

HISTORY OF FRIENDS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES

Introduction

In November 1996 a historic reunion of veterans from around the world took place in Spain to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of the International Brigades. It was an event that brought together Brigaders from all around the world, for the last time on such a scale, as most veterans were by then over eighty.

The 60th anniversary reunion, or Homenaje, took place across Spain between 4th and 12th November 1996. It was, by all accounts, brilliantly organised and coordinated by the organisation we knew then as the Amigos, or to give them their full title: Asociacion de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales, or AABI. It left an indelible impression on all who took part in it.

When he returned from the commemoration, Bill Alexander, former commander of the British Battalion in Spain, and at this time Honorary Secretary of the International Brigade Association, wrote in the IBA newsletter: "The Amigos faced a formidable task, raising funds, the reception, travel and events. ...our five day crowded stay was superbly organised because of the hard work of the Amigos, support of the Spanish people across political and national divides and the appreciation of the Brigaders. No thanks and praise can ever be enough!"

"Wherever we went, after arrival in Madrid there were young people to help with luggage, passers-by who clapped, gave an emotional welcome of our return." [International Brigade Association Newsletter March 1997]

Bert Carnall, nephew of Brigader Jack Coward, wrote in his November 1996 Report of the Homenaje: "Well, if some politicians found the commemorations too painful or embarrassing, not so the tens of thousands, old and young, who filled the Madrid Sports Palace. The brigaders were showered with thunderous applause; folk music; the lament of flamenco song; poems of Garcia Lorca; battle songs, amid cries of 'No Pasaran!'"

The 60th anniversary reunion would be the catalyst for the formation of groups in several countries which would bring together veterans, relatives, friends, historians and others who felt that the story of the International Brigaders, and their example of international solidarity, must continue to be told. There was a feeling of urgency, because, as veterans died, younger generations would no longer hear at first-hand their accounts of the atrocities of fascism and why it must always be confronted and opposed.

The story begins

It was in this atmosphere that four children of British Brigaders, Martin Green, Dolly West-Shaer, Dolores Wild and Hilary Jones, met in Spain during the Homenaje, to discuss

setting up a group to bring together relatives and friends of the International Brigades. This is where the story of FIBS begins.

Friends of the International Brigades (FIBS) or the Friends, as it became known, would not have an easy birth. It existed as an independent organisation for less than five years, from 1997 until, in late 2001, it came together with the International Brigade Association to form the International Brigade Memorial Trust. Those five years were, however, crucial in establishing an organisation which would continue the legacy of the British and Irish volunteers. This history will, I hope, show the importance of FIBS in the formation of the IBMT.

The aim of FIBS was to “to keep alive an interest in the involvement of the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, not as a solitary historical event now in the past, but as a part of a common struggle enshrined in the aims of the Spanish Republic and its fight against international fascism.

“Membership of the Friends of the International Brigades is open to anyone with a genuine interest, particularly to relations and descendants of Brigaders.” [FIBS Newsletter No 2 September 1998]

Relations with the International Brigade Association

A constant leitmotif of the FIBS years was the attempt to work more closely with the International Brigade Association. As far back as July 1991, some five years before the four relatives met in Spain, Martin Green had written to Bill Alexander, Honorary Secretary of the IBA. asking if he, Martin, could become an associate member of the IBA.

Bill wrote back to say there were “no associate members of the International Brigade Association. The proposal that there should be such a grouping was dropped somewhere in World War II and has never been revived.”

Every year since its inauguration on London’s South Bank in 1985, a commemoration has been held at the International Brigade Memorial. It was organised by the International Brigade Association until 2001, when the International Brigade Memorial Trust took over the responsibility.

At the lunch in John Marshall Hall following the 1991 commemoration, Martin Green suggested to Bill Alexander that he write to him “formally proposing the decision be reconsidered, and that he brought it up at the next annual general meeting of the Association.

“He [Bill] said that was impossible, there had not been an AGM for the last thirty years or so and there would never be another one.”

