



IBMT Newsletter

www.international-brigades.org.uk

Issue 29 / Spring 2011

1936
2011
75th ANNIVERSARY
INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES
See insert to book tickets for our
gala celebration in London on 1 October

INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE MEMORIAL TRUST

Marshall Mateer



SINGING: The cast of "Goodbye Barcelona" perform at the IBMT's lecture day at London's Imperial War Museum on 5 March. See report on page 4.

Go-ahead for Jubilee Gardens commemoration

There has been a last-minute reprieve for the IBMT's commemoration in July in London's Jubilee Gardens, which will this year mark the 75th anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War and the creation of the International Brigades.

Work on a major redevelopment and landscaping of the gardens was scheduled to begin in May. But the timetable has been put back two months, with contractors now expected to move in on the South Bank site on 25 July.

This means that the annual ceremony to remember the 2,500 Brigaders, among them

some 525 who died in Spain, will take place on Saturday 2 July from 12:30pm. As usual, wreaths will be laid following a minute's silence and there will be songs and speeches.

It is hoped that at least one of the few surviving veterans will be able to attend this year.

During the redevelopment of Jubilee Gardens the International Brigade memorial will be placed in safe storage until the gardens are reopened to the public by May 2012.

The memorial by sculptor Ian Walters will eventually be relocated a short distance from its present site. The IBMT has been fully consulted on the new position, which will remove the memorial from the congested corner of the park where crowds wait to board the London Eye.

The trust is in talks with the redevelopers on the installation of a plaque next to the memorial – which was unveiled in 1985 by former Labour leader Michael Foot – with more background information on the International Brigades.

After this year's commemoration, participants will be invited to a nearby pub, the Camel & Artichoke, for lunch and a social gathering, where it is also hoped that live music will be played.



See "Diary dates: page 11.

Backers wanted for IB musical

Fundraising efforts for the "Goodbye Barcelona" musical celebrating the International Brigades are being supported by the IBMT in a bid to ensure that the show can be successfully mounted at the end of this year.

The musical is due to open at the Arcola Theatre in London in November, with special previews at two other venues in the capital: Wilton's Music Hall on 30 September and the Jewish Museum on 27 October.

Writers Karl Lewkowicz and Judith Johnson are looking for volunteers who would like to share the work of organising support for the show for a minimum of one or two days a week over the next six months. Ideally they would have good communication skills, be computer literate and have organisational or fundraising experience.

Donations are also being sought. Every contribution, however small, helps, say Lewkowicz and Johnson, and will go towards the considerable costs of the production.

Says Lewkowicz: "Some IBMT members have already contributed toward production costs and, with support from more members, 'Goodbye Barcelona' will literally sing the praises of the Brigaders from November 2011."

The show is supported by the IBMT, historians Max Arthur, Richard Baxell and Paul Preston, novelist Victoria Hislop and many others.

Contact Karl Lewkowicz on 07894-460 079 or email [contact@goodbyebarcelona.com]; more details: [www.goodbyebarcelona.com]; watch the promotional video at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTp5ALLspQ].

Marshall Mateer



SUPPORT: Karl Lewkowicz (third from right) with some of the "Goodbye Barcelona" cast and *Private Eye* editor Ian Hislop (centre) at a Spanish embassy-sponsored fundraising event at Europe House, London, on 4 March.

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

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Membership applications, renewals and queries should be sent to Membership Secretary Mary Greening. General correspondence should go Secretary Jim Jump.

Annual membership rates are £15 standard; £7.50 for concessions; £20 family (single household); affiliating organisations by arrangement. Further details and 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. Back numbers can be downloaded from the IBMT website on [www.international-brigades.org.uk/newsletter.htm]. Send all items for the next issue to the Editor by 31 July 2011 at the latest.

Editor: Jim Jump (see contact details above)
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By Jim Jump

Anniversary year

Welcome to another packed issue of our newsletter. I hope its diverse content reflects all the aspects of the IBMT's work and interests. This being the 75th anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 and the formation of the International Brigades in October of that year, there is likely to be added public interest in our activities. Let's hope we can capitalise of this and recruit more members. We rely wholly on subscriptions, donations and the sale of merchandise for our income. They make it possible for us to produce this newsletter, look after the memorials and continue our educational work. So, if you haven't paid your 2011 subs yet, please do so. Send them to Membership Secretary Mary Greening (see details on left).

Libyan lessons?

Apart from clear-cut and relevant causes such as anti-fascism and democracy in Spain, the IBMT steers clear of taking sides on politically sensitive issues. We do it not just because we are a registered charity and must obey certain rules in this regard, but also because we respect the fact that many of our members have differing views on current controversies, whether Israel-Palestine, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and, most recently, the bombing campaign in Libya. We can be sure that many of the Brigaders would have felt very strongly on such topics – though they might not all have agreed!

It's interesting nonetheless to see how the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War are often deployed in debates on some of these issues – indeed in many cases by those on opposite sides of the argument.

Speaking in the House of Commons on 21 March, Ed Miliband quoted a Spanish politician who came to Britain in 1936 and pleaded for support: "We are fighting with sticks and knives against tanks and aircraft and guns, and it revolts the conscience of the world that that should be true." The Labour leader continued: "As we saw the defenceless people of Libya attacked by their own government, it would equally revolt the conscience of the world to know that we could have done something to help them yet chose not to."

Similar sentiments were expressed by Australian Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd, citing Guernica as a warning not to "stand idly by while similar atrocities are committed again" in Libya. Meanwhile online message-boards and blogs have seen plenty of calls for a "new International Brigade" to help the Libyan rebels.

Not everyone agrees. The blogsite of *The Volunteer*, run by ALBA, a sister organisation in the US, has reproduced arguments made by law professor Marjorie Cohn – who gave this year's ALBA lecture in San Francisco in February. Her view is that military action in Libya sets a dangerous precedent of attacking countries where the leadership does not favour pro-Western countries. What, she asks, would prevent the US from stage-managing some protests, magnifying them in the corporate

media as mass actions, and then bombing a country like Cuba?

Fidel Castro himself is urging a political solution to the conflict in Libya and has strongly condemned Nato's bombing campaign. Writing on the subject on 28 March, he said: "Not even the fascist leaders of Germany and Italy were so blatantly shameless regarding the Spanish Civil War unleashed in 1936, an event that maybe a lot of people have been recalling over these past days."

Whatever individual IBMT members think about these arguments, what is striking is how the Spanish Civil War is still used as a moral touchstone by so many people. Seventy-five years on, the war remains a powerful reference point for what is politically, diplomatically and militarily right and wrong.

Harry Potter and the Spanish Civil War

Talking of right and wrong, JK Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, clearly takes sides on the Spanish Civil War, judging by an interview she gave to *The Scotsman* on 2 November 2002, which Rodney Bickerstaffe has brought to my attention. Rowling said: "My most influential writer, without a doubt, is Jessica Mitford. When my great-aunt gave me 'Hons and Rebels' when I was 14, she instantly became my heroine. She ran away from home to fight in the Spanish Civil War, taking with her a camera that she had charged to her father's account. I wished I'd had the nerve to do something like that. I love the way she never outgrew some of her adolescent traits, remaining true to her politics – she was a self-taught socialist – throughout her life. I think I've read everything she wrote. I even called my daughter [Jessica Rowling Arantes] after her." Mitford of course married International Brigader Esmond Romilly.

News from Canada

The IBMT has close ties with International Brigade organisations around the world. It is not always easy to keep in touch with them, particularly if there are changes in personnel. It was especially pleasing to re-establish contact with the Friends and Veterans of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in Canada. Secretary Sharon Skup reports that they have two veterans still alive though, after the national monument was put up in Ottawa in 2001, many supporters left off being active. The group's main activities now are to create a website to be used as a resource for the general public and for educational purposes and to persuade families of veterans to save all documents and other material for the archives in various universities or the national archives. Their website is already very informative. You can see it here: [www.web.net/~macpap].

Cleaned up in Glasgow

Our thanks go to vigilant Glasgow member Eddie Mullen who tipped off the IBMT about some offensive graffiti on the city's Pasionaria memorial to the International Brigades. We promptly got in touch with Glasgow City Council and within a few days the memorial was cleaned up – for which the council deserves thanks too.

Plaque honours Belfast volunteer Jim Stranney



UNVEILING: From left: Gerard Murray, Sam White and Sean Quinn.

A plaque to remember Brigadier Jim Stranney, killed at the Battle of the Ebro in August 1938, was unveiled on the Stranney home in John Street, Belfast, on 26 February by family members and local community activists.

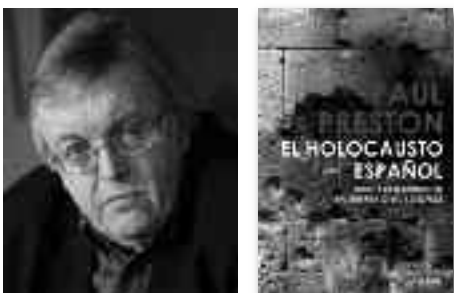
Organised by the Belfast Cultural and Local History Group and the republican socialist Teach na Failte, the event attracted over 100 people to the unveiling and talks afterwards by historians Sean Quinn and John Gray at the National Club.

Other speakers included Mary Greening and Manus O’Riordan from the IBMT, Gerald Murray of Teach na Failte and Sam White of Lower Castlereagh Community Group, which is planning a similar event in East Belfast to commemorate Brigadier William “Liam” Tumilson, who was killed at the Battle of Jarama in February 1937.

Preston’s harrowing account of the ‘Spanish holocaust’

A definitive account of the murders and massacres of civilians that took place during and after the Spanish Civil War has been published in Spain with a frenzy of publicity for what is still a sensitive and controversial topic three-quarters of a century after the start of the war.

Author Paul Preston says the book proved to be his harshest challenge to date, both because of the vast scale of the subject matter and because of its harrowing nature. “The gratuitous cruelty it recounts ensured that it was an extremely difficult book to write,” says Preston, a founder member of the IBMT, who is regarded as the world’s foremost historian of modern Spain.



Preston and his “difficult to write” latest book.

The English-language version of “The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination during the Civil War and After” is scheduled to appear in bookshops in Britain in September.

Preston, who is professor of modern Spanish history at the London School of Economics, has established his reputation with a series of books centred on the causes, course and consequences of the 1936-39 civil war. They include biographies of General Franco (1993) and King Juan Carlos (2004) and his recent “We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War” (2008).

In Spain, his latest work has stirred massive media interest. The author received more than 50 requests for interviews in the lead-up to publication. It won the Santiago Sobrequés i Vidal history book prize in Catalonia – and attracted predictable fury from the highly vocal neo-Francoist commentators in the Spanish press.

Although “The Spanish Holocaust” covers the repression both in the Republican and Francoist zones, Preston makes a clear distinction between violence in the two camps, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The murders and semi-judicial massacres per-

Continued on page 5

Battle of Jarama gathering draws 300 supporters

Totalling more than 50 people, the British and Irish formed the largest foreign contingents at the annual commemoration of the Battle of Jarama on 26 February in the valley south-east of Madrid where the British Battalion played a key role in stopping an attempt by Franco’s forces to encircle the capital in February 1937.

Over 300 people, mostly Spaniards, took part in a hike around key points of the battlefield, along with representatives of International Brigade associations. Organised by the Madrid-based AABI (Association of Friends of the International Brigades), this year’s commemoration paid special homage to the XI Brigade, comprising mainly German-speaking volunteers.

At a ceremony of remembrance at the International Brigade memorial overlooking



The poster for this year’s event.

the battlefield, IBMT Secretary Jim Jump recalled that some 130 of the more than 500 members of the British Battalion were killed at Jarama. “They were the first of that remarkable generation that fought fascism in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s,” he said. “While their own government in London was betraying a fellow democracy, these volunteers were fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Spanish people because they knew that fascism had to be confronted and defeated.”

The day ended with a meal at a restaurant in nearby Morata de Tajuña, where Mike Wild sang his musical tribute to the International Brigades, “Our Open Eyes”.

Hunt for Jarama graves

A team of Spanish researchers has been scanning the surroundings of the Jarama River in search of the graves of fallen International Brigaders and Spanish combatants. Reports in the Spanish press add that the operation is also being followed by a crew from the BBC History Channel.

See report of the commemoration in *The Independent*; [www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/jarama-a-walk-through-the-valley-of-death-2244066.html].

Provisional programmes of events to mark the 75th anniversary of the creation of the International Brigades

London: 30 September-2 October

Friday 30 September

● **Afternoon:** Arrival at St George's Hall, Cable Street, E1 0BL, of National Clarion Cycling Club 1895 riders from Edinburgh. See page 11 for more details.

● **Evening:** Special presentation of International Brigades musical "Goodbye Barcelona" at Wilton's Music Hall, 1 Graces Alley, E1 8JB.

Saturday 1 October

● **Morning:** Opportunity to see exhibition of paintings by Brigader Clive Branson and daughter Rosa Branson at Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, EC1R 0DU.

● **Midday:** Rededication of International Brigade memorial in headquarters of Unite the Union, 128 Theobald's Road, WC1X 8TN.

● **Afternoon:** IBMT annual general meeting, plus talks/films tbc; Unite the Union HQ.

● **Evening:** 75th anniversary fundraising gala at the New Red Lion Theatre, 271-273 City Road, EC1V 1LA. Performers will include poet Jackie Kay and Tayo Aluko, star of "Call Mr

Robeson", plus other special guests. See insert in this newsletter for reservations. Book early to ensure entry.

Sunday 2 October

● Activities to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street centred on Wilton's Music Hall, 1 Graces Alley, E1 8JB.

Accommodation: Travelodge has a selection of hotels in the Cable Street/Tower of London area. They include the London Aldgate East Travelodge (6-13 Chamber St, E1 8BL) and the London Tower Bridge Travelodge (Lloyds Court Business Centre, 1 Goodmans Yard, E1 8AT), where double rooms are available on 30 September and 1 October at online "saver" rates of £65.75 and £62.95 per night respectively. Breakfast is £6.65 extra per person. Go to: [http://www2.travelodge.co.uk]. For phone bookings tel: 0871-984 6406. The nearby Royal Foundation of St Katherine (2 Butcher Row, E14 8DS) is a charitable centre with b&b in single and twin rooms for £47 and £69 per night respectively. Tel: 0300-111 1147; web: [www.stkatharine.org.uk].

Spain: 22-29 October

These activities are being organised by the Paris-based Coordination Internationale (CI) of International Brigade associations. We must let the CI know roughly how many IBMT supporters plan to attend. All individuals must make their own travel arrangements to and from Spain, but we expect group travel and accommodation to be available in Spain, with individuals charged accordingly. If you plan to attend, let IBMT Secretary Jim Jump know by early in June: [secretary@international-brigades.org.uk]; tel: 020-7228 6504. Indicate if you will be attending for the whole week or part of it.

Saturday 22 October

– Tour of various key sites in the battle for Madrid.

– Inauguration of a memorial to the International Brigades in the Complutense University of Madrid (to be confirmed).

– Concert in honour of the International Brigades in the auditorium of the CCOO union federation, Lope de Vega Street, Madrid.

– Overnight in Madrid.

Sunday 23 October

– Departure to the Jarama battlefield.

– Visit to the Museum of the Battle of Jarama at Morata de Tajuña.

– Lunch in the Mesón el Cid restaurant.

– Departure to Albacete.

– Overnight in Albacete.

Monday 24 October

– Tour of Albacete and nearby villages where

the International Brigades were based.

– Ceremony organised by Terre de Fraternité and Albacete city council.

– Overnight in Albacete.

Tuesday 25 October

– For participants returning home, departure to Madrid.

– For the others, departure by train to the Ebro at 12:05pm; arrival at about 4:30pm.

– Overnight in Salou.

Wednesday 26 October

– Tour of the Ebro battlefields.

– Homage to the International Brigades and Spanish Republican combatants at the memorial to the International Brigades.

– Tour of the Terra Alta de l'Ebre region.

– Overnight in Salou.

Thursday 27 October

– Congress in Barcelona: "The International Fight Against Fascism"; opening session, led by Ángel Viñas, starts at 8am; theme: Revolution and counter-revolution in the interwar years.

– Overnight in Salou.

Friday 28 October

– Congress in Barcelona continues with theme: Solidarity, the foundation of a society based on social progress.

– During the congress, a visit to Barcelona will be arranged.

– Overnight in Salou.

Saturday 29 October

– Congress in Barcelona continues with theme: The resistance in France and in Europe.

– 7:30pm-8pm: Summary and conclusions of the congress, led by José Luis Martín Ramos.

Marshall Mateer



PALFREEMAN: Achievements of medics in Spain.

Medical volunteers preserved decency in a time of 'moral decay'

Heroic and ground-breaking work carried out by the British volunteers who served with the Spanish Republican army's medical services was the focus of this year's Len Crome Memorial Lecture at London's Imperial War Museum on 5 March.

Not only did these volunteers help to establish and maintain an emergency medical service, but they were also responsible for important developments of relevance to later military-medical practice and to the history of medicine in general, said Linda Palfreeman in her lecture, titled "¡Salud! The British Contribution to the Republican Medical Service during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939".

Palfreeman also brought greetings from a Catalan doctor who worked with the Britons in the medical services of the International Brigades. Before leaving Spain, where she teaches at Elche's Cardenal Herrera University, she spoke by telephone with Moisès Broggi i Vallès, now aged 103 and living in Barcelona.

Chaired by Professor Paul Preston, the IBMT-organised lecture attracted over 120 people to the museum's auditorium, many of whom took part in the discussion following the talk.

Preston was also one of the participants in a special tribute held earlier in the day to International Brigaders who had died over the previous 12 months. Using words, song and film clips, historians, friends and family members remembered Jack Edwards, Penny Feiwei, Joseph Kahn, Bernard Knox and Sam Lesser. The session



GREETINGS: From Dr Moisès Broggi, as a young man with the International Brigades and today.

International Brigader on euro coin

An International Brigader now features on currency used in the 17 countries of the European Union's euro-zone. He is Franc Rozman (1911-1944), who fought with the Yugoslav volunteers in Spain and whose portrait appears on the 2-euro coin which has been minted by Slovenia from March this year.

After the Spanish Civil War Rozman, who also used the *nom de guerre* Stane, was a leader of the Slovenian communist partisans fighting the Nazi German occupation. He died in a mortar weapon accident while with the partisans.

The Rozman coin commemorates the centenary of his birth in a village near Ljubljana.



In Spain, Rozman commanded the Matej Gube Company of the Dimitrov Battalion, consisting mainly of volunteers from the Balkans and Greece. After the war he was interned in camps in France before making his way home and joining the Yugoslav resistance in 1941.

Euro notes are identical throughout the euro-zone, but each member country is able to design and produce its own coins, which are legal tender in all the other 16 countries.

The choice of Franc Rozman has not been without controversy, with Slovenia's right-wing Democratic Party criticising the decision to commemorate a communist.

included songs performed by the cast of the "Goodbye Barcelona" musical based on the story of the International Brigades.

In her lecture, Palfreeman pointed out that the volunteers who went to Spain were part of a widescale mobilisation of support for the Spanish Republic in Britain, with thousands organising marches, rallies, meetings, concerts and bazaars in order to raise funds for the Aid Spain movement and to encourage support for the anti-fascist cause.

"More than 1,000 aid committees were created and millions of people from every class and social circumstance donated food, clothing, labour and money," she said. "Volunteers also worked tirelessly with the victims of the war in Great Britain as well as in Spain, establishing hospitals, refuges, soup kitchens and schools."

As part of her conclusion, she quoted the words of Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit, the young administrator of the first British Medical Unit, reflecting on the participation of volunteers: "What was achieved in Spain? I believe that all those who went to Spain and those who made it possible for us to do so did something important to preserve human decency at a time of widespread moral decay. All those people who worked in Spain and in their own countries, in hospitals and homes, refugee centres and soup kitchens, all those who collected and donated money, food and clothing... all helped to save many lives and to ease a great deal of suffering. Many gave all they had: they gave their life."

The IBMT is hoping to publish Linda Palfreeman's lecture as an illustrated booklet in tribute to the work of the British medical volunteers.

Dundee remembers

The annual remembrance in Dundee organised by the local trades union council was held at the memorial to the International Brigade in the city's Albert Square. Taking part in the event on 12 February along with union members were relatives of

the volunteers and others interested in the Spanish Civil War. Chief organiser Mike Arnott said afterwards: "It is important to commemorate the fact that over 60 people volunteered from Dundee to fight in the war, 17 of whom gave their lives."

Award for Garzón

Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón is the first recipient of the annual \$100,000 Award for Human Rights Activism conferred jointly by ALBA, one of the IBMT's sister organisations in the US, and the Puffin Foundation. Garzón became internationally famous after he ordered the arrest of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet in London in 1998. More recently he has led efforts to identify human rights violations during the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship. He has faced a hostile backlash by conservative elements in Spain's judiciary and, for opening an investigation into Franco's crimes, was in 2010 suspended from office for exceeding his authority.



APPEAL: The IBMT has joined campaigners and historians in Spain and Britain in urging the town council of Tarancón, about 50 miles south east of Madrid, to stop the proposed demolition of the building (above) that housed an International Brigade hospital during the Spanish Civil War. Several well known doctors, such as the Briton Reginald Saxton and the Canadian Norman Bethune, served at the hospital. Tarancón was one of four such institutions in the area, and there have been proposals to link them as a specialist tourist destination for visitors interested in the history of the civil war.

The 'Spanish holocaust'

From page 3

perpetrated by the fascist-backed rebels were almost always officially sanctioned and were an integral and carefully-planned part of their policy of terrifying the Spanish people into submission.

By contrast, the killings in Republican-held Spain took place in the first few months of the war when law and order broke down and elements on the left, in particular the anarchists, took spontaneous revenge on individuals and groups—such as the Church—who backed the July 1936 coup against the elected Republican government. Once the Republican authorities had reasserted control in their zone, the killings by and large ceased.

Murders in the Republican zone, for which there is a reliable figure of 49,272, says Preston, were exhaustively investigated, both by the Republic before its defeat and by the victorious Francoists.

The process of counting the victims of Francoist violence could begin only after the dictator's death in 1975 and is still incomplete. "It is unlikely that such deaths were fewer than 150,000 and they could well be more," says Preston. This figure excludes battlefield deaths on both sides, along with the unknown numbers killed in the bombing campaigns against Republican cities such as Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. Nor does it include the many thousands of refugees who died in bombing attacks as they fled Francoist advances, nor the tens of thousands of refugees and prisoners who subsequently died from disease and malnutrition.

"All of this constitutes what I believe can legitimately be called the Spanish Holo-

"I hope the book will show the extent of the suffering unleashed upon their own fellow citizens by... the officers who rose up on 17 July 1936."

caust," says Preston. Statistics, however, fail to convey the intense horror of what took place, the author concedes, and he includes many stories of individual victims from both sides. "I hope the book will show the extent of the suffering unleashed upon their own fellow citizens by the arrogance and brutality of the officers who rose up on 17 July 1936. They provoked war, a war that was unnecessary and whose consequences still reverberate in Spain today."

See a lecture that Paul Preston delivered on the theme of his latest book at a conference at University College, London, in February on "The Carnival of Death": www.spainculture.co.uk.

● Duncan Longstaff has been trying without success to trace the whereabouts of the International Brigade memorial plaque to nine volunteers from Bristol which was displayed at the former MSF union offices at Westbury-on-Trym. Contact: [duncanlongstaff@btinternet.com].

● A group of TV film makers in Spain is putting together a documentary about the Asturian miners' strikes of the early 60s and would like to find out more about solidarity support from Britain, in particular a delegation from the National Union of Mineworkers that visited Spain in 1962. It included Ben Morris (South Wales), SL Magness (Kent) and H Dilks (Chesterfield). They are also interested in a group called the Spanish Democrats' Defence Committee

and leading members Charles Padley, John Clarke and Sam Watson. If anyone can help, contact Marcos Martínez Merino at [marcosmmerino@hotmail.com] or tel: +34-658 790 017.

● Graham Thompson is arranging to have the memorial stone to Percy Williams in Swindon restored. According to the inscription, Williams was killed at Caspe in 1938. Can anyone provide information relating to the action in which he was killed? [g.thompson154@btinternet.com].

If you do not have access to email, contact the IBMT Secretary (details on page 2). Please share your information about Brigaders with Jim Carmody, the IBMT's researcher: [jamescamody@yahoo.co.uk].

LETTERS

Anti-fascism is their legacy

In Marlene Sidaway's column (New Year 2011) on the legacy of the International Brigades she said that "the issues that these men and women faced in 1930s are just as relevant today".

We again face a situation where right-wing parties across Europe are making the same old noises that the volunteers heard and acted against, for example, how our society and values are being destroyed by immigration. The same tactic of using the frustrations of the unemployed, and particularly the young unemployed, against immigrants is being attempted. Look at the EDL, at efforts to instigate tensions between white and Asian youth and at attempts by the BNP to use the election process to position themselves as "legitimate" politicians.

Coalition politicians claim that multiculturalism has failed. The current economic situation will provide the right with an opportunity to develop and grow. The true legacy of the International Brigade volunteers was their heroic anti-fascist stance. We must continue the work they so rightly believed and died for.

Remember the words of Bertolt Brecht in May 1945: "Don't rejoice in his defeat, you men. For though the world has stood up and stopped the bastard, the bitch that bore him is in heat again."

Graham Thompson

By email

Sam Lesser

Thanks for the latest great edition (New Year 2011) of the newsletter, not that it isn't always, and for the obituary of Sam [Lesser].

There are just two things I wonder if you could mention in the next issue. The first is that one of the young nurses that Sam "escorted" into Spain was Dora Levin (whose death was mentioned in the same issue). Also, the man who

dragged and carried Sam to safety at Lopera, and probably saved his life, was Jock Cunningham, another early British Brigader.

Ruth Muller

(Daughter of Sam Lesser)

By email

Buried in Paris

The reference to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Arc de Triomphe (Autumn 2010) reminded me of the memorials to the French volunteers I came across in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris in June last year. Some of the names mentioned include Boris Guimpel, chief of staff of La Marseillaise Battalion, also a resistance fighter in the Second World War, and an architect – which he returned to after the war; Thadée Oppman was commander of the Edgar André Battalion; Jeanne Oppman, if my research is correct, was a nurse from Lithuania.

Arthur Tucker

By email

Remembering Arthur Dooley

I read with interest the item about Glasgow's International Brigade memorial by Arthur Dooley (Autumn 2010). He was a good friend of ours and kept us informed about progress in making the sculpture and how it was going to be shipped from Liverpool to Glasgow. John and I never got to Glasgow for the unveiling in 1979 or to see it, but I'm happy that it has been refurbished. Arthur would have been pleased.

After he appeared on TV in "This Is Your Life" in 1970, he received lots of requests to be an after-dinner speaker, but got himself tied up in knots by not keeping a note of dates etc. I then offered to get all the dates organised and to write appropriate letters to the people and companies concerned. All went well after that.

Veronica Gibson

Liverpool

Paddy Cochrane

By Marlene Sidaway

Paddy Cochrane, who died on 31 March 2011, aged 98, returned to Spain in 2007 to visit Belchite where he was badly wounded 70 years ago. In the process of trying to commandeer three lorries to help with the evacuation of International Brigaders from the battle, he sustained a direct hit by a hand grenade, part of which went right through his leg and sliced the femoral artery; shrapnel also shredded his back, arms and legs. Comrades helped him to crawl into a ruined house and went to get more help.

He sat on his leg during the night, trying to stop the bleeding, trying to keep awake. Just before dawn he heard an urgent whisper: "Any Americans in here?" He called back: "No – just a wounded Irishman" and he recalled... "this enormous fellow appeared. He threw me over his shoulder and carried me down the street." Bullets were striking the walls around them, but they made it to safety.

Paddy never found out who his saviour was, but on his return trip, quite by accident, he met a Republican veteran who had been wounded on the same day and had taken refuge in a house just two doors away from where Paddy was lying. He too recalled a huge man coming to his rescue, and carrying him on his shoulder to safety. The two veterans were moved to tears by the memory of that brave American who had often been in their thoughts and raised a glass in honour of the man who had saved them from certain death.

Paddy was born in Dublin in 1913. After leaving school at 14, he worked for an automobile company, where the boss spent most of the day in the pub and left the running of the place to the teenage Paddy. One day an American visited the shop on business and Paddy asked if he could give him a job in the US. Within three months he was there – he stayed with the job for a year, before deciding to go exploring and went to Canada and Alaska, where he hated the cold weather, so hitched down the West Coast and finally got a working passage on a ship bound for Liverpool.

At the age of 23, finding a job back in England was very difficult. "No Irish need apply" was often tagged on to the advert. He learned of the Spanish Civil War from the *News Chronicle*, which he read to look for a job and this was where he saw a notice asking for drivers to take ambulances to Spain, so he volunteered. He

"...this enormous fellow appeared. He threw me over his shoulder and carried me down the street."



Paddy Cochrane by the ruins of Belchite in 2007.

said he felt it was his duty to go, he'd always had what he called "left-wing thoughts", he hated fascism and had been involved in the anti-fascist movement against Mosley.

He was unable to continue his fight against fascism in the Second World War because of the injuries he'd sustained at Belchite. He became a toolmaker in London for many years, and later designed and made spectacle frames.

He met his beloved wife May in 1939 and they had three children. When he retired at 70 they decided to live in Ireland, where they remained very happily for 16 years until ill health made them return to England to be near their daughter, Karen. May died three years ago.

Paddy was active in politics all his life. He vividly remembered his time in Spain and maintained that he would do it all again and that one of the proudest moments of his life was receiving his Spanish passport in 2009.

Jack Edwards

By Jim Jump

Jack Edwards, who died on 26 January 2011 at the age of 97, was a veteran of the battles of Jarama, Teruel and the Ebro. He was a lifelong communist and an inspiration to all those who came in contact with his cheery optimism and dedication to progressive causes.

Born in Liverpool on 3 January 1914 and raised as an only child by his widowed mother, Jack attended Socialist Sunday School and delivered copies of the *Daily Worker* and *Sunday Worker* around Edge Hill. He worked in various jobs after leaving school, including motor mechanic and, as a member of the Young Communist League, was involved in street clashes when Sir Oswald Mosley's fascist Blackshirts came to Liverpool and Birkenhead.

When Franco launched his coup against the Spanish Republic in July 1936, Jack soon decided he should join the International Brigades. "I

thought the [British] government's non-intervention was a load of rubbish actually, because it wasn't going to work. It was a ploy to let the fascists go into Spain," he recalled years later. He set off for Spain not even telling his mother or girlfriend Ivy. His future wife got a postcard from London saying simply: "I'm going to Spain and I'll see you when I get back."

Via Paris, Perpignan, Barcelona and Valencia, he arrived at the base of the newly formed British Battalion at Madrigueras, near Albacete, in January 1937. The next month he was in action at Jarama, south-east of Madrid, where the battalion sustained heavy casualties as Franco tried unsuccessfully to cut the main road linking the capital with Valencia. Jack was wounded in the foot and spent several weeks in hospital.

Once recovered, he joined the 1st Transport Regiment, working as a driver and mechanic alongside Americans, Canadians and Cubans. He was in action at Teruel in the winter of 1937/8 and afterwards in Aragón, keeping the fighting units supplied with munitions and food. However, by now the Republic's lines were in retreat and part of his work involved sabotaging petrol tanks on vehicles left behind as the fascists advanced.

For the Republic's last great offensive across the Ebro, Jack was attached to a machine-gun unit in the mainly Spanish 129th Artillery Division and fought around Tortosa in the summer and autumn of 1938. In his recollections of the war he always underlined the spirit of unity between the Spaniards and the other nationalities in the International Brigades. In a 1976 interview for the Imperial War Museum he remembered: "There was one bloke, came from Seville, he said to me, where did I come from and I said 'Inglaterra'. He said: 'Is it far away, you know, like, is it near Madrid?' So the sergeant laughed at him. This was the kind of thing, you know, people who hadn't realised the distance of things but were all working together. It was a harmonious set-up."

As the Battle of the Ebro raged, the Republic decided to withdraw the International Brigades in a forlorn attempt to court favour with the Western powers, who were nonetheless determined to appease the fascist dictators. Detached from most of the other British volunteers, who had been fighting further north near Gandesa, Jack was sent to Valencia and made his way home alone via Barcelona, crossing the frontier into France on foot and then by train to England. He arrived home in January 1939, a month after the British Battalion.

During the Second World War he volunteered to join the RAF in 1940, declaring it was "the same bloody fight" as in Spain. His proficiency with a rifle was noted by an NCO, who was puzzled by Edwards' claim never to have served in the forces.

After the war he worked as a mechanic and in various labouring jobs in Liverpool, eventually moving with Ivy and their daughter and two boys to the Midlands, first to Dudley, where he worked for the local authority, and

Jack Edwards:
Surprised that
the Spanish Civil
War isn't taught
in schools.



then to Telford, becoming a manager with the water board.

Jack was an enthusiastic member of the IBMT and, until our annual general meeting last October, served on the executive board. Despite failing health, he managed to attend the AGM in Liverpool. There, he and Unite's Len McCluskey unveiled a plaque in the union's Jack Jones House to the Merseyside International Brigade volunteers who died in Spain, several of whom had been Jack's friends and comrades.

A very modest man, he would shrug off his own courageous part in the fight for democracy in Spain with a characteristic laugh and a joke. He remained a great internationalist throughout his life. In 2009, he went to Cuba for May Day and visited Cuban International Brigade veteran Universo Lípiz Rodríguez in Matanzas. In the following month he was at the Spanish embassy in London to receive the Spanish citizenship and passport conferred on Brigaders by Spain's current socialist government.

Writing in 2009 about his thoughts on the Spanish Civil War in Max Arthur's "The Real Band of Brothers", he said: "People think of it as a forgotten war, but it should be remembered, really, as a fight against fascism, for democracy... I'm surprised it's not taught in the schools – they should teach it out of respect for democracy. That would leave behind the legacy of the Brigaders – something that people could remember us for."

See video clips of Jack Edwards describing his experience as a Brigader at [www.shapesoftime.net/pages/viewpage.asp?uniqid=14581].

Also remembered

● US Brigader **Hank Rubin**, who died in February at the age of 94, served initially with the mainly Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, but in the autumn of 1937 was transferred to the British Medical Unit established by Kenneth Sinclair Loufit on the Aragón front. Rubin worked as a blood transfusionist under Dr Reginald Saxton. The unit was sent to Teruel in December 1937 and to the Ebro in July 1938. After the war he became a renowned restaurateur and wine expert in the San Francisco area. In 1997 he wrote "Spain's Cause Was Mine", describing his experiences in the Spanish Civil War.

When the International Brigade memorial on London's South Bank was unveiled on 5 October 1985, *The Guardian* mentioned "an old grey-haired woman" speaking of medical aid for Spain. This was Dame Janet Vaughan, aged 85, whose activity during the Spanish Civil War had been largely forgotten by then. But her story can still be found in papers and sound recordings, mainly in the Marx Memorial Library, the Imperial War Museum and the Hull History Centre.

Born in 1899, the daughter of a public school headmaster, Janet was expected by her parents to have a conventional middle class life and marriage. Instead, she became a doctor and – having seen as a student the poverty of London's slums – a socialist. In 1930 she married David Gourlay, a socialist and conscientious objector. They lived in a flat above the travel agency David ran in Bloomsbury's Gordon Square. The sisters Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf were her cousins; and she was related to Amabel and John Strachey, both prominent socialists.

By 1936 Janet was an eminent medical researcher: the second edition of her classic book "The Anaemias" was published that year, and she was promoted to senior lecturer at the British Postgraduate School of Medicine at Hammersmith. She also had two children, Mary and Priscilla, both under five.

Then came the rise of fascism. Janet wrote later that the Spanish Civil War "became for many of us the great opportunity to take a stand against fascism". The Spanish Medical Aid Committee (SMAC) was set up in August 1936 through the Socialist Medical Association, at the instigation of Communist Party activist Isabel Brown – soon to be one of the committee's leading fundraisers. By September, Janet was chairman of one of its most effective local committees – Holborn & West Central London. Its first public meeting was held on 5 October; and the pamphlet it published in November included contributions from writers such as JB Priestley, Rebecca West and Stephen Spender, all arguing against the government's policy of non-intervention.

Janet drew in her friends to support the cause. Vanessa Bell wrote in October 1936: "For the last few days we have all been trying to do posters for a meeting... to get money to send medical help to Spain – Janet Vaughan asked me and Duncan to do some – and Q[ueentin] and A[ngelica] have done one each too..."; and again in November Janet was one of those who "pestered" her "by every post" to help with a show of Spanish art. In its first three months, the committee raised more than £684 (around £35,000 in today's money), of which it gave £600 to the national SMAC.

Janet herself remembered walking in poster processions, speaking on soap boxes at street corners and in "huge public meetings" and selling "many treasured possessions". Her daughter Mary (aged 4½ in May 1937) stood alongside such soap boxes on Saturday afternoons and has a vivid memory of returning one day to find the

Sheena Evans describes how Janet Vaughan's commitment to Spanish Medical Aid not only helped the people of Spain but led to thousands of lives being saved during the Second World War.

Wearing a stone from the Jarama battlefield: Vaughan in the portrait by Victoria Crowe.



National Portrait Gallery

Janet Vaughan: Spain in the heart

flat dark and empty, the car and much of the furniture sold for Spanish Medical Aid; and of her mother's "absolute delight" at the amount of money she had raised.

Although Janet had resigned as chair of the local committee by March 1938, she continued as one of the national vice-presidents of SMAC, and addressed an all-London women's meeting as part of a huge campaign around Britain over the autumn and winter of 1938-39 to fill foodships for Spain. She was also delegated, with other women, to lobby the Foreign Office (unsuccessfully) for more government help.

In January 1939, SMAC called a meeting at which doctors returned from Spain shared their experiences. Janet took the chair for questions and discussion – a long session, mainly about the then innovative practice of using stored blood for transfusions. This had been pioneered in Barcelona by the Spanish doctor Frederic Durán-Jordà, and Dr Reginald Saxton spoke at the meet-

"She was the driving force behind a group of pathologists who... planned what was to be the wartime blood transfusion service."

ing about using stored blood provided by Jordà for the International Brigades.

Janet had worked for SMAC in sending personnel and medical supplies – including blood transfusion equipment – to Spain. She had studied the literature and experimented herself with stored blood. She also learned personally from Dr Jordà, when she helped him and his family

settle in England after their escape from Spain. With world war now looming, she saw the need to act quickly to use this knowledge. Between April and July 1939, she was the driving force behind a group of pathologists who met on her initiative in her flat, at first unofficially, and planned what was to be the wartime blood transfusion service for London. When war came in September their plan was put into effect. Similar arrangements followed in the provinces. The service was to save thousands of civilian lives.

Janet was the principal of Sommerville College, Oxford, from 1945-1967. She never forgot Spain. She gave money to help dissidents under Franco and, into her old age, to the International Brigade Association. The pendant she wears in the 1985 portrait by Victoria Crowe, now at the National Portrait Gallery, is a stone she treasured, picked up in 1981 from the Jarama battlefield.

At the unveiling of the International Brigade memorial in 1985, many listeners were moved to tears as she recalled some of her colleagues in Spanish Medical Aid – Isabel Brown, Leah Manning, Audrey Russell and Richard Ellis, and Vanessa's son Julian Bell who met his death as an ambulance driver – and urged all present to fight "for our democratic rights, for our social services, for our health service, for our children's right to full education and full employment. We can say as the Brigades said in 1936: '¡No pasarán!'"

Sheena Evans is an independent biographer.

Brigader's testimony resurfaces in book on Churchill and India



International Brigader Clive Branson is one of the few British people to emerge with any credit in “Churchill’s Secret War” by Madhusree Mukerjee, a book that tells the appalling story of how a combination of callous economic policies and colonial attitudes contributed to the 1943 famine in which 3 million Indians died.

Branson arrived in India in May 1942 with the Royal Armoured Corps, aged 35. Frustrated at having spent more time in Spain in a Franco prisoner-of-war camp than on the battlefield, he was eager to continue the fight, this time against “Japanese Fascism”. That opportunity did not come until many months later, but in the meantime Branson was able to immerse himself in Indian culture and politics. He learnt Hindi and made many friends among the locals, whereas most

of his comrades in arms, especially the officers, despised the Indians.

The boredom of barrack-life also gave him the time to write many letters home to wife Noreen, a fellow leading figure in the Communist Party. A selection of these was published posthumously by the party under the title “British Soldier in India”, Branson having been killed in Burma in February 1944. Mukerjee draws extensively from these letters, which chart the terrible progress of the famine in Bengal, along with Branson’s horror not only with the human suffering but with the cynical indifference of the British authorities.

As Mukerjee acknowledges, Churchill was a venerated wartime leader in Britain. But his view of Indians – “a beastly people with a beastly religion” – and his part in the great famine of 1943 are a blot on his record and stand in stark con-

trast to the “acute sense of compassion” shown by Branson.

“Churchill’s Secret War: the British Empire and the ravaging of India during World War II” by Madhusree Mukerjee is published by Basic Books (New York, 2010); £18.99.



Jews against fascism

The role of British Jews in the Second World War is described in “Fighting Back”, a new book by Martin Sugarman, the archivist of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women. It contains a chapter about the Jewish volunteers who went to Spain to join the International Brigades. The book is published by Vallentine Mitchell (Edgware, 2010); £18.95 (paperback); More details from: [www.vmbooksuk.com].



A lost cause

“The Truth about Spain! Mobilizing British Public Opinion, 1936-1939” by Hugo García; £55 (Sussex Academic Press; Eastbourne, 2009)



Reviewed by Richard Baxell

Hugo García has made an important contribution to the rather crowded field of books published recently on the impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain; this is a rich,

detailed study, impeccably researched. The title, however, is somewhat of a misnomer, for García’s aim, as he admits, is not to judge the veracity of Republican and Nationalist propaganda, but rather to attempt to present an objective, dispassionate analysis of the forms and effectiveness of their propaganda campaigns.

The book comprises four main sections. The first is a history of “modern” forms of propaganda and censorship, from the end of the 19th century to the end of the Second World War.

Part two compares the differing approaches of the Nationalists and the Republicans in Spain and contains a wealth of detail on the development, manning and operation of both sides’ propaganda machines. As García shows, the view of foreign correspondents as spies and criminals by senior Nationalists, and their treatment by their rude and obstructive press officer, Luis Bolín, was often counter-productive. For example, the expulsion of *The Times* correspondent George Steer required him to move to the Republican zone, from where he later produced his devastating coverage of the bombing of Guernica.

García’s analysis of the Republicans’ approach – frequently drawing on Arturo Barea’s wonderful

memoir, “The Forging of a Rebel” – recognises that the Republic’s initial problem was to overcome the chaos that followed the rising and which had shattered the state apparatus. Order was gradually re-established by the end of 1936, leading to increasingly professional dealings with the foreign press. In contrast to the repugnant Bolín, Republican figures such as Constanza de la Mora offered an efficient and charming front to the foreign correspondents, recognising their value, rather than treating them as irritants.

García then turns to the propaganda messages put out by both sides, particularly atrocities and foreign intervention. It was obviously vitally important for both sides to get across their version of events: the rebels’ depiction of themselves as *Nacionales* in an anti-communist crusade was countered by the Republicans’ portrayal of the war as “progress versus feudalism”, or the defence of democracy against international fascism. García argues that the techniques used by both sides were in fact very similar and that both knowingly and deliberately used falsehoods to sustain their portrayal of the conflict.

The final section discusses the impact of the propaganda on Britain. As he admits, García faces the thorny problem of assessing exactly how the “messages” put across were received in Britain; not easy to judge considering the unreliability of opinion polling, then still in its infancy. García claims that, in the main, there was a general indifference, “a plague on both your houses”, as one contemporary newspaper put it. However, as he recognises, of those who took sides, many more sided with the Republicans than with the rebels. And while the strongest support for both sides came from the political extremes in Britain, the Republicans had some success in extending their realm of support as the war progressed.

However, García believes that the reportage of the horrors of the Spanish war was most effective

in convincing neutrals of the horror of war in general, rather than of one particular side, and thus consolidated support for non-intervention. In a depressing conclusion, he argues that, even if the Republican propaganda had been better, it would probably still not have achieved enough to be able to save the Spanish Republic. Sadly, it is difficult to disagree with García’s view that “this was, from very early in the war, a lost cause”. Once Britain and France were determined to pursue non-intervention, despite ample evidence of a huge German and Italian presence in Spain, the Spanish Republic was effectively doomed.

Forgotten hero

“A British Hero: Christopher St John Sprigg aka Christopher Caudwell” by James Whetter; £20 (Lyfrow Telispen, St Austell, 2011)



Reviewed by Jim Jump

Poet, novelist, critic and journalist Christopher Caudwell was one of the best known International Brigaders to die in Spain. Reports of his death at the

Battle of Jarama in February 1937 appeared in newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror*, *London Evening News*, *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*. The *News Chronicle* announced the creation of a memorial fund in his name in order to send an ambulance to Spain. Among the signatories were JB Priestley, WH Auden, Julian Huxley and Sir Hugh Walpole.

His posthumous works of Marxist literary theory and philosophy, “Illusion and Reality” and “Studies in a Dying Culture”, were critically acclaimed and reviewed extensively in the press.

Continued overleaf



● Written and sung by Stevie Simpson (above), “**The Volunteer**” is an epic 14-minute story of a Brigader who joins the fight against fascism in Spain. It is taken from Simpson’s latest album “Garage Songs”. For the past nine years Stevie has been playing at festivals all over the UK, sharing bills with Status Quo, Jethro Tull, Dave Edmunds and Wilko Johnson, among others. Watch him perform “The Volunteer” with vocals and mandolin only: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbCCTm8evtk] or listen to the full version at: [http://soundcloud.com/stevieoneblokeone_mandolin/the-volunteer], where the album can also be purchased.

● The March 2011 issue of the Socialist History Society’s newsletter contains an interview with

the nieces of **Harold Laws**, a Southampton volunteer who was killed in Spain in February 1938, aged 26. Henrietta Quinnell and Catherine Silman talk about the powerful impact and influence that their uncle’s brief life had on them and their families. In the same issue there is also a tribute to historian **Jim Fyrth**, author of “The Signal Was Spain” about the Aid Spain movement in Britain, who died last year. See: [www.socialisthistorysociety.co.uk/newsletter.htm].

● Catalonia-based Alan Warren, Claudia Honefeld, Jordi Martí and Merce Lluveras have launched a **Porta de la Història** website for people interested in the Spanish Civil War. In English, Spanish and Catalan, it includes many news and photos of tours led by the group. See [<http://pdlhistoria.wordpress.com>].

● The Derry-based North West Spanish Civil War Project, the historical and educational group which remembers the lives of International Brigade volunteers from **Derry, Donegal and Tyrone**, has launched its own website: [www.nopasaran.netfirms.com]. The group hopes to organise a series of events in 2011 to ensure that the names of the 24 local men who went to Spain in the fight against fascism are not forgotten. Anyone who would like to support the project or provide information on the volunteers, contact: [xvbrigade@hotmail.com].

● Published by ALBA, our sister organisation in the US, the March 2011 issue of **The Volunteer** (right) is now online at [www.albavolunteer.org].



● The AICVAS association of **Italian volunteers** in the International Brigades has a new website (in Italian only): [www.aicvas.org].



● To mark the centenary of her birth in November last year, researchers in Reading have produced an informative booklet on the life of **Thora Silverthorne** (left), the Welsh-born nurse who settled in Reading before serving as a nurse in Spain. After the war she was a notable nurses’

trade union leader. She died in 1999. PDF copies are available from Mike Cooper at: [mike.cooper@reading.gov.uk]. See also an online biography of Silverthorne at [<http://cohse-union.blogspot.com/2010/11/thora-silverthorne-progressive-nursing.html>], also marking her centenary.

BOOKS

From previous page

They were translated into several languages and appeared on many university reading lists in the decades that followed Caudwell’s death at the age of 29.

Now, most of his books are hard to find and out of print – including the series of detective novels that he wrote under his real name of Christopher St John Sprigg.

Cornish historian James Whetter therefore deserves great credit for writing this first biography of Caudwell and, it must be hoped, helping to return his name and literary legacy to a wider audience.

Painstakingly researched and packed with detail, the book, as its title suggests, was a labour of love for Whetter, for whom Caudwell was an inspiration and model from the time of his student days. Whetter also delighted in Caudwell’s Cornish connection and organised the erection of a plaque at the inn in Porthleven where he wrote “Illusion and Reality”.

“A British Hero” traces Caudwell life from comfortable bourgeois upbringing in west London through his career as a journalist with the *Yorkshire Post* and as editor of *Airways and Airports*. In the meantime he wrote poetry, eight novels and five books on aviation. At the end of 1935 he joined the Communist Party, moved to the East End (where on one occasion he was beaten up first by Blackshirts and afterwards by the police)

and then in December 1936 drove an ambulance to Spain to join the International Brigades.

Available from: **The Roseland Institute, Gorrán, St Austell, Cornwall PL26 6NT, with cheque for £25 (including p&p) made out to James Whetter. See also: [www.theroselandinstitute.co.uk/html/lyfrow_trelyspen_publications]**

It’s my party

“**My Life**” by **Chris Birch**; £15 (St Christopher Press, London, 2010)



Reviewed by **Jim Jump**

Now in his 80s, Chris Birch is known to many IBMT members as a lifelong anti-Franco activist and supporter of the International Brigades. In the 1950s he and wife Betty were founding members of the Aid to Spanish Youth Committee and took part in many demonstrations in London calling for the release of political prisoners from Franco’s jails.

Chris was also the treasurer of the International Brigade Memorial Appeal that raised the funds for the erection of the outstanding International Brigade memorial in London’s Jubilee Gardens.

All this is described in “My Life”, an autobiogra-

phy full of fascinating anecdotes – not least about how his activities in support of democracy in Spain were spied on by Britain’s secret police, as of course were many Brigade veterans.

But Spain has been only part of a lifetime of incident, travel and political commitment. Born and raised in the West Indies, Chris settled in England after studying at Bristol University in the late 40s. There he joined the Communist Party and met Betty (their first encounter came when he sold her a copy of the *Daily Worker*).

As leading members of the Young Communist League they spent much time in Eastern Europe, including Hungary, where they were eyewitnesses to the events of 1956 when Soviet tanks put down the uprising in Budapest. Afterwards he co-authored a memorandum to party chiefs in London sharply critical of the Hungarian party’s corruption and subservience to Moscow.

More recently, Chris, having discovered his bisexuality in the mid 50s, has been active in campaigns against HIV/aids. He represented London Lighthouse at the funeral of Princess Diana in 1997.

For most of his working life Chris was a journalist, including a spell on the *Morning Star*. He and Betty remained communists until the CPGB dissolved itself in the early 90s. “My Life” makes clear his abiding pride with having been a member of a party that foresaw the evil of fascism and created the International Brigades.

21 May 2011: Lecture: "Irish Volunteers in the British Battalion" by Richard Baxell; 4pm; Irish Labour History Society Museum, Beggars Bush Barracks, Haddington Rd, Dublin 4; preceded at 2:30pm by society's annual general meeting; registration fee: 5 euros; email: [secretary@irishlabourhistorysociety.com].

21 May 2011: Paul Preston lectures on "The Spanish Civil War 75 Years On" as part of Bristol Festival of Ideas; 2pm; Arnofini Gallery, 16 Narrow Quay, BS1 4QA; £7 (£5 concessions); reservations: [boxoffice@arnofini.org.uk]; see: [www.ideasfestival.co.uk].

25-25 June 2011: 4th annual George Brown commemoration weekend at Inistoge, Co Kilkenny; begins Fri 7:15pm with wreath-laying at George Brown plaque, St Colmcille's Cemetery, followed by speakers and social; events on Sat run from 11am; speakers include Harry Owens, Ciarán Crossey and Manus O'Riordan; more details: [moriordan@suptu.ie].

2 July 2011: Annual commemoration at International Brigade memorial, Jubilee Gardens, London SE1; assemble 12:30pm; followed by lunch at Camel & Artichoke, 121 Lower Marsh St, SE1 7AE (see page 1 map); contact IBMT Secretary Jim Jump (see page 2) for more information or if transport needed from Jubilee Gardens to Camel & Artichoke.

2 July 2011: As part of South Yorkshire Socialist Festival, afternoon rededication of olive tree memorial at Wortley Hall, Wortley, Sheffield, South Yorks S35 7DB, to South Yorkshire International Brigaders; time to be confirmed; IBMT's "Antifascistas" exhibition will also be on display; more information from Mike Wild: [mikesamwild@fsmail.net]; tel: 0114-201 6350.

2/3 July 2011: Annual commemoration of Battle of Brunete; organised by Madrid-based AABI; details from Severiano Montero: [seve.montero@gmail.com].

6 July 2011: Talk by Richard Baxell "Three Months in Spain: The British Battalion at

Madrigueras and Jarama" at Sheffield University's Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Jessop West Building, 1 Upper Hanover St, S3 7RA; 7:30pm; plus from 6:30pm songs and poetry; more information from Mike Wild (see above).

9 July 2011: Rededication of Sheffield International Brigade memorial in Peace Gardens (next to Town Hall), with speeches, songs etc; 11am; more information from Mike Wild (see above).

13 July 2011: IBMT fundraising evening of music and poetry; Sheffield Trades & Labour Club, 200 Duke St, S2 5QQ; from 7:30pm; more information from Mike Wild (see above).

16 July 2011: 75th anniversary commemoration at International Brigade plaque, Manchester Town Hall; 11am-12:15pm followed by refreshments; more information from Hilary Jones (0161-224 1747) or Dolores Long (0161-226 2013).

17 July 2011: 75th anniversary commemoration at International Brigade memorial in front of Newcastle Civic Centre; 10:30am for wreath-laying; afterwards at Percy Arms, 83 Percy St, NE1 7RW; contact Simon Galliers: [sigalliers@gmail.com].

9-11 September 2011: International Brigade commemoration weekend in Berlin; organised by KFSR German IB association; contact [info@spanienkaempfer.de].

25 September 2011: Talk by Richard Baxell, "Cable Street, the Road to Spain"; St George's Hall, Cable St, London E1 oBL; time to be confirmed; organised by Jewish East End Celebration Society [www.jeeccs.org.uk].

30 September-2 October 2011: Weekend of events in London to commemorate 75th anniversary of International Brigades, including on 1 October IBMT annual general meeting at Unite the Union, 128 Theobald's Rd, WC1X 8TN, plus evening gala at New Red Lion Theatre, 271-273 City Road, EC1V 1LA; more details on page 4.

4-17 July 2011: Sheffield University's Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Jessop West Building, 1 Upper Hanover St, S3 7RA; during same period at Local Studies Library in Central Library, Surrey St, S1 1xz, "Behind the Clenched Fist: support for Republican Spain in the Sheffield area"; more information from Mike Wild: [mikesamwild@fsmail.net]; tel: 0114-201 6350.

18-29 July 2011: Reading Museum, Blagrove St, Reading RG1 1QH; Tues-Sat 10am-4pm/Sun 11am-4pm; [www.readingmuseum.org.uk]; contact Mike Cooper [coomik1418@yahoo.co.uk].

Apologies to readers who went to Winchester Great Hall from 28 March-16 April to see the "Antifascistas" exhibition, as listed in our previous issue. Regrettably, the showing was cancelled at the last minute by the hosts.



Edinburgh to Cable Street cycle ride 2011

This is the itinerary that the National Clarion Cycling Club 1895 (NCCC) will be taking on their Edinburgh to London ride to mark the 75th anniversary of the creation of the International Brigades and the Battle of Cable Street. They arrive at Cable Street on Friday 30 September at the start of a weekend of activities in the capital, including the IBMT's annual general meeting and a commemoration of the Battle of Cable Street – in which many future Brigaders took part, along with NCCC members (see more details on page 4).

19 September: IB memorial, Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh to Glasgow; visit Blantyre IB memorial en route; 60 miles.

20 September: IB memorial, Custom Quay, Glasgow, to Cairnryan; 85 miles.

21 September: Cairnryan by ferry to Larne; onwards to Belfast; 25 miles.

22 September: IB memorial, Saint Anne's Square, Belfast, to Dundalk; 55 miles.

23 September: Dundalk to Dublin; 55 miles.

24 September: IB memorial, Liberty Hall, Dublin, to Arklow; 62 miles.

25 September: Arklow to Rosslare; 58 miles.

26 September: Rosslare by ferry to Fishguard; onwards to St Clears; 33 miles.

27 September: St Clears to Cardiff; 62 miles.

28 September: IB memorial, Cathays Park, Cardiff, to Bristol; 55 miles.

29 September: IB memorial, Castle Park, Bristol, to Streatley; visit Swindon IB memorial en route; 35 miles.

30 September: Streatley to London; visit Reading IB memorial en route; arrival at IB memorial in Cable Street; 60 miles.

Other memorials, apart from those mentioned above, might be visited en route, including those at Rutherglen, Llanelli, Swansea and Neath. The NCCC welcomes cyclists to join them on the ride, whether for an hour or two or for much longer. IBMT supporters are also invited to meet and greet the riders at the International Brigade memorials they visit. For more information, including accommodation details, contact [clarioncc@yahoo.co.uk]; tel: 01254-51302.

Where to see IBMT's 'Antifascistas' exhibition

26 April-13 May 2011: University of Portsmouth Library, Cambridge Rd, PO1 2ST; 8am-6:30pm; more information: [www.port.ac.uk/library/essentials/open].

16-28 May 2011: Irish Labour History Society Museum, Beggars Bush Barracks, Haddington Rd, Dublin 4; 10:30am-4:30pm Mon-Fri; [http://ilhm.tripod.com/museum.html]; tel: (+353) 1-668 1071.

2-25 June 2011: Library, Market St, Kidderminster DY10 1AB; 9am-5:30pm (8pm on Tues and 7pm on Weds/Thurs); [www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/community-and-living/libraries-and-learning/local-library-details].

2 July-4 September 2011: Cannon Hall Museum, Bark House Lane, Cawthorne, Barnsley S75 4AT; 11am to 5pm (closed Thurs & Fri); [www.barnsley.gov.uk/bguk/leisure_culture].

Bienvenido David Lomon, our newest Brigader

Richard Baxell profiles an International Brigade veteran who has only just joined the IBMT.

The April 2009 issue of the magazine of SAGA, the organisation aimed at the over-50s, featured an article by historian Max Arthur on the Britons who fought against Franco, told through the reminiscences of the English nurse Penny Feiwel.

It was read by David Lomon in Bourne End, Buckinghamshire, who wrote to the magazine, taking issue with Max's remark that, sadly, there were now only eight British veterans still alive. As Lomon explained, he knew this not to be the case – for he too had been with the British Battalion in Spain.

News of this latest "discovery" eventually reached the IBMT and David is now a keen supporter of the trust.

The son of Jewish migrants from Poland, David Solomon was born in Manchester in the last year of the First World War. The youngest of eight children, his father's premature death when David was 15 signified both the end of David's education and a move to Hackney in London, the home of his mother's family. Disturbed by the behaviour of Mosley's black-shirted thugs in the East End, David soon became an active anti-fascist, despite his mother's disapproval. As he explained, it was this which was to lead him to join the Young Communist League and to go to

Spain: "I wanted to do something, I wanted to fight fascism."

David followed the typical route of a British volunteer: a weekend train ticket to Paris, by coach to the Spanish border and the long, exhausting climb through the night over the Pyrenees. He arrived in Spain on the penultimate day of 1937, and joined under the name David Lomon, to prevent being singled out if captured.

After two or three weeks of training as a machine-gunner, David was rushed up to the

"I wanted to do something, I wanted to fight fascism."

front, part of the Republic's desperate response to Franco's huge offensive that followed the capture of Teruel. He was involved in a few minor skirmishes, before being taken prisoner by Italian soldiers during the Republican retreats in the spring of 1938. Imprisoned in the concentration camp of San Pedro de Cardena, near Burgos, in northern Spain, David struck up a great friendship with the artist Clive Branson. They were



INTERVIEW: David Lomon talks to Richard Baxell at his home in Buckinghamshire.

both among the British prisoners repatriated in October 1938.

On his return from Spain, David left the YCL and joined, instead, the Labour Party, partly he said because they "had a bigger voice than anyone else", but also because he was bitterly disappointed by the Hitler-Stalin pact in August 1939: "that Stalin should link up with [Hitler] was unbelievable", he said.

David served in the Royal Navy on a minesweeper during the Second World War, patrolling the English Channel, before being transferred to the Far East around Burma and the Malaya Strait. Following the war, he returned to his work in a large retail company in London and to family life. David confessed to not really knowing why he never had any involvement with the International Brigade Association, except that he became "wrapped up with family life" at home. There he remained, as unaware of the IBMT as we were of him, until his fortuitous letter to *SAGA Magazine* in 2009 led to him being brought to our attention.

Now a youthful 92, David lives near to his son. He has become a keen IBMT member and is looking forward to attending events, including this year's London commemoration in July.



Limited edition plate to mark 75th anniversary of the Brigades

The IBMT has produced this limited edition 10½-inch plate to commemorate the 75th anniversary in 2011 of the formation of the International Brigades. Only 75 (numbered) copies have been made. The price is £30 plus £5 p&p. To order, send cheques payable to the IBMT to: IBMT

Merchandise Officer Chris Hall, 286 Brantingham Road, Manchester M21 0QU. Despatch is planned for May.



VIEWING: TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber (right) visits the IBMT's "Antifascistas" exhibition with IBMT trustee Rodney Bickerstaffe. The exhibition was displayed at the TUC's London headquarters for two weeks in February, where it was seen by many trade union leaders. As a result, the GMB has asked for it to be shown at its conference in Brighton in June. See page 11 for more dates.