



# IBMT Newsletter

www.international-brigades.org.uk

Issue 25 / New Year 2010

## INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE MEMORIAL TRUST

Marshall Mateer



The IBMT's annual general meeting in session at the Miners' Hall, Durham, in October 2009. See back page for report and more photos.

### It's time to pay 2010 membership subs

Subscriptions for 2010 are now due. Please send them as soon as possible and fill in the membership form inserted in this Newsletter. This enables us to match you with the correct entry on the database.

The system for paying by direct debit is now in place and the membership form contains a direct debit instruction. The IBMT hopes that as many members as possible will pay by this method.

If you have a standing order please cancel this and take out a direct debit instead.

Contact Membership Secretary Mary Greening with all queries; tel: 029-2019 5412; email: [\[memsec@international-brigades.org.uk\]](mailto:memsec@international-brigades.org.uk).

### 'Antifascistas' opens in May

The IBMT's long-awaited travelling exhibition about the British and Irish volunteers in the International Brigades is set to open in London on 5 May.

More than two years in the making, "Antifascistas" will be on show at the 12 Star Gallery in Westminster for two weeks, before going to Newcastle City Library for a further two weeks from 22 May. The IBMT also plans to display it at this year's annual commemoration in London's Jubilee Gardens on 3 July.

The exhibition sets out the reasons why the volunteers took the extraordinary decision to risk their lives in a foreign war, in which more than 500 of them died. The role of the British Battalion in many of the key battles in Spain is described, along with brief biographies of outstanding individuals who took part. It also details the heroic work of the medical volunteers in makeshift hospitals near the front line.

In addition, the exhibition considers the artistic impact of the International Brigades and their historical legacy, underlining the importance today of remembering their example of anti-fascism and international solidarity.

See "Diary dates" (page 7) for more details.

### Battalion's first three months to come under the spotlight

By Jim Jump

This year's IBMT lecture at London's Imperial War Museum will focus on the experience of the British Battalion before, during and after the Battle of Jarama in February 1937.

The lecture, on 13 March, will be delivered by historian and IBMT committee member Richard Baxell, whose "British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War", first published in 2004, has established itself as the definitive account of the British Battalion of the International Brigades.

Entitled "Three months in Spain: the British Battalion at Madrigueras and Jarama", the lecture is expected to cover the formation of the battalion, its baptism of fire at Jarama and its subsequent recovery and rebuilding before returning to action at the Battle of Brunete in July 1937.

This will be the ninth consecutive Len Crome Memorial Lecture, named after the young doctor from Britain who became head of the medical services of Spanish Republic's 35th Division, comprising the International Brigades.

The lecture will be preceded by a celebration in words and music of the life of IBMT President Jack Jones, who died last April.

Baxell promises to focus his lecture on the day-to-day experiences of the volunteers in Spain. If possible, he intends playing extracts from some of the recordings of interviews with Brigaders that are held in the Imperial War Museum's sound archive.

He adds: "The period of training – let alone combat – must have been an immense culture-shock to the members of the battalion, almost all of whom spoke no Spanish and had rarely travelled – even within Britain.

"Factor in an unfamiliar diet, woefully insufficient and often sub-standard weaponry and a general lack of appropriate military experience and you begin to understand the scale of the appalling task facing the British Battalion in their first experience of combat."

A collection of all nine Len Crome Memorial Lectures, including an earlier talk that Baxell gave on the writer Laurie Lee's experiences as an International Brigade volunteer, is to be published later this year by Lawrence & Wishart. More details will appear in the next Newsletter.

See "Diary dates" on page 7 for listing details of this year's lecture.

*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](http://www.international-brigades.org.uk)

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*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 19 April 2010 at the latest.*

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This photograph from 2000 shows International Brigade veterans, family members, friends and historians outside the Marx Memorial Library, London, at a meeting which decided to create a combined organisation of veterans and supporters. Thus the IBMT was born in 2001. See “A new decade”. The names of those pictured here can be found on the IBMT’s Facebook page.

By Marlene Sidaway

### A new decade

It’s hard to realise a new decade is beginning and the formation of the Trust was first thought of 10 years ago in 2000 (see photo above) when Bill Alexander, the then Secretary of the International Brigade Association, died.

Since then we have gone from strength to strength. Our membership has grown beyond our expectations and, more importantly, the number of our members who are actively pursuing the aims of the Trust, by organising lectures, films, and other events in their areas, has grown too – all of you helping to spread the word about the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War.

### Tea at the House of Lords

The new year begins with a pleasant recognition of the British Brigaders, when the veterans have been invited in January to have tea with Baroness Royall, Leader of the House of Lords and a long-time admirer of the International Brigades.

### French and German proposal

The French group ACER (Les Amis des Combattants en Espagne Républicaine) and the German group KFSR (Kämpfer und Freunde der Spanischen Republik) have established an organisation for closer co-operation between all associations dedicated to the memory of the volunteers for the Spanish Republic. They have invited us to join them. Other European groups and representatives from ALBA, our sister organisation in the US,

have taken part in preliminary meetings and there is a proposal for a weekend meeting in Paris at the end of May.

We will discuss this proposal at our next committee meeting on 23 January. We welcome the initiative and recognise the need to join together and fight today for the anti-fascist ideals which inspired the Brigaders. However, we would also wish to preserve the autonomy of our own organisation, within closer co-operation with our comrades abroad.

### 2010 Annual General Meeting

Our AGM this year will be in Liverpool on 16 October. The organisers include Dolores Long [doloreslong@fastmail.fm] and Danny Payne [danpayne40@yahoo.co.uk]. Please contact them if you wish to be involved.

### Glasgow memorial

The Pasionaria memorial on Customs House Quay in Glasgow is in dire need of repair and Glasgow City Council, which is responsible for its preservation, is supporting an appeal to help with the expense of refurbishing it. Send donations to: Ian Tasker, Assistant Secretary, Scottish Trades Union Congress, 333 Woodlands Road, Glasgow G3 6NG.

### In memory of Dave Hann

Thanks go to Louise Purbrick and the family of Dave Hann, who died in September, for suggesting that donations in his memory should go to the IBMT. (See “Obituaries” on page 4.)



Congratulations to Robin White, Andy Sanders and Doug Bain (pictured), who cleaned the British Battalion’s Battle of the Ebro memorial plaque on Hill 705 near Pinell de Bray, Catalonia, last September. However, the effects of the clean-up – clearly visible on these photos – will be temporary, warns Robin. He recommends annual maintenance.



# Protests as county council removes part of Nottinghamshire memorial

Part of the memorial to the International Brigaders who went from Nottinghamshire has been removed by the county council amid protests from the IBMT, local trade unionists and Labour MPs.

The memorial, which features a sculpted relief of bombed-out buildings by artist Michael Johnson, three plaques and an explanatory storyboard, was unveiled in 1993 by Jack Jones and Spanish ambassador Alberto Aza. The storyboard provides background historical information about the 18 volunteers, five of whom were killed, who are named on the memorial.

In October the Conservative-controlled council removed the storyboard. In its place a new plaque has been installed dedicated to the “men and women of this county who have sacrificed their lives for others and for freedom”, with no mention of the Spanish Civil war and the fight against fascism.

The Nottinghamshire, Mansfield & Nottingham Trades Union Council (NMNTUC)

campaigns against the removal of the storyboard, as did Labour councillors and MPs.