“The wife of an active member of the Association asked Bill Alexander why it was that the widow of one of the Brigade’s most distinguished figures was no longer on the mailing list for the news-sheet.

‘She passes my house every day,’ was the reply, ‘why can’t she call in?’

‘Suppose my husband dies,’ said the wife, ‘will you send me the news-sheet if I send you a subscription?’

‘You must understand that myself and my wife can’t possibly take on any more work,’ was the answer. [Martin Green, ‘An Open Letter to Members of the International Brigade Association’]

Martin sent out a letter containing these verbatim comments “to about 30 Brigaders and friends and a lively correspondence followed but was blocked by Bill at the end of the day”, he explained to Dolores Wild in a letter of 10th February 1997.

When they met in Spain at the 60th anniversary Homenaje, Martin told Dolly, Hilary and Dolores about his failed attempt to discuss the possibility of associate membership.

After she returned from the Homenaje, Dolores Wild sought advice from Fred Thomas, one of the Brigaders sympathetic to the idea of setting up a ‘Friends’ group. Fred wrote an undated letter, probably from December 1996, attaching a draft that she might use at her own discretion in her letter to Bill. Fred and his wife Sadie, whose younger brother Max Nash was killed at Gandesa in July 1938, were to remain great friends and supporters of FIBS from this time on.

Dolores wrote accordingly to Bill on 4th January 1997. Bill’s reply to Dolores’ letter, dated in error 12 January 1996 (for 1997) is mild in tone. After thanking her for the letter, he writes: “It is the first statement I have received about the proposed organisation. I will willingly meet you to discuss the idea.” He suggests Dolores phone him with a suggested date, time and place for a meeting. It is not clear if such a meeting ever took place.

Dolly West followed up Dolores’ letter with another to Bill dated 3rd February 1997. “The recent visit to Spain was a moving, emotional and inspirational experience for everybody involved. One of the most positive aspects of the trip was that it brought together a group of people although not immediately involved in the fighting in Spain nevertheless had a common interest in the Spanish war.”

“A group of children and grandchildren met together here recently [Dolly West’s home address] to show our photographs. At this informal gathering we discussed the possibility of setting up an organisation along the lines of the Amigos in Spain and the American VALB. [Volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion] “We see this organisation as a vehicle for carrying on the memories and ensuring a historical interest is maintained. We’d appreciate it if you would publish the enclosed in the next newsletter.”

It is assumed the enclosure referred to was the Friends of the International Brigades membership letter and form. [undated]

In a letter to Martin Green dated 9th February 1997, Lala Isla wrote: "I am sorry to hear that Bill does not want to help you. He is a funny man and can be quite stropky....I am used to his ways now and I do not think he is a bad person. You can't expect from him something that doesn't fall in his own way of doing things."

Martin Green could barely have received Lala's letter, when he wrote to Dolores Wild on 10th February 1997 saying he had spoken to Bill Alexander. "He said he was going to tell me what he thought, then he said, no he wouldn't, but that he'd be writing to Dolly. Martin wrote: "I think we must now take steps to launch the business without the aid of Bill and the IBA."

Two days later, on 12th February 1997, following receipt of Dolly's letter of 3rd February, Bill wrote a letter to Dolly, Martin and Dolores. He rejected out of hand Dolly's proposal that he mention the setting up of a Friends organisation in the next IBA newsletter when members would have been notified about the annual commemoration at Jubilee Gardens on 19th July.

He stated that: "In 1939, at the foundation meeting of the IBA, key decisions were made: that only those who had actually served in Spain could be members: the purpose of the Association should be limited only to work in Britain to help the Spanish people regain democracy and freedom."

On 17th February 1997, Martin Green wrote to Dolores: "I was very disappointed by Bill's letter as I'm sure most of the old Brigaders who have children would all want their offspring to know about the Friends. As I mentioned on the phone, the Spanish Amigos are very interested in our plans and would like to encourage us."

