILP volunteers, British and Irish, rank and file and leadership. He includes their backgrounds of political involvement, their service in Spain and their subsequent careers. Inevitably the level of detail varies from individual to individual but it adds to our understanding of these anti-fascists.

The POUM section was in military terms irrelevant to the Republican war effort and several of the ILP volunteers said so at the time. They were serving on the Aragón front and aware that they were doing little while the real fighting was elsewhere. A number were negotiating transfer to the International Brigades when politics famously intervened. But their real significance is what

they revealed about the politics of the Republic and the effects of the Stalinist influence. Besides the famous account of the suppression of the POUM in “Homage to Catalonia”, the use of the ILP volunteer Frank Frankford by the *Daily Worker* is an interesting example and Hall provides probably the fullest account of this episode so far.

Voices from the past



“Heroic Voices of the Spanish Civil War: Memories from the International Brigades” by Peter Darman; £14.99 (New Holland, London, 2009)

Reviewed by Jim Jump

The Imperial War Museum’s extensive sound archive of British International Brigaders is an invaluable resource for researchers, allowing them access to first-hand testimony from some 100 volunteers. The interviews took place in the 1970s and 1980s, often lasting for more than five or six hours, during which time the Brigaders were able to talk in detail about their involvement in the Spanish Civil War and give their thoughts on the conflict after the passage of four or five decades.

Peter Darman has done an admirable job in trawling through these interviews and selecting passages for this new book. What emerges is basically a collection of extracts from the museum’s archive, supplemented by a handful of interviews from newspapers and online sources.

The value of the book is that the extracts are thematically organised under chapter headings such as “Reasons for Volunteering”, “Enlistment”, “Getting to Spain”, “Turning Volunteers into Fighters”, “Away from the Fighting”, “Prisoners of War”, “Withdrawal” and “Reflections”. There are also chapters on the main battles of Madrid, Jarama, Brunete, Teruel and the Ebro. Thus, the reader can acquire a rounded picture of events and experiences, as told by different Brigaders who were there at the time.

Many familiar names are here, including IBMT stalwarts Jack Edwards, Lou Kenton and Sam Russell (now Lesser), along with recently deceased Bob Doyle, Jack Jones and Bernard McKenna.

Darman adds a useful glossary and chronology of the war and his introduction gives an overview of the conflict and its international dimension which sympathetically portrays the role of the foreign volunteers: “Though they failed to prevent a fascist takeover in Spain, the men and women of the International Brigades could feel justifiably proud of what they had achieved.”

However, some of the facts and figures are highly questionable – there were some 2,500 volunteers from the British Isles, not 1,800 – and the Brigades’ final parade in Barcelona was on 28 October 1938, not 15 November. In addition,

Finnish-Canadians go to war

“To My Son In Spain”, directed by Dave Clement; Thunderstone Pictures (Thunder Bay, Ontario)

Reviewed by Lynn Hill

Dave Clement’s documentary film of the Spanish Civil War, “To My Son In Spain”, was premiered in Britain on 6 September to a packed house at Leicester Secular Hall.

The film begins by clearly explaining the causes and history of events leading to the war. It follows events through the eyes of Jules Paivio, a Finnish-Canadian and one of the last surviving Canadian veterans of the war, and examines the role of the 116 Finnish-Canadians from north-western Ontario in the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion of the International Brigades.

Jules and his comrades shared the same background as most of their fellow Brigaders from all

over the world. They came from poor working class neighbourhoods where life was hard and it was a struggle to exist, a situation that forged them into revolutionary organisers, trying to build a better world. This plus their shared ideals made the choice to go to Spain obvious to them.

The film makes this all very clear in an emotionally-charged way. It explains the politics of the time, looks at the military tactics, weaponry and the ebb and flow of the frontline, while never losing sight of the human and personal impact of the war on the Brigaders and the Spanish people.

Jules talks of his comrades, their motives, fighting spirit and his own capture and treatment in a Franco concentration camp.

This film is perfect to show to the younger generation, as it informs and moves in an energetic way that is both educating and fascinating, cleverly using cartoon characters to express the words of Jules’s father’s poem that gives its name to the film. It also uses a section of film of Canadian lumberjacks that exemplifies the struggle of the working class perfectly and is an oblique nod to the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World – the “Wobblies”) credentials of Saku Pinta, the film’s scriptwriter and one of its producers.

The result is a film with a fresh feel to it that will help to keep the memory of the Brigaders, their sacrifices and achievements alive for many years to come.

More details: [<http://thunderstone.jmultimedia.com>].



Remembering the 187 volunteers from the Manchester area



“From Manchester to Spain” by Bernard Barry; £5 (Working Class Movement Library, Salford, 2009); available direct from the library: [www.wcml.org.uk/shop]; tel: 0161-736 3601

Reviewed by Stuart Walsh

Bernard Barry’s booklet, based primarily on material held at the Working Class Movement Library (WCML) in Salford, is an excellent account in five short chapters of the volunteers from Greater Manchester and of the material

support so freely given by the residents of the city to the Spanish Republic in its struggle against fascism. Now aged 91, Barry, a retired teacher who has been a volunteer at the WCML for many years, remembers many of the events described in the book.

A short introductory chapter on the lead-up to the Spanish Civil War is followed by chapters on the volunteers from Manchester, Aid to Spain, the postwar and a final chapter listing the volunteers who went to Spain, either as fighters or medical personnel.

Manchester sent 187 men and women to Spain and the core of the book is chapter 2, where six of the volunteers are given the largest space, while 13

others are allotted shorter pen portraits, the latter including three women medical volunteers. As always with the WCML’s publications, the text is enhanced with illustrations from the library’s collection, which give great immediacy to the narrative. For example, the account of the memorial meeting for champion speedway rider Clem Beckett, who was killed in February 1937, is accompanied by an illustration of the leaflet for this meeting which took place in Ardwick in May 1937.

Chapter 3 is a short account of the various activities and organisations that can be placed under the rubric of Aid to Spain, including a short account of the Basque children in the Manchester area. Chapter 4 describes the postwar activities and struggles and ends with the setting up of the IBMT and Manchester’s role in that.

The final chapter is the roll of honour of those 187 men and women who went to Spain, 45 of whom were killed in action. As the author says, some of these are only names and it is his hope that readers may be able to help in giving more details of the lives of these brave men and women who gave their all in trying to stem the tide of fascism in Spain.

In conclusion, the words of Clem Beckett’s wife at the memorial meeting for him may stand for all of those who died and be a reminder to us all of their bravery and idealism: “He gave his life for the cause which he believed in and fought for all his life, and I know he gave his life freely and that he would have chosen to die this way defending his ideals.”

many would regard Darman’s depiction of Britain’s policy of “non-intervention” as overly sympathetic – and, though several poets did go to Spain, TS Eliot was definitely not one of them!

These and other editorial criticisms aside, the book is to be welcomed for once again bringing to life on the written page these evocative eyewitness accounts and, at the same time, the remarkable men and women who made them.

More than a love story



“The Return” by Victoria Hislop; £7.99 (2009 paperback edition) (Headline Publishing, London, 2008)

Reviewed by Colin Carritt

This is a story of love and loss in Spain during the civil war. It is bittersweet and it is no fairy tale. But then Victoria Hislop knows her subject and she doesn’t pull her punches. Her research into the events in Spain from 1936 to 1939 and the exodus of refugees to France and to Britain in the aftermath is impeccable. She spares us nothing as she lays bare the full horror and unspeakable cruelty of the Nationalist onslaught. And yet she is never voyeuristic or sensational. She just tells it as it is.

Sonia is a middle class, middle aged Home Counties English woman; her marriage to James, a nouveau riche banker, is clearly not going anywhere. To escape her stifling marriage she joins a class learning salsa and Latin American dance. Then, with Maggie, a slightly bohemian school friend, she heads off to Granada, where she becomes captivated by the flamenco culture. A

chance visit to a local café, full of old photographs of gypsy guitarists and dancers intrigues her further. Falling into conversation with the elderly proprietor, she learns about the history of the café and the family who ran it for generations.

The tragedy of divided loyalties, betrayal, revenge and loss through the years of the civil war and beyond are recounted through the old man’s emotional narrative. The story line is simple enough and it’s an easy and effortless read, except for the harrowing history of Franco’s invasion and the international isolation of the Second Republic.

At times, the weight of factual information can overwhelm the love story at the heart of the novel. Victoria clearly feels the need to tell all in what sometimes veers dangerously close to polemic. Given the lack of understanding about the 40 years of fascism in Spain, perhaps that’s no bad thing. Perhaps what those of us who have laboured to tell the world, Victoria can achieve through a simple and poignant love story. She educates and entertains in equal measure.

This review first appeared in the newsletter of the Basque Children of ’37 Association UK.

In brief...



● Newly published “Kiwi Compañeros: New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War”* is the first and only account of New Zealanders’ participation in the Spanish Civil War. It records the actions of some 20 New Zealand combatants and nurses. Edited by Mike Derby, the book draws on research in public collections

in Spain, Britain, the US, Canada, Australia and Russia and includes previously unpublished material including an interview with Pedro De Treend, a veteran of the battle of Teruel and the last surviving New Zealand veteran of the war. *Published by Canterbury University Press in association with the Labour History Project. Copies can be ordered via the website [www.cup.canterbury.ac.nz]. See also: [www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/spanish-civil-war].

● A study of the East European volunteers in the International Brigades has been published in Spain. Edited by Manuel Requena Gallego and Matilde Eiroa, “Al lado del Gobierno Republicano: Los brigadistas de Europa del Este en la guerra civil española” (Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Cuenca, 2009) includes articles on the volunteers, based on work in Hungarian, Polish, Czech and Bulgarian.



● There is now a Spanish language edition of “Poems from Spain”, the anthology of verse written by International Brigade volunteers from the British Isles (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 2006).

“Hablando de Leyendas;

Poemas para España” has been edited by Jim Jump (editor of the original anthology), Antonio Díez and David González and is published in Tenerife by Baile del Sol: [www.bailedelsol.org]. In 2005 Díez edited “Cartas de España” (Muñoz Moya Editores Extremeños, Sevilla), a collection of letters written home by International Brigade volunteers from the Manchester area. González is a poet from Gijón, Asturias.



BENEFIT GIG: The Foundlings (right) and Thee Intolerant Kidd (left) were two of eight bands at a benefit concert for the IBMT at the Inn on the Green in London's Notting Hill in July. Under the slogan "They shall not pass and we shall groove", £140 was raised for the IBMT – and a younger audience found out more about the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War. Other bands included Gaia, Taurus Trakker, Nyika & The

People, Chester, The Dirty Curtains and The Self. Such was the success of the event, which was compered by Shaman of the North, that organisers Paul Whieldon and Kim Lawton of The Foundlings hope to make it an annual event.

Videos of songs by The Foundlings, including "Salud Brigadista", inspired by International Brigader Bob Doyle, can be played at: [www.myspace.com/foundlingsband].



International speakers set the tone at Jubilee Gardens

By Pauline Fraser

A large crowd gathered at the International Brigade memorial in London's Jubilee Gardens on 4 July for the IBMT's annual commemoration and heard a warning about the recent success of the far right and fascist parties in elections for the European Parliament.

Linking the International Brigaders' fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War with the need to combat fascism today, Patrik Helegson, from the Swedish International Brigade friendship group, joined a number of international speakers from Spain, Germany and the United States to praise the heroic volunteers.

IBMT Chair Sam Lesser paid tribute to the late Jack Jones, his fellow-Brigader and friend. He spoke of Jones's untiring international work on behalf of Spanish Republican prisoners and their families, as well as his commitment to the working class in Britain.

As well as Lesser, other veterans present were Lou Kenton and Jack Edwards.

There were moving tributes to the other volunteers who had died since the last Jubilee Gardens reunion, Bob Doyle, Bernard McKenna and Rosaleen Ross, which were paid respectively by Robert Doyle, Neil McKenna and Angela Jackson.

Robert Elms, of BBC Radio London, said what an honour it was to be invited to speak at the



Broadcaster and writer Robert Elms (left) speaks in Jubilee Gardens; above: Na-Mara performing at the gathering.

commemoration. The Robert Elms Show had given prominence to the Brigaders on a number of programmes and on each occasion there had been massive feedback from listeners praising their brave and selfless stand.

One of the reasons he had accepted the invitation to speak, he said, was so that he could bring his young son along. "We live in an age of celebrity culture where people are famous for doing nothing. I wanted him to see some real heroes."

The musical duo Na-Mara of Rob García and Paul McNamara led the singing of "Jarama" and "The Internationale".

Wreaths were laid by the Spanish ambassador, Carles Casajuana, the leader of the Catalan delegation to London, Xavier Solano i Bello, and by Clara and Meirian Jump on behalf of the IBMT, along with wreaths from the Association of Jewish Ex-Service Men and Women, US Veterans for Peace, rail union Aslef and several individuals.



Choirs sing out for Frank Owen



Above: The new plaque. Left: Frank's brother, Arnold Owen (fourth from left), with the singers on Maerdy Bridge.

Members of Cardiff's Cor Cochion (Red Choir) were joined by New York's Labor Chorus – while on a tour of Europe – to sing at a re-dedication in August of the memorial to International Brigader Frank Owen at Maerdy Bridge, in the Maerdy Community Woodland Project, in the Rhondda. The previous plaque, unveiled in 2000 by Brigader Lance Rogers, had been vandalised.

Owen was killed at the Battle of Brunete in July 1937.