Paddy Tipping, Labour MP for Sherwood, said: “In a time when the BNP is on the rise, we need every reminder of the tyranny we fought against in Spain. This is simply the Tories showing their true colours.”

In a letter published in the *Nottingham Evening Post*, IBMT Secretary Marlene Sidaway said: “Those who volunteered for the International Brigades... were brave men and women who recognised the dangers of fascism earlier than most and were prepared to lay down their lives for the freedom of Europe at a time when their own governments were ignoring the danger. I hope the council will reconsider its decision.”

● The NMNTUC is planning to hold a memorial event at the International Brigade memorial on Saturday 17 July. For details of the event and the campaign to reinstate the storyboard, contact Barry Donlan; tel: 01909-476 178.



Council workmen remove the storyboard (pictured below).



Marshall Mateer



**REMEMBERING JACK JONES:** Four IBMT participants (above) on stage at the Royal Festival Hall, London, during a commemoration of the life of Jack Jones organised by his union, Unite. From left are International Brigade veteran Jack Edwards, IBMT Secretary Marlene Sidaway, IBMT Chair and fellow veteran Sam Lesser and harpist Brenda O'Riordan, daughter of Irish Brigadier Michael O'Riordan.

The legendary union and pensioners' leader – and President of the IBMT – died in April last year. The Unite event on 5 October saw Lesser read Cecil Day Lewis's poem “The Volunteer”. There was a contribution too from IBMT committee member Rodney Bickerstaffe.

Lesser and (like Jones) Liverpoolian veteran Jack Edwards were given a standing ovation when they came on stage. Others who took part in the event, which was compered by comedian Arthur Smith, included Glenda Jackson and folk musicians Roy Bailey, Martin Carthy and Dave Swarbrick.

## Irish pay tribute to Doyle and Jones

By Lynda Walker

A weekend of events in honour of International Brigaders Bob Doyle and Jack Jones, who both died earlier in 2009, was held in Belfast and Derry in December.

Participants included Daniel Gray, author of “Homage to Caledonia”, who gave a talk about the Scottish volunteers in the International Brigades, and Jimmy Kelly, regional secretary of the union Unite. Family members Mick Jones and Tabitha Doyle unveiled a replica of the International Brigade memorial in Writers' Square, Belfast, in the union's office.

There was also a ceremony at the memorial itself, with IBMT Secretary

Marlene Sidaway and Kevin Doherty of the Belfast International Brigade Commemoration Committee emphasising the need to follow the example of Doyle and Jones and fight racism and fascism today.

Jack Edwards, one of the few surviving Brigaders, was in attendance. Joe Mulheron sang his own “Connolly Column”, which left many with tears in their eyes.

On the Sunday, proceedings moved to Sandino's Bar in Derry, where Robert Doyle Jnr and Marie-Joelle Doyle unveiled a wall statue and photo of Dublin-born Bob Doyle.

Highlights of the tributes can be viewed at [\[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEohn\\_Lmyjo\]](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEohn_Lmyjo).



# Les Gibson

By Pauline Fraser

International Brigade veteran Les Gibson died in hospital at Southend-on-Sea on 14 November 2009, aged 96. He was born in Fulham and



Echo Newspapers

remembered helping his mother leaflet door-to-door for the Labour Party. This early experience of campaigning may have led him to set up the Hammersmith Branch of the Young Communist League with a group of

friends from the Labour League of Youth. He cut his political teeth as a street-corner speaker for the YCL.

Les made up his mind to go to Spain at the age of 22, when a wounded Brigader spoke to the local YCL about his determination to return to the war. A teenager from the YCL, AE "Dicky" Bird, entreated Les to take him too. Les reluctantly agreed and they travelled to Paris where they were split up in different safe houses.

Gibson crossed the Pyrenees by night, as so many volunteers did, after France closed the border with Spain. Most men were kitted out with espadrilles for the climb, but they had none big enough to accommodate Les's size 13 feet, so he had to make do with his leather-soled shoes, which were "a bit slippery over the slopes". They got to the top as day was breaking and he was particularly moved when the volunteers of various nationalities sang "The Internationale" in "all their different tongues".

During training, a shortage of rifles meant learning with wooden cut-outs. At Jarama, the first time he squeezed the trigger, he found himself on his back in the bottom of the trench. He had no idea of the power of a rifle's recoil.

Les's experience of fighting was interspersed with periods in hospital with colitis, a typhoid-related disease that nearly killed him, and treatment for a badly-burnt leg caused by an accident while a cook for the British Battalion. This injury caused problems throughout his life. While in hospital, he became a paramedic, eventually assisting in operations to remove bullets. He later served as a stretcher-bearer at the Battle of the Ebro.

While Les missed death in Spain by a whisker, young Dicky Bird was not so lucky. He was killed at Brunete in July 1937. Les always felt guilty for taking him to Spain.

After the war, Les had a variety of jobs, from gutting and boning chickens at the Barkers department store in Kensington to plasterer's mate and from chef to milkman.

In 2002 Reg Saxton spotted a letter that Gibson had written to the *Morning Star* as an International Brigade veteran and so brought

it to the attention of IBMT officers, who thereby "discovered" this unknown volunteer.

Les read the *Daily Worker / Morning Star* throughout his life, even getting a friend to bring it to him daily at the nursing home where he spent his last year.

## Dave Hann

By Louise Purbrick

Lifelong anti-fascist Dave Hann died on 29 September 2009, aged 49. He was a member of Anti-Fascist Action through the 1980s and 1990s and co-wrote with Steve Tilzey "No Retreat" (2003), an account of their struggle against the National Front and BNP.

Dave then started work on a book charting anti-fascist struggles throughout the 20th century. He felt privileged to have interviewed a number of International Brigaders, including Andy Andrews, Lou Kenton and Bernard McKenna, as well as people who worked in the Aid for Spain movement.

His book, provisionally titled "A Cause Worth Fighting For", makes an argument he firmly believed: fascist groups and parties are constantly being reformed, but the right-wing politics, with its fascist tendencies, is a feature of a capitalist world and there will always be a need for people to stand their ground against them.

## Also remembered...

● Three US veterans have died in recent months. **Hilda Bell Roberts**, their last surviving woman volunteer, died in September in northern California. She was 94. Hilda remained an activist all her life, visiting Nicaragua and Cuba, and was active in peace groups opposed to US policies in Central America and the Middle East. **Carl Geiser** died at the age of 98 in November. He served with the Canadian MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion and was captured by Franco's forces. After the war he worked as an electrical engineer and was active in his union. He also studied for a degree in psychology and, upon retiring in 1981, wrote "Prisoners of the Good Fight", published in 1986, an account of his time at the San Pedro de Cardena prison camp. October 2009 saw the death of **Clarence Kailin** at the age of 95. He had been instrumental in the placing of a memorial to Wisconsin veterans of the International Brigades in James Madison Park, Madison, Wisconsin. A lifelong socialist, union activist and campaigner for civil rights and progressive causes, Kailin was at various times a taxi driver, shop assistant, factory worker, caretaker and finally a worker in the University of Wisconsin's photography department.

● **Antonio Eletto**, a veteran of the Garibaldi Battalion of the International Brigades and thought to be the last surviving Italian International Brigader, died in December 2009 in Romagnano Sesia, aged 94.

# Brigade book back in the family

By Helen Cadman (née Fletcher)

In late August last year, the 52nd anniversary of the death of my father George Fletcher, I received a phone call from Mike Wild, the son Sam Wild. He told me that "The Book of the XV Brigade", published in Spain in 1938, was on sale on eBay. Significantly, the book was dedicated to George Fletcher who, like Sam Wild, had served as the commander of the British Battalion in Spain.

Having only recently discovered my father's involvement in the Spanish Civil War and as a result visited places in Spain where he fought and was hospitalised, I was very keen to obtain the book, which my brother John Fletcher and I had never been aware of.

The book was offered for sale by an antique dealer who lived close by and I visited him to inspect it. The contents revealed that it was essential to obtain and, after some very keen bidding (there were 10 bidders in total), the book came into my possession.

Its significance to my family lies in the large number of dedications to my father written on the fly by many of his comrades, presumably at the time that the battalion returned home in December 1938.

These are the signatories in the book, each one writing a few words about George Fletcher. Many are difficult to decipher: Sam Wild, Robert Walker, Bob Cooney, Peter Kerrigan, Benny Goldman, Johnnie Power, Alan W Gilchrist, Alun Williams, LL Walker "Hookie", Alan Lawson, B Richardson, Maurice Simon (?), Sony Lows (?), Evan Lowden, Peter Cassidy, J Cryer, FWilliams, A Christos (?), A Halligan, Phil Boyle, Jack Roberts, William Dunbar, RA Morgan, Jim Brewer, Charles Boyd, John S Millie, Percy Hemson (?), W Togwell, Andy Smith, Dave Rogers (?), James Arkley (?), Frank Rogers, F Ruskin, Joe Latus, David L Wickes, Manuel Esterez (?) and one further illegible signature.

Any family members of these Brigaders who wish to inspect the book should contact Helen Cadman on 01270-875 654.

## No name yet for Brigader

Efforts are being made to solve the mystery of the identity of an International Brigader (pictured right) with the US contingent of volunteers in Spain. He was photographed by Agusti Centelles, sometimes known as the "Spanish Robert Capa". The Spanish press is reporting that a copy of



Agusti Centelles



Right: Tony Burke (left) and Les Bayliss at the unveiling of the International Brigader statue and memorial plaque (above) at the Marx Memorial Library.



## New home for print workers' memorial

The memorial dedicated to four graphical workers killed in Spain with the International Brigades has a new home at the Marx Memorial Library (MML), London, thanks to financial support from the trade union Unite.

Formerly located at the union's training centre in Quorn, Leicestershire, the bronze statue of an International Brigader and plaque now stand in the MML's new Memorial Garden along with a plaque to the members of the former print union Natsopa (now part of Unite) who were killed in the Second World War.

The garden was inaugurated in December

2009 by Unite Assistant General Secretaries Les Bayliss and Tony Burke.

Bayliss commented: "Today, Unite honours a powerful anti-fascist tradition, but it also seeks to take these values forward as part of a left project at a time when fascism once again rears its ugly head on our streets."

The International Brigader memorial was originally unveiled by IBMT President Jack Jones in November 2002 at the union's centre in Quorn, which has now been sold. Before that, the plaque stood at the Sogat print union's convalescent home in Rottingdean, Sussex.

the photo is to be presented to US President Barack Obama by Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero when the two men meet later this year.

According to Sebastiaan Faber of ALBA (the IBMT's sister organisation in the US), the man is thought to be a Cuban exile, nicknamed "Cuba Hermosa", who was living in New York and who sailed to Europe on the *Champlain* on his way to Spain.

Faber, who is working with others in the US and Cuba to uncover the man's real name, says: "We are realising that the role of the New York Cubans in the organisation of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, and in particular the recruitment of American volunteers, was much more important than we had previously assumed."

## Sculpture for Blantyre trio

A memorial to three Blantyre men who died fighting fascism in Spain was unveiled at Blantyre Miners' Welfare Club on 24 October 2009 before a gathering of over 100 people. The sculpture commemorates the heroism of Thomas Brannan, William Fox and Thomas Fleck. Brannan and Fox were killed at Jarama, Fleck at Chimorra, near Córdoba.

The unveiling was performed by Cathie Neil, (daughter of Brannan), Margaret Scullion, (niece of Fox) and two relatives of Thomas Fleck.

The memorial was erected on the initiative of



The memorial outside Blantyre Miners' Welfare Club.

East Kilbride & South Lanarkshire Trades Union Council member and Unison branch secretary Stephen Smellie. He wrote to the *Hamilton Advertiser* in 2007 suggesting a tribute to the three men. Since then, the veterans' families campaigned for the memorial. Sculptor Frank Casey created the bronze plaques mounted on granite.

Smellie said: "The memorial will be a lasting tribute to the men who sacrificed their lives for democracy and a constant reminder to the people of Lanarkshire to be vigilant against the dark forces of fascism."

Hospitality was afterwards provided by the Miners' Welfare Social Club and music was per-

formed by The Wakes and by John Malcolm and John Young of the Lanarkshire Songwriters' Group, who had each written new songs based on the Blantyre men and their comrades' exploits in Spain.

See photo and caption on page 11 for more about The Wakes.

## 'Guernica' invokes the past

By Marshall Mateer

Two important meetings have taken place beside the tapestry of Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" at the Whitechapel Gallery in London.

On 12 September 2009 a day-long symposium was led by the poet and broadcaster Michael Rosen to explore the contexts and issues of the gallery exhibiting "Guernica" in 1939 and today. The day began with historian Paul Preston, IBMT Patron and author of many books on the Spanish Civil War, setting out the political context of the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica.

He described the role of the press and in particular of *The Times* correspondent George Steer, whose much syndicated report of the results of the bombing had such an impact: "Throughout the night houses were falling until the streets became long heaps of red impenetrable debris."

In conversation with Michael Rosen, local political activist Alice Hitchin recalled visiting the 1939 exhibition when the original "Guernica" was displayed to raise funds for Republican Spain. "I remember the chalking; going out at night and chalking the pavements with 'No pasarán!'"

Following contributions from academics Mike Gonzalez, Valentine Cunningham and Tom Buchanan and others, the symposium ended with IBMT Chair Sam Lesser taking a question and answer session. Describing his experience as an International Brigader, he reminded the audience that iconic images such as "Guernica" accumulated their meanings from reality. Nodding towards the tapestry, he said: "We were in Spain. We didn't see the painting, but we saw the dead and wounded on the ground as Picasso displayed them there."

Following the Jubilee Gardens commemoration in July last year, a group of about 50 went to the gallery to hold a meeting in front of the tapestry and recalled their memories of the 1930s in Britain and the International Brigades.

There was a reminder that the "Battle of Cable Street" took place right outside the Whitechapel Gallery where the group was gathered and memories of collecting "Aid for Spain" were recalled by Vivien Pixner and others.

The meeting concluded with a performance by folk duo Na-mara, who sang the ballad "Only For Three Months" about the Basque refugee children who arrived in Britain following the bombing of Guernica.

The "Guernica" tapestry is on loan from the United Nations building in New York as part of

Continued overleaf

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artist Goshka Macuga's installation "The Nature of the Beast". Macuga hopes that her installation might "encourage people... to use the round table for meetings and discussions with 'Guernica' once again the backdrop".

A longer report of both meetings at the Whitechapel Gallery, with sound clips of speakers, music and poetry, is available on the Shapessoftime website: [www.shapessoftime.net/pages/viewpage.asp?uniqid=14007].

See "Diary dates" (facing page) for exhibition details.



Dennis Skinner unveils the plaque for Tom Gaunt.

## Plaque for Derbyshire IBer

A memorial plaque has been unveiled to Tom Gaunt, an International Brigade volunteer from Clowne, Derbyshire.

The event took place on 31 October 2009 in the Parish House of the former mining town where Gaunt was born, with the plaque unveiled by local Labour MP Dennis Skinner.

Skinner spoke passionately about the sacrifice of the International Brigaders and the continued need to confront and defeat fascism. Other speakers included IBMT committee member Dolores Long, Karl Reid, chair of Clowne Parish Council, and Mark Grayling, secretary of the Chesterfield & District



It's good to see that the best known Spanish Civil War slogan lives on, notes IBMT committee member Mike Arnott of Dundee, who sent in this photo of the counter-march in Glasgow protesting against the far-right Scottish Defence League rally on 14 November 2009.

Branch of the Co-operative Party, which funded the memorial project and plaque, which was designed by Mick Jones.

Tom Gaunt was born on 8 November 1907 and is described in records as a miner, labourer and soldier. He was one of a handful of volunteers from Derbyshire and arrived in Spain on 20 December 1937, having spent two years in the British Army prior to that. He was posted as killed in action in Aragon in March 1938.

The unveiling ceremony was closed by IBMT committee member Hilary Jones, who read the moving John Cornford poem, "A Letter from Aragon".

To view the plaque, contact Denise Cameron, Clerk to Clowne Parish Council, Parish House, 48 Mill Street, Clowne, Derbyshire S43 4JN; tel: 01246-811 586; email: [denise@clownepc.co.uk].

## In brief...

- A South Wales IBMT member who has campaigned successfully for memorials to International Brigaders was given an MBE in the Queen's New Year Honours List. **Arnold Owen**, 91, of Bridgend, whose brother Frank was killed in Spain, was recognised for his services to the 200 Welsh volunteers.

- Philosophy Football has presented the IBMT with a cheque for £150, which are the proceeds of its **Jack Jones memorial t-shirt** that was issued following his death last April. The t-shirt features the banner of the Major Attlee Company, in which the former IBMT President and labour movement legend served as a political commissar during the Ebro offensive in the summer of 1938. Priced £20.99, profits go towards the IBMT. In five sizes, the t-shirt can be ordered from the Philosophy Football website: [www.philosophyfootball.com] or tel: 020-8802 3499.

- With backing from, among others, Tony Benn and Jimmy Reid, an appeal has been launched to raise a statue to the former Communist MP for West Fife, **Willie Gallagher**. Gallagher was a strong supporter of Republican Spain and visited the British Battalion during the civil war. The memorial would stand in his home town of Paisley. Contact: William Gallagher Memorial Appeal, c/o Sma Shot Cottages, 11/17 George Place, Paisley PA1 2HZ.

- BNP leader **Nick Griffin** attended a rally in Madrid on 20 November organised by Spanish neo-fascists to commemorate the death of General Franco. The event was hosted by the so-called National Democracy Party. There were 28 arrests when a riot broke out involving members of a rival fascist group, the equally bizarrely-named Patriotic Socialist Movement. Griffin is also understood to have visited Franco's grave during his stay in Spain.

Imperial War Museum



Thanks to Chamberlain: Czech-made tanks of Rommel's 7th Panzer Division in action in France in 1940.

# Britain's help for the fascists

May I take issue with Gary Willis ("Maybe the British government was right over Spain after all", Autumn 2009 issue) and the idea that the sacrifice of the Spanish Republic was a necessary evil for the safety of Britain.

Britain and France were not sorrowful hand-wringing spectators of fascist aggression. In 1935, via the infamous Hoare-Laval Pact, they had pressured Abyssinia to make "concessions" to Mussolini. Why? Three years later Czechoslovakia was pressured to give "concessions" to Hitler. Why?

The emergence of the Spanish Republic became an obstacle to fascist hegemony. Provided that Mussolini respected British "interests", there was no real disagreement between London and Rome.

If vigorous action had been taken to help the Republic blockade Franco's Army of Africa out of Spain, then Franco would have lost. In 1936 the Italian navy had four battleships and no aircraft carriers. Hitler had none of either. The combined French and British navies (and how much boasting had there been about the latter) had 17 battleships, three battle cruisers and seven carriers. What was missing was the will, not the means!

Gary correctly suggests that Britain was not ready to confront Hitler earlier. The very idea of collective security was that no country should face Hitler alone. In spite of the real memories of 1914-18, in the Peace Ballot the British people voted by nearly three to one to support the League of Nations using force to stop aggression.

Delay was dangerous. The great armoured force of 10 Panzer divisions which overwhelmed France in May 1940 did not exist earlier on. At the time of Munich there were just the first three divisions. The 4th and 5th were formed in November 1938, after Munich. The 10th was partially formed in April 1939, the 6th, 7th and 8th in October 1939, after the attack on Poland. The 9th was formed in January 1940. The 6th, 7th (Rommel's) and 8th divisions were partly equipped with Panzer 35s and 38s - Czechoslovakian tanks given to Hitler by Chamberlain.

# Inspired by my Republican roots

My father, Emilio Moragas, was a refugee to England from the Spanish Civil War. He left Spain on the *HMS Galatea*, the last refugee boat to leave Spain, on 1 April 1939 and, via France, arrived here on 4 April 1939 with his brother Fernando. He was 25 years old.

I am immensely proud of my Spanish ancestry. My great great grandfather was Estanislao Figueras y Moragas, the first president of the

first Spanish Republic. One of my uncles was assassinated near Talavera as he led a youth battalion of Republicans during the civil war.

Another uncle and family escaped over the Pyrenees into France and six months later he joined the maquis and was later captured by the Germans and deported to Mauthausen concentration camp. He miraculously survived.

Their stories and struggles

have inspired me and I have always been aware of the immense contribution made in Spain by the International Brigades.

I now work as a volunteer for Unite Against Fascism and I'm involved in many and varied campaigns to oppose the resurgence of fascism in this country and across Europe.

We must *never* forget.  
*Yvonne Wren (née Moragas)*  
Bromley

The anti-fascist movement used foresight in the 1930s. The correctness of that foresight is firmly underlined by subsequent events and knowledge. The best time to resist fascism was over Abyssinia and Spain. After Munich the initiative had passed to the enemy.

*Barry Donlan*  
Worksop

## Government's cynical role

Gary Willis' letter displays a view that is increasingly historically discredited, whereby he sees non-intervention in Spain as part of a coherent policy of appeasement

Firstly, if a militarily "weak" Britain was trying to strengthen itself against the growing threat of the Third Reich, why was it increasingly exporting arms everywhere (bar Spain) – including some of the most modern weaponry – from 1936 until the start of the war (and after)? This was not just about arming up its allies if you take a look at the recipients.

Secondly, it should not be ignored how rabidly anti-communist the British government and establishment of the time was – they had no desire to see Spain go communist and drag with it an already left-leaning France, potentially resulting in a "dangerous" ideological power bloc developing in the West. No matter that the

***“The best time to resist fascism was over Abyssinia and Spain. After Munich the initiative had passed to the enemy.”***

Spanish government had been democratically elected.

The Republican government had never asked Britain to intervene in Spain per se, just to allow it to purchase arms on the open market, but this was blocked at almost every turn by Britain's non-intervention policy. In fact, operation of the policy did more to help Franco than protect Spain from external interference.

That said, the causes of the Republican defeat in Spain are complex and not yet fully understood by historians. But one thing is certain: that Britain's role was far more cynical than it appears on the surface and that its role needs to be scrutinised very closely without accepting what we've all been conveniently fed for so long. Until it is understood, Gerald Howson's "Arms for Spain" and Michael Jabara Carley's "1939" will give a good insight into how British anti-communism was far more of a pre-occupation than anti-fascism.

*Simon de Montfalcon*  
Romsey

## Non-intervention was a fraud

Garry Willis seems to have a poor grasp of the political situation in the 1930s. Had Britain and France joined with the USSR in a united front against Germany, the Second World War might have been prevented. However, they were primarily worried about the spread of communism. In fact, many in the establishments of both countries supported the fascists. Many saw Nazi Germany as a bulwark against communism.

Our government wasn't "buying time" – it wanted Franco to win. The non-intervention pact was a fraud thought up because they didn't want their support for Franco to be too obvious.

On my brother's return from Spain in 1939, a typical British gent, on learning that Chris had fought for the Spanish government, remarked: "But I thought Franco was our man".

*Bill Thornycroft*  
London SE27

● **26-29 February 2010:** Battle of Jarama commemoration weekend opens in Madrid on Friday evening with a talk by historian Richard Baxell; on Saturday there is a tour of the Jarama battlefield and lunch in Morata de Tajuña, followed on Sunday by a trip to the Brunete battlefield and to the Salamanca military archives on Monday; more details about accommodation and the programme from Danny Payne: [danpayne40@yahoo.co.uk] or Alan Warren: [hill705@gmail.com].

● **7 March 2010:** Professor Paul Preston is interviewed by Daniel Gray, author of "Homage to Caledonia", about writers and correspondents in the Spanish Civil War and his latest book "We Saw Spain Die"; part of the Aye Write! book festival; 12.30pm-1.30pm; The Mitchell, North Street, Glasgow G3 7DN; [www.ayewrite.com].

● **13 March 2010:** Len Crome Memorial Lecture at Imperial War Museum (Lambeth Road, London, SE1 6HZ) by Richard Baxell: "Three months in Spain: the British Battalion at Madrigueras and Jarama"; chaired by Paul Preston; 2.30pm; at 11am Chris Tranchell is staging a celebration of the life of Jack Jones in words and music.

● **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; followed by a discussion led by Richards, Carrier and Max Arthur (author of "The Real Band of Brothers"; 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].

● **5-18 May 2010:** "Antifascistas"; inaugural showing of the IBMT exhibition on International Brigade volunteers from the British Isles; 12 Star Gallery, 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT; 10am-6pm, Mon-Fri; admission free.

● **7-9 May 2010:** Commemoration weekend in Waterford; provisional programme includes unveiling of plaque at International Brigade memorial on The Mall, lecture by historian Daniel Gray, presentation on involvement of Irish women in the Spanish Civil War and wreath-laying at memorial to George Brown in Inistioge; more information from Annette O'Riordan: [annetteoriordan@nestron.ie].

● **22 May to 7 June 2010:** "Antifascistas" exhibition on International Brigade volunteers; Newcastle City Library, Charles Avison Building, 33 New Bridge Street West, Newcastle NE1 8AX; 8.30am-8pm Mon-Thurs; 8.30am-5.30pm Fri-Sat; 11am-5pm Sun.

● Gary Imlach is interested in the **1936 Peoples' Olympiad** in Barcelona and particularly those athletes who stayed on to fight when the civil war broke out. The research is for a book he is writing about particular places of historical sporting significance, provisionally titled "Sacred Grounds". Tel: 07984-153 824; email: [gilach@yahoo.com].

● French filmmaker Martin Ginestie is researching for a documentary on France's national anthem, the "**Marseillaise**", its history and uses. He has discovered that it was often sung, and even rewritten, by International Brigaders in Spain. He wants to hear from anyone who knows more about this, especially in relation to the British volunteers. Contact: [dr\_dimitri@hotmail.com].

● Dee Dee Cunningham is looking for a copy of Hector MacMillan's 1997 play "Towards a Greater Tomorrow" about her relative, **Jock Cunningham**, who was for a while the commander of the British Battalion in Spain. Email: [deedee@on.aibn.com].

● Mike Arnott has asked if anyone knows where the lines of poetry on the **Edinburgh International Brigade memorial** are taken from. They begin: "Not to a fanfare of trumpets, / Nor even the skirl o' the pipes. / Not for the off'r of a shilling, / Nor to see their names up in lights. / Their call was a cry of anguish, / From the hearts of the people of Spain." He also wants information about the training of International Brigade volunteers on **Carbeth Hill**. A report in *The Observer* on 22 October 2000 about a dispute over huts built on the hill said: "At stake are not just a few huts but a thread running right through the rich fabric of Glasgow working-class history... In the 1930s they were used as a training camp by socialists preparing to join the International Brigade fighting Franco's fascists in Spain." Contact: [mike.arnott@dundee.gov.uk].

● John Dickie, who is writing a biography of Brigadier Jack Brent, is seeking information on **Sally Carson**, who was married to a Brigadier and was engaged in long correspondence with Brent. He is also keen to trace a painting that **Chris Maxwell** did of Brent and also a poster that she designed for the Spanish Relief Campaign. Maxwell worked at the Labour Research Department with Noreen Branson during the 1940s. Contact: [johndickie100@hotmail.com].

● Ron Thompson is researching **Wigan volunteers** in the Spanish Civil War. In particular, he wants to find out more about Arthur Evans, who served with the Republican navy, Benny Hoath, a Wigan Corporation bus driver before going to Spain, and Pat Deegan, John Connolly and Hector Coop, who were from Leigh. Contact him on 01942-322 813 or email colleague Frank Kelly at [fairworld1@hotmail.co.uk].

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



**BERLIN SIGHTS:** IBMT member Alan Lloyd spent a few days in Berlin last autumn and has written in to recommend the following sights that are not included in the usual guidebooks:

- International Brigades memorial (left), including a new additional panel depicting the defence of Madrid, is in Volkspark and fronts onto Frieder Strasse. The closest metro station is Strausberger Platz on U5 line.
- Statue to Ernst Thälmann (the Communist Party leader who gave his name to the German battalion in the International Brigades) is in Ernst Thälmann Park, on the corner of Greifswalder Strasse and Danziger Strasse. The nearest metro station is Greifswalder Strasse on S41, S42, S85 or S8 lines.
- The Left Party head office has plaques to Ernst Thälmann and Karl Liebknecht outside (and a statue to Rosa Luxemburg very close by). The address is Karl Liebknecht House, KL Alexander Strasse 28. The nearest metro stations are Weinmeisterstrasse on U8 line or Rosa Luxemburg Platz on U2.

## In the footsteps of Ivor Hickman

By John L Wainwright



No matter how many books and articles that you read on the International Brigades and their role in the Spanish Civil War, nothing can offer more of an understanding than visiting the country itself. Last year I went

to Catalonia to carry out research for my forthcoming biography on Ivor Rae Hickman (pictured), chief of observers in the British Battalion. In the company of Alan Warren of Warren & Pell Publishing, I was expertly guided around some of the key locations.

One of the many unique and otherwise inaccessible locations that I was taken to was the Escola Militar at Tudela on the River Segre, a Republican officers' school during the conflict. I had the privilege of being one of the first English visitors to this privately owned site. The walls of the school are still festooned with propaganda murals and slogans painted by some long forgotten idealistic Republican more than 70 years ago. The classroom still has tactical maps and even instructions in chemical warfare (!) beautifully painted on the walls. However, the property is currently up for sale for 180,000 euros and Alan and others are hoping that the Catalan government and local groups will provide funding to save the build-

ing. In the same village as the school I was also shown an underground tunnel in a private house that served as a bomb shelter for the village. There is a communal entrance to the basement which runs from outside the medieval wall of the village – not for the claustrophobic but a vital element towards understanding the conflict from a civilian perspective.

Using period photographs, Alan has been able to pinpoint locations and he led me to the exact spot where the British Battalion crossed the Ebro in July 1938 near Ascó. Hill 481, where the British Battalion suffered horrendous losses, was climbed and explored. Shrapnel, bullets and bones still litter the area.

The highlight was being led to the site of the last stand of the British Battalion in September 1938. This was where Ivor Rae Hickman was killed during the last few hours of battle. Again the area is peppered with trenches, shrapnel and even unexploded grenades, testimony to the brutal hand to hand fighting that took place on this spot.

Alan has been looking for the XV Brigade headquarters near Corbera. Accompanied by an ex-soldier and ex-pat called "Len" whom we adopted on our travels, we explored hills, caves and tunnels in search of the elusive HQ. Unfortunately one morning's hunt was not long enough but we did have many finds of interest including a rather intricate trench system peppered with shrapnel and grenades. The signs of battle are everywhere and offer a symbolic explanation for the red earth of much of Catalonia.

John Wainwright is keen to be given more information on Ivor Hickman, who was born in Southampton in 1914 and arrived in Spain in October 1937. He knew Miles Tomalin and possibly David Guest. Before going to Spain he had been at Cambridge University and worked for Vickers Metropolitan in Manchester. He married Juliet MacArthur of Steep near Petersfield in 1937. If anyone can help, contact: [jwainwright@psc.ac.uk].

**APOLOGIES:** To Dolly West for misidentifying her in the photo of the dinner in Hammersmith in support of Republican Spain that was published in our last issue. In fact she is the dark-haired young girl leaning forward next to the woman with a white collar.



How many civilians were murdered far away from the front line during the Spanish Civil War? Crimes were committed both in Republican Spain and the Francoist zone, but does that mean that both sides were equally culpable? The question arose recently in an internet discussion group about the civil war. This was the contribution made by historian **PAUL PRESTON**...

**P**roviding full documentation on the victims on both sides of the Spanish Civil War is impossible and, even to produce what exists, would involve many thousands of pages. I have been working on this for the last five years and I can say that there is a massive literature about civilians killed behind the lines in both zones. What follows is a synthesis of the current state of play based both on my own work and that of the best Spanish specialists.

There can be little doubt about the crimes of the military rebels. All of the ex-post facto justifications produced for their actions were spurious. The man charged with organising the rising, General Emilio Mola, declared that “we must exterminate those who do not think as we do” and that widespread terror must be used. A fake “communist plot” was invented as a first justification but there was no such plot – the Communist Party was insignificant and the Soviet Union had no interest whatsoever in any involvement in Spain lest it undermine its policy of collective security and the goal of alliance with France.

Only a tiny minority of those killed in the Francoist repression were guilty of crimes. When they were not murdered indiscriminately and were subjected to military trials, they were accused of “military rebellion” (in other words, not having

# Balance sheet of murder



Thousands of murdered Republican civilians lie in unmarked mass graves throughout Spain. Many, such as this one at Montoñedo in Lugo province, are now being opened and the remains properly identified and buried.

supported Franco’s military rebellion) and were tried in batches, without access to defence counsel (other than token defence by officers significantly junior both to the judge and prosecutor).

The military rising itself provoked a collapse of the apparatus of the state; prisons were emptied and, in the subsequent power vacuum, until the Republican authorities would rebuild the state, atrocities were committed against the rich, the clergy and those perceived to be supporters of the military rebels. Sometimes these were simply criminal acts, sometimes deliberate actions aimed at eliminating Fifth Columnists, sometimes outbursts of popular outrage provoked by rebel bombing raids or news of major rebel atrocities such as the massacre at Badajoz on 14 August 1936. These atrocities committed in the

Republican zone were used as the second major justification of the military rising. However, they happened after, and because of, the rising.

The Republican authorities made Herculean efforts to put a stop to the uncontrolled violence and had largely succeeded by the end of November 1936, by which time the bulk of the killing had taken place, although it was May 1937 before it could be said that the Republic had fully re-established control. A synthesis of research on those killed in the Republican zone, carried out by Julián Casanova and Francisco Moreno Gómez, reaches figures of 55,000, although they have acknowledged that the final number is probably nearer to 50,000.

Within that number, on the basis of rarely dis-

**Continued overleaf**

## David Guest reconsidered

By Will Boisseau

**D**avid Guest was one of several young men who left Southampton to join the International Brigades. He never returned. Unlike most of his comrades Guest’s background enabled his family to produce a collective memoir of his life, which was published shortly after his death near Gandesa in the Battle of the Ebro of 1938\*.

David was the son of an MP and was sent to a school which produced “faithful miniatures of the governing class of England”. Raging against his privileged upbringing, he soon joined the Communist Party and, ultimately, felt compelled to “fight for freedom” in Spain.

The memoir, written by family and friends, details the life and character of a man who “left his mark on all who knew him”. However, for the historian interested in all volunteers and the communities which they left, some aspects of the book need reconsideration. Published in the early months of 1939, the authoritative account of David’s life seems too much of its time. One is left wondering if his struggle would have been

used by some writers to justify the Communist Party’s support of the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact had it been published a few months later; although the accusation of partisan bias is unfair if levelled against most contributors. Still, one wonders if the praise David receives for showing his co-workers “the dangers of Trotskyism” might need greater analysis today.



David Guest, mathematician, and philosopher, joined the Communist Party while at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1931, having become involved in anti-Nazi activities while studying in Germany in the previous year.

A study of labour relations in the town which David left to travel to Spain is vital. Disunity in Southampton’s labour movement was rife in the late 1930s. The Communist Party had split into two groups – with the dockworkers demanding their own branch. The Labour Party and trades council were determined to avoid communist affiliation or infiltration to important local bodies. Even the Youth Peace Council in Hampshire, which David helped to organise, was the scene of some conflict. Perhaps the only issue which united Southampton’s labour movement was Spain itself; from dockworkers to intellectuals or non-politicised residents who were moved by the arrival of Basque refugees, the Spanish Civil War radicalised the town.

David’s life, wrote Communist Party General Secretary Harry Pollitt, was “many-sided, original and daring”; indeed there “was no rigidity, complacency or self satisfaction in David Guest”. Future studies of volunteers must avoid heroics, study wider communities and labour movements and match the criteria which David strived to achieve in his own life.

\* Carmel Haden Guest (ed.): “David Guest: A Scientist Fights for Freedom” (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1939).

## Balance sheet of murder

From previous page

puted research by Bishop Antonio Montero Moreno, it is widely accepted that the number of clergy killed number 6,832, of which 4,184 were secular clergy, 2,365 priests and monks and 283 nuns. The only significant dent in these figures has come from Gregorio Rodríguez Fernández in “El hábito y la cruz. Religiosas asesinadas en la guerra civil española” (Edibesa, Madrid, 2006), who reaches the figure of 296 nuns killed. Interestingly, contrary to Francoist accusations of the systematic raping of nuns, he found only half a dozen cases.

It is possible to be so precise about the numbers killed in the Republican zone for several reasons. The crimes committed in the Republic were partially investigated by the Republican authorities and then very thoroughly by the military as they conquered each area. At the end of the war, there was a national process known as the Causa General to ensure the punishment of the guilty, and indeed of the far-from guilty. The families of those murdered were able to mourn their dead, they knew where they were buried and their sacrifice was celebrated by the military dictatorship and the Catholic Church.

In the rebel zone, systematic terror, overseen by the military and legitimised by the Catholic

***“The victims of the military repression come to a minimum of 130,000 and anything up to 200,000 dead.”***

Church, continued until 1943. There is considerable debate over the numbers killed, partly because many were murdered indiscriminately and, where records were kept, they have often been destroyed. However, massive, albeit methodologically and geographically uneven research has been carried out over recent years in 37 of Spain’s 50 provinces. It has produced the names of about 101,000 victims of the repression. Factoring in the remaining 13 provinces and the un-named dead, it is reasonable to assume that the victims of the military repression come to a minimum of 130,000 and anything up to 200,000 dead.

This figure does not include battlefield deaths, the victims of bombing raids or of the thousands of Republican refugees killed when strafed and bombed from the air and sea – such as those who fled from Málaga to Almería in February 1937 or the 450,000 people who fled from Catalonia to the French frontier at the end of January 1939. Nor does it include those who died of malnutrition or untreated diseases in the massively overcrowded prisons and concentration camps or indeed those forced into exile who died in German concentration camps.

Paul Preston is Professor of Spanish History at the London School of Economics and an IBMT Patron.

## Brigaders among the ‘famous faces’

**“Famous Faces of the Spanish Civil War: Writers and artists in the conflict 1936-1939” by Steve Hurst; £19.99 (hardback) (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2009)**

Reviewed by Jim Jump



This book consists of a collection of essays describing the experiences of various writers, journalists and artists in the Spanish Civil War. The chapters run chronologically, the first detailing the murder of poet Federico García Lorca in

August 1936 and the final chapter, “Men Against Machines”, is an account of the Spanish Republic’s doomed attempt to push back Franco’s slowly advancing forces in the later half of 1938. The conflict is seen through these eyewitnesses, though the author is not afraid to deliver his own assessment of their views on the war in general, nor to pass judgement on the reliability of their testimony.

Two chapters are devoted to well-known British International Brigaders: the poet John Cornford who was killed in December 1936 in fighting near Córdoba, and Esmond Romilly, the nephew of Winston Churchill, who would later be killed in the Second World War. Those chapters dealing with the battles at Jarama, Teruel and the Ebro also draw on the memoirs of Brigaders, including Tom Wintringham, Fred Copeman and Bill (here called “William”) Alexander.

Quoted extensively are journalists Arthur Koestler, Ernest Hemingway, Martha Gellhorn and Henry Buckley, as well as two of the handful of British volunteers who took up arms on the side of the fascists: Peter Kemp and Frank Thomas.

In addition, a chapter is devoted to the experiences of George Orwell and the eruption of fighting that he witnessed in Barcelona in May 1937 between revolutionary militias and the Republican and Catalan authorities. Though Steve Hurst is a military historian, he has clearly grasped the political complexities of the war and this is evident in his balanced account of Orwell’s views on the civil war as well as in the rest of this consistently interesting book.

## How volunteers crossed more than state frontiers

The cultural and social significance of the International Brigades was explored by Helen Graham when she delivered her inaugural lecture early in December at Royal Holloway University of London.

The Professor of Modern European History described how many of the 35,000 volunteers from around the world came from backgrounds of exile, emigration and social and political marginalisation. As such, in the 1930s they challenged the fascist paradigm of conformist, controlled and nationally pure citizens.

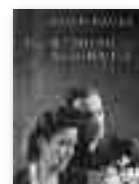
Later, in the Cold War, the example set by the International Brigaders of crossing not just state frontiers, but those of political orthodoxy, national identity, ethnicity, race, class and, in some cases, sexuality, was silenced and suppressed on both sides of the ideological divide. Her talk drew on individual case studies, principally of volunteers from the US and those who lived in East Germany, to illustrate this point.

Titled “Border Crossings: Thinking about the International Brigaders before and after Spain”, the lecture is available as a podcast from: [<http://backdoorbroadcasting.net>].

## Love in Auschwitz

**“The Wedding in Auschwitz” by Erich Hackl; £8.99 (Profile Books, London, 2009)**

Reviewed by Jim Jump



Written by Austrian novelist Erich Hackl and based on real people and events, this book tells the bitter-sweet love story of Rudi Friemel, an Austrian International Brigader, and his Spanish lover Marguerita Fer-

rer. They fell in love in 1938 when Marga, as part of an anti-fascist women’s delegation, met Rudi at Falset prior to the Spanish Republic’s Ebro offensive.

When the Republic collapses in 1939, they make their separate ways to France, where he is held at an internment camp in Gurs along with other Brigaders. In 1941, with France under Nazi dominion, the German prisoners are repatriated. He and Marga are briefly re-united and a child is conceived, before he is taken to a Gestapo prison in Vienna and then on to Auschwitz.

In the camp, Friemel is one of the more privileged prisoners and works as a car mechanic, though he continues his resistance activities along with other ex-International Brigade detainees. He asks to be allowed to marry Marga and make his son legitimate. Eventually, and to everyone’s surprise, his petition is granted and Rudi’s wife and their son, Edi, are brought to Auschwitz for the ceremony. But this is no happy ending, though the personal histories of those affected by the liaison of Rudi and Marga move through the postwar years and beyond the death of Franco.

The narrative is skillfully stitched together as a series of interviews with the main protagonists: Marga, her sister, Edi and others who knew or had heard of Rudi and Marga in Spain, France and Auschwitz. They recall too many of the his-



Bookseller Graham York Rare Books, based in Honiton, Devon, has produced a catalogue of out-of-print and second-hand books on the Spanish Civil War. Some 177 items are listed. They include a few other artefacts including this postcard appealing for cigarettes that was sent to the *Daily Herald* by the writer Nancy Cunard from Republican Spain. Email: [books@gyork.co.uk]; tel: 01404-41727; web: [www.gyork.co.uk].



The Autumn 2009 issue of *Jewish Socialist* carries a feature on Jews in the Spanish Civil War written by Judith Lesser Cravitz, niece of IBMT Chair Sam Lesser, and David Rosenberg. Judith's father, Frank Lesser, was also an International Brigader. The authors estimate that about 15 per cent of the 35,000 volunteers from around the world were Jewish. Copies are obtainable for £2.50 from: *Jewish Socialist*, BM 3725, London WC1N 3XX.



The video of Glasgow-based "folk 'n roll" group The Wakes (above) performing their song "These Hands" about International Brigader Jimmy Maley can now be seen on YouTube. The song is also the title track of the band's new album, which in addition features a cover of Christy Moore's "Viva La Quince Brigada". The Wakes played at the IBMT concert in Manchester in 2008 to mark the 70th anniversary of the departure of the International Brigades from Spain and have been doing gigs in Scotland to publicise Daniel Gray's new history of the Scottish involvement in the Spanish Civil War, "Homage to Caledonia". "These Hands" can be seen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=B123eUo4ohA] and via the band's website: [www.thewakes-band.com].

torical events that shaped their lives: the arrival of the International Brigades, the fall of Barcelona and the horrors of the refugee camps in France.

Thus the fate of this small group of people, whose lives were shaped by the tumultuous conflicts in Spain and Europe, are vividly recalled. The gaps in memory are left in place and are made all the more poignant as the protagonists and witnesses take their forgotten pasts to their graves.

## In brief...

● Max Bennett-Parker has transcribed the music and words of the well-known Spanish



Civil War song "Si me quieres escribir". It is available on request from his father, Tim Parker, at [timprkr@gmail.com]. Tim is the son of US International Brigader Max Parker, who recorded the song in 1982 for his album "Al Tocar Diana (At the Break of Dawn): Songs from a Franco Prison" (pictured). Tim explains: "Anyone buying my dad's record (now on CD) should download the liner notes which are a small book of reminiscences, words to songs and pictures of San Pedro de Cardeña where he spent 13 months. My dad made the

record in the last year of his life. He had never sung publicly and had not written any of the songs down. They were all from his memory of Spain almost 40 years before."

To order the record go to: [www.folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=1010].



● "The Olive Groves of Belchite" (by Elena Moya Pereira, £11.99, Vanguard Press, Cambridge, 2009) is a novel set in London, Belchite and Barcelona. The triangle of locations is reflected in its three main characters, whose

story is set against the changing attitudes to love, sex and religion in Spain and England. Family values, high finance, predatory business threats and religious fanaticism all come into the mix, together with the shadows of the civil war still influencing the lives of all.

● Readers have pointed out that all six programmes of the acclaimed 1983 Granada TV history of the Spanish Civil War that was broadcast by the BBC have been posted on YouTube. Each 60-minute programme has been cut into six 10-minute video sections. There are links to these sections and to the subsequent programmes. Start at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wS-KLhoenml] for the first programme, then navigate accordingly. For more film browsing, also recommended by readers is the Spanish Civil War material to be found at the Christie Books site run by Stuart Christie. See: [www.christiebooks.com/ChristieBooksWP/?page\_id=2].



"The Hand that History Dealt: Ralph Fox" is a tribute to the International Brigader,

writer, journalist and political activist Ralph Fox (pictured), who was killed with poet John Cornford near Córdoba in December 1936.

The author is Don Hallett, who wrote the paper originally for the Halifax Antiquarian Society (*Transactions*, Vol. 17, 2009). He also has a limited number of off-prints available (contact: [donski@blueyonder.co.uk]).

## Recognising Ralph Fox

Hallett makes the case for a wider recognition of Fox's life and work, arguing that his lack of public approval stems from his commitment to unpopular causes and to his communism. But he makes the point that Fox had a "distinguished and remarkable career" and was involved in all three of the "great forces which shaped the first three decades of the 20th century: the rise of the working classes, the tremendous upheaval of

the First World War and the ideological struggle between communism and fascism".

Fox was the author of 20 books, several of which have been translated into German, French, Spanish and Russian. His obituary appeared in most of the major newspapers and a memorial service was attended by 1,500 people.

But Hallett notes: "Fox is ignored by the Dictionary of National Biography and Encyclopaedia Britannica. There is no portrait of him in the National Portrait Gallery. He is a man largely without honour in his native town."

Marshall Mateer



Above: Gathering by the International Brigade plaque and tree of remembrance at Newcastle Civic Centre.  
Right: Middlesbrough Mayor Ray Mallon (left) with IBMT Secretary Marlene Sidaway and committee member Duncan Longstaff at the rededication of the memorial plaque to the International Brigade volunteers from Teesside.



International Brigade veteran Jack Edwards (right) unveils the memorial plaque to the volunteers from Durham in the Miners' Hall, Durham, headquarters of the Durham Miners' Association (DMA) and venue for the IBMT's 2009 Annual General Meeting. With him is David Hopper, general secretary of the DMA.

# Homage to North East volunteers

By Pauline Fraser and Don Watson

Members who attended the IBMT's 2009 Annual General Meeting got a tour of the North East of England, along with a warm welcome wherever they went. The weekend began on 9 October in Middlesbrough, with the rededication of the beautiful wooden plaque commemorating 10 Teesside heroes of the International Brigades killed in Spain. Books and memorabilia of Brigaders were also donated to the Dorman Museum and Teesside University.

That evening, members viewed a film about the Finnish-Canadian Brigaders, "To My Son In Spain", preceded by a short interview with Jack Jones made by the union Unite.

The AGM itself on the following day saw the re-election of the committee to serve a further term. Reports from the IBMT's officers were upbeat, with Membership Secretary Mary Greening saying that the aim of 1,000 members was realistic. Currently we had nearly 800 on the books.

Treasurer Mike Anderson reported income had risen from £19,338 in 2008 to £23,444 in 2009.

The AGM was followed by the unveiling of a plaque to the Brigaders from the Durham area by IB veteran Jack Edwards.

In the afternoon a round table discussion of speakers combined the historical and the personal. Don Watson showed the links between the volunteers from the North East and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. From Newcastle University, Lewis Mates analysed the roles of the Durham Miners' Association in the support for the Spanish Republic.

Then Sheila Gray provided a family history with a difference: two brothers who would have been her uncles, Bill and Edward Tattam, were killed in Spain, and she put their stories in the context of her family's continuing political involvement.

Also present was their sister, Moira Gray. Finally a speaker from the Tyne & Wear Anti-Fascist Association linked the struggles of the 1930s with those of today to combat the BNP.

**POSTER:** The GMB trade union has reproduced this 1938 Spanish Civil War poster celebrating the Republican airforce in association with the Marx Memorial Library. It measures approximately 770mm x 510mm and can be ordered from the union for £7, or two posters for £10, including p&p. Go to [www.gmb.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=89683], click the "merchandise pages" option and follow the link to "posters".



The powerful image is also earmarked to be used for the cover of a new book to be published by Lawrence & Wishart, "Looking Back at the Spanish Civil War", containing all nine of the IBMT's Len Crome Memorial Lectures (see front page for information about this year's talk) from 2002-2010, plus a tribute to Len Crome.

**MEMORIAL FOR MEDICS:** Mick Jones (right) unveils a plaque in memory of the British medical staff who worked in the cave hospital at La Bisbal de Falset (below) during the Battle of the Ebro in 1938. Jones designed the plaque and his father, Jack, was wounded during the battle.

Unveiled in November 2009, the plaque is the first memorial in Spain to the British medics who served with the International Brigades. It was paid for and organised jointly by the IBMT and local civil war commemorative group No Jubilem la Memòria, with support from the town council of La Bisbal de Falset.

In 2001, two plaques were installed, one at the communal grave in the village cemetery containing the remains of several International Brigaders and another in the cave, stating that it had been used as a hospital during the civil war. The council has also placed several display units in the cave with photographs taken during the war showing medical personnel at work.

The new plaque quotes lines from the poem "The Dead Have No Regrets" by Aileen Palmer, an Australian volunteer attached to the British Medical Unit: "Having given all they had to give, / To save from blood and fire and dust / At least a hope that we can trust / We must remember them – and live."