Martin enclosed the draft of a letter he thought should be sent out "to anyone we thought might be interested in joining the Friends. If you and Dolly and Hilary are happy with this, I'll get some run off ready to send out, first establishing that Dolly will be willing to act as Secretary, ie. will be in receipt of the responses. I think there should be a modest membership fee to cover cost of postage etc, and the running off of a news-letter, which I should be happy to take on myself."

Three weeks later, on 11th March 1997, Martin wrote again to Dolores to tell her he had "had a very encouraging response from my mailing and think we're going to have quite a lot of people wanting to join, particularly sons and daughters". Dolly shared his delight in a letter of 22nd March 1997 to Martin, Hilary and Dolores, in which she writes: "There has been an overwhelming response in terms of the reception to our letter. Some of the responses deserve reproduction in our first news-letter."

The letters that Martin Green sent out had his home address published at the foot. This made it easy for well-intentioned supporters to get in touch, but he also received threatening hate mail. There seemed to be an unpleasant cluster of fascists, or their sympathisers, in the South Wales area. This was discussed at committee and it was agreed to investigate the cost of a PO Box instead.

Among FIBS earliest supporters was veteran Spanish Civil War journalist Martha Gellhorn. Dolly received a letter from her on 11th March 1997 and replied on 14th saying: "we are extremely pleased with your expression of encouragement." The following year, Martha wrote again to Dolly on 6th February 1998 saying: "I am probably the last surviving war correspondent from the Spanish war.I think anything you can do to keep alive the anti-fascist spirit of the Brigade and Spanish people is valuable." Six days later, on 15th February 1998, Martha Gellhorn died, aged 90.

Kim Economides, son of Brigadier Michael Economides, replied, enclosing copies of his late father's obituary, and wrote: "Congratulations on taking this initiative!" sentiments echoed by Bert Carnall, who wrote to Dolly on 15th March: "It would be a tragedy for the International Brigade to be relegated to history books. The spirit of those who fought and what they fought for must be kept alive."

In a letter dated 6th March 1997, Wally Togwell requested Dolly write to the Mayor of Morata de Tajuna supporting a campaign to get a street named after XV Brigade as a number of those killed at Jarama were buried in the local cemetery.

Replying that she would do as he asked, Dolly wrote: "A group of us who were in Spain in November [for 60th anniversary] are getting together to keep the spirit of the I.B. alive." We "have sent out to families of Brigaders and we have had a very good response." It is noteworthy that this is the first reference to keeping 'the spirit of the IB alive'.

Wally's reply to Dolly on 17th March 1997 said he was: "pleased to note your initiative re- a 'friends of the IB organisation'. When I was in Manchester some years ago at the unveiling of the Plaque up there....Sid Booth [mooted] at a discussion among us I.Bers about ass. [associate] membership and I noted there was no dissent.....but I believe that being presented to Bill, he has rejected the idea....I fully support the idea for us Octogenarians will not last forever and the spirit of the Brigades and the anti-fascist convictions....have to be promoted so that it shall not be necessary for an International Brigade to fight again in the future!"

Writing to: "Dear Dolly and Amigos," on 16th March 1997, veteran John Longstaff pledges to: "give support" [to the Friends of the I.Bs.] John's letter also contains interesting material concerning the fighting that continued until 1959 in Andalucia, and paid tribute to the brave Republicans who paid with their lives.

A watershed moment came on 26th March 1997, when Edinburgh Brigadier John Dunlop wrote a most significant letter to Dolly. It gives insight into Bill's attitude and motivations. He explained that Bill had sent him the previous week a copy of the letter Dolly had written to Bill of "5 February". [Dolly's letter to Bill was dated 3rd February, but John must have mis-read it for a 5.]

"Steve Fullarton and I, the only Brigadiers still extant in Edinburgh have written a joint letter to Bill to the effect that **we do not entirely agree with his approach to the subject of your letters.** [my bolding]

"Both Steve and I are sorry that Bill should have written to you in the way that he did in brushing aside your suggestion of forming an additional organisation to the IBA as we did not fully understand the reasons for his attitude. We wondered if he felt that the emergence of a parallel organisation of younger people questioned his way of running the IBA for which he has fought valiantly throughout the years since he took over as Secretary of our Association. **We would not like it if we thought that that was in your minds.**

"There is no doubt that, since he took on the job of Secretary, he has dedicated his energies to keeping the Association going in a way that, possibly, no other member could or would have done and for this we have to give him full credit and respect for his views.

"As well as speaking to Steve I have also spoken on the phone to John Longstaff, the only other member of our Committee whose address I know, and I got the impression that he is broadly in agreement with Steve and I on this matter.

".....Chris Smith, who knew Bill very well in Spain, as I did, tends to agree with Bill. Having had a talk with him I have a bit more understanding of Bill's attitude and his fears that the organisation that you are proposing could be taken over and used for purposes other than those for which the IBA was formed and as a platform for supporting causes which are not within the remit of our Association as it was originally constituted and which it has held to throughout the years.

"My own and Steve's opinion on the matter is that **we cannot stop you and the others subscribing to your letter from going ahead with your plans for the 'Friends' but we would hope that in doing so, you should keep very much in mind the objects for which our Association was originally founded** as expressed in the Minutes of the founding meeting of the International Brigade Association on 5 March 1939. Bill has already expressed these to you in his reply to you of 12 February."

In a PS, John writes: "I enclose a list of names and addresses of possible subscribers to your proposed association."

Replying to John Dunlop on 1st April 1997, Dolly explained that: "All four of us [Martin, Dolores, Hilary and herself] appreciate fully what Bill has done over the years for the IBA

and there is no way at all that there can be any thought of conflicting aims if we get anything set up. You have our word for that.”

On 25th April 1997 John Dunlop replied to a letter he had received from Martin Green, writing: “I am very sorry that Bill Alexander has taken up the attitude that he has towards the Friends.....I really do not know what is bugging him, but I suppose some old men get like that when they feel the young ones are trying to take control. I knew him quite well as he and I went through France together on the way into Spain and were later in the Anti Tank Battery when it was founded until I got wounded at Brunete. He tended even then to take life, and himself, very seriously. Not my way.”

The first newsletter was published, possibly in June 1997, and referred to the “enthusiastic response from the initial letter circulated to those who were thought to be interested, but so far no further steps have been taken to consolidate the society formally, though plans are afoot to achieve this and details will hopefully be circulated in the not too distant future.” The newsletter contains details of books and events. A typed addition had been added to the simple contact form circulated with the first letters asking members to pay a £5.00 subscription.

Sometime in August 1997, Dolly wrote to the contacts: “Dear Friend, do not despair, we are still here but what with holidays and one thing and another we have not been able to get things together.”

She drew readers’ attention to an exhibition about the International Brigade archive to be held over a two-week period between 25th October and 8th November 1997 in Marx Memorial Library and explained that “we are trying to organise a meeting on the middle Saturday the 1st November.”

Dolly had been busy reading Fred Thomas’ long-awaited and recently-published book: ‘To Tilt at Windmills’, and wrote to him on 1st August 1997, saying: “It has taken time to pull my thoughts together about the book. You see I like many other people have been filled by the ‘glory and splendour’ of it all.....

“On reading the book I realised for the first time that the War was no different from any other war, except the lack of arms, food, clothes and at times organisation were almost unbearable to read about.

“What was good to read about was the descriptions and comments on all the people you met and interacted with, men and women....

“I suppose it is that aspect that sets your book apart from any others that I have read on the war.”

She ends by writing:

“I hope that we will meet on August 30th.” [at the unveiling of a new memorial to the Hammersmith Brigaders].

“Many thanks for your letter and, too, the ‘Searchlight’ review – which, of course, gave me great pleasure,” Fred replied in a letter of August 6th 1997. Gerry Gable, then, as now editor of anti-fascist magazine ‘Searchlight’, had been one of Fred’s students at the Hackney school where he taught, having retrained as a teacher under the emergency scheme following World War Two, so the review would have no doubt been favourable. Gerry Gable has told this writer of the strong influence that Fred Thomas had on him becoming a life-long anti-fascist activist.

Dolly followed up her brief note of August to members, with another, notifying them of a meeting at 4pm on Saturday 1st November at The Betsy Trotwood, 56 Farringdon Road, EC1. The minutes record that there were 14 members present, plus two members of Los Amigos [AABI] from Spain.

“It was agreed that the name of the organisation should be Friends of the International Brigades” and that “we should aim at having a quarterly newsletter. A small committee was elected consisting of:- Dolores Wild, Dolly West, Patrick Rudd, Pauline Fraser, Bert Carnall, Kate Green and Martin Green.”

Dolly West was nominated as Secretary and Pauline Fraser as Chairperson. The Committee would meet on Sunday 30th November 1997 to draft a constitution for the organisation. It was agreed that the subscription should be £5.00 a year and that a bank account would be opened and cheques made payable to **Green Rivers Press**.

There was some discussion on the role of the organisation and a number of points were made:

- It was suggested that we should look into forming a panel of speakers to be available to speak on Spain.
- Some people felt that the panel should only consist of direct descendants.
- There was a suggestion that we try to get a well-known person to act as a figurehead and that they be given the title of Honorary President.”

After the main meeting Dolly and Martin had a discussion with the two Spanish Amigos, Pepé and Julia, [letter from Cherry Embury to Dolly West 17.11.97]. They told Dolly and Martin that Friends organisations had been set up in seven or eight other countries. The Amigos were planning to hold an event in Barcelona in September 1998, on the anniversary of the Farewell Parade of 1938.

The first item of correspondence at the meeting of 30th November 1997 was a letter from Fred Thomas [dated November 21st 1997] in which he said that FIBS needed to work with the IBA and suggested “a friendly approach be made to the Chair, Secretary and committee members.....stressing the wish to work together and asking for a meeting. “It was decided Dolores would approach Bill Alexander asking for a meeting with him. It was suggested that Fred Thomas be asked to accompany her.” It is unlikely that such a meeting took place, as there is no mention of it in subsequent committee minutes.

Fred's letter ends ominously:

"Unless the present existing attitude of near armed truce is broken I cannot see much of a future for the Organisation: that there is no future for the IBA as at present constituted, is certain." Fred also felt that the organisation needed to attract young members, something that was to remain a preoccupation for FIBS and subsequently the IBMT.

However Fred's subsequent letter to Dolly West of 19th February 1998, strikes an optimistic note.

"We [Sadie and himself] are both pleased to hear of the progress made by the Association in gaining support from a widening range.....I am glad that you are providing the means to prevent the ignominious end of the IBA as at present constituted. I feel sure that, if they were invited to give an opinion, the majority of the survivors would welcome the friendship of comrades in the continuing fight against the insidious threat to Democracy which still persists."

The Friends ended the year positively despite failing to get any official endorsement or encouragement from the IBA. They were building up a group of Brigaders who had at the least, misgivings about the direction the IBA was heading, or at most, were significantly disaffected. In a letter to Martin, Hilary and Dolores dated 22nd March 1997, Dolly said they had received twelve replies from the letters that she and Martin had sent out. By 1st November 1997 Dolly announced that forty four people had expressed their support for the Friends. From a group of four at the 60th anniversary commemorations a year earlier this was a satisfactory outcome. [FIBS members List of Applications at 1-11-97]

Five Brigaders and three relatives replied to letters sent out in the first half of 1997, according to the archive documents. By the second half of the year, when Martin Green's roll-out of letters to local newspapers began to take effect, the balance had shifted to two relatives and nineteen friends, historians, or other interested people, including journalists. These figures exclude letters from the four FIBS founders: Martin, Dolly, Dolores and Hilary. The first newsletter had been sent out around June 1997, the first meeting of members had taken place and they could look forward to having an official launch meeting in February 1998 with the press invited.
[Minutes of meeting of 1st November 1997]

Hiding in plain sight since the publication of Bill Alexander's book: 'British Volunteers for Liberty' in 1982, was evidence that the IBA had expanded its membership to include those active in the cause of Spain.

The evidence was chanced upon when Martin Green looked something up in his own copy, and came across the following passages, which had previously escaped his notice: "Full membership was limited to those who had served democracy in Spain; next of kin were enrolled as associate members.

"In 1950 the Association changed its name to the 'International Brigade Association and Friends of Republican Spain' to reinforce the dwindling ranks of the Brigaders with people

who were active in the cause of Spain but had not actually fought there.” [‘British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-1939’ pages 249-250, Bill Alexander L&W 1982]

At the FIBS committee meeting of 26th April 1998, Dolly read out a letter from Martin with the information that he had discovered, and it was agreed that Dolly send a letter to Brigaders with whom we were in contact, enclosing the relevant material from the book. It was felt that it was crucial to get the tone, wording and accuracy of the letter just right, and Dolly requested amendments. Dolores’ amendments, appended to the minutes, were incorporated.

However, events beyond FIBS’ control caused a delay in sending out those letters. In a note to Pauline Fraser and, presumably, the rest of the committee, that enclosed the draft letter to Brigaders, and requested any changes, Dolly wrote: “I propose that we wait until the end of next week, ie the end of May so that Bill [Alexander] has time to calm down after the latest attack on him by the Guardian.”

It was a wise decision, as Dolly would have been mindful that the letter, with a copy of the passages Martin had chanced upon in Bill’s book enclosed, might not have been well received by the Brigaders at this time and it is apparent from the note that there had been earlier attacks on Bill Alexander in the Guardian. Veterans might have rallied to Bill’s defence and regarded the FIBS letter as just another attack on Bill Alexander. FIBS was walking on eggshells on the issue of support from the surviving volunteers.

It is ironic that, some eighteen months later, after the death of Bill Alexander, the Guardian was keen to photograph all the Brigaders, relatives and supporters at the historic meeting of 28th October 2000 at Marx Memorial Library.

Dolly West wrote to Jane Larson on 17th April 1998 asking her if she had a copy of ‘British Volunteers for Liberty’. Jane was a close friend, but even so, Dolly’s comment on Bill Alexander is revealing. “The man is a liar of the first order.” The sheer vehemence of this sentence is in contrast with other references Dolly makes to Bill, where she makes concessions to his age and the good work he had done in keeping the IBA together.

The revelations from ‘Volunteers for Liberty’ prompted Wally Togwell to send Martin Green IBA papers from an earlier date in World War Two. In a section of the IBA newsletter, ‘Volunteer for Liberty’ entitled ‘The Next Steps’, he found the following:

“2 Because of shortage of forces even if all members are organised it is necessary for an immediate increase of Associate members who will only be kept together if concrete plans are made.”

While an IBA delegate conference in 1943 concluded:

“The number of Brigaders is dwindling and many members are in the army or engaged in other important activities. Hence Associate Members must be recruited....Regular planned

activity is essential, to keep members and supporters active..." [Newsletter No.2 September 1998]

In addition, Eric Tallis, brother of Brigader Walter Tallis, killed at Gandesa in 1938, wrote to Dolly, in an undated letter: "Dear Dolly West, I was most interested to get your letter and I wholly support your proposal for a 'Friends of the International Brigade' group. I was myself an associate member of the IB Association, which accepted close relatives into membership. We had membership cards and paid a yearly subscription."

Here was incontrovertible evidence that the IBA had initiated an expansion of associate membership to include next of kin and those active in the cause of Spain. Why then did Bill Alexander, in the 1990's, remain adamant that there should be no Friends association?

The main business of the 26th April meeting was the Draft Constitution. Bert Carnall, who had extensive experience in the trade union movement, had been asked to produce a draft. The draft confirmed the name of the organisation as Friends of the International Brigades and gave the aims as furthering "the principles of those men and women who fought in support of the Republican government of Spain, with the International Brigades against fascism, and all who supported their fight.....to maintain contact with relatives and friends of International Brigaders [and] to develop links with like minded organisations throughout Europe and the world." Membership would "be open to all those who agree with the aims of the organisation and are willing to abide by the constitution." Rules for the holding of an AGM and the election of a committee follow and under "Finance: An annual membership fee of £5.00, to be reviewed at the first AGM. There should be fund raising events and appeals."

The constitution and aims of the IBMT can be traced back to this draft and to the membership form developed after this meeting, which went through several incarnations over the next couple of years.

Relations with the Asociacion de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales (AABI)

Those who had taken part in the 1996 Homenaje had nothing but praise for the organisational work that the Amigos had put in to make it such an outstanding success. However, the first worrying signs that there might be a split occurring between the Amigos in Spain was when Dolly got a letter from Lala Isla, writing from a London address, on 27th May 1997.

After introducing herself to Dolly, Lala wrote: "Next week Dolores Cabra, the founder of Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales, the one that started everything, comes to London.....She would like to see you and I was wondering if you would have time on Thursday..." There is no record of Dolly's reply to this letter.

Just days later, Ana Perez sent Dolly a letter dated 1st June 1997. Ana starts by giving a positive account of what the Amigos have been doing since the Homenaje. She goes on: "However, there is a problem which we are very worried about, and it is necessary to make this matter clear." Ana accuses Dolores Cabra of "sending out different documents and reports thus creating confusion..." and says "there has been a betrayal of trust on Dolores' part." Ana then refers to a letter she wrote in February which reported that Dolores Cabra and Juan Barceló had not been re-elected to positions of responsibility on the Amigos board. Clearly splits had taken place following the Homenaje.

On 7th July 1997, Dolores Cabra wrote a letter in Spanish to Dolly West, Dolores Wild, Martin Green, Hilary Wild and Kim Economides, announcing the creation of the Archivo de la Guerra Civil (AGE). She tells them that the delegate of AGE in Britain is Lala Isla and says that they had worked together on the archives in Great Britain and had come across a large quantity of materials that they wished to put on microfilm and incorporate into their archive. She looked forward to meeting them all at the annual commemoration at Jubilee Gardens on 19th July, but there is no record that Dolores Cabra met with Dolly or any of the others at the commemoration.

Members of FIBS were puzzled and distressed to receive conflicting accounts of the split and wisely felt it best not to get drawn into this internal dispute. The nub of the argument centred around the setting up an International Brigades archive, whether it should stand alone or if it should be extended to cover all aspects of the war in Spain, including an archive on Children of War, as referred to in Dolores Cabra's letter. Later, the location of the archive and its status would also become contentious.

Ana Perez and Dolly had struck up a firm friendship, as shown in Ana's letter to Dolly of 25th August 1997 referring to the Jubilee Gardens commemoration: "I still remember the good moments we had together last month in London and your hospitality." She went on to tell Dolly that she would be coming to the International Brigades exhibition at Marx House in October-November. "Do you know that Germans have also created a Friends Association of International Brigades?" she asks.

In her reply Dolly thanked Ana for her letter and bulletins. "I will take them with me on the 30th for the Hammersmith unveiling," she wrote. This referred to the new memorial to the Hammersmith volunteers where her father, Brigadier Frank West's name was included.

She confirmed that she had heard from the Germans and would put them on the Friends mailing list and enclosed the letter sent to members about the forthcoming meeting in November with some information about the exhibition at Marx Memorial Library. Dolly concludes: "If you need to come to London there is always a bed in this house.." [letter dated 29th August 1997]

Other strong and lasting friendships were forged at that extraordinary 60th anniversary Homenaje. A couple of expats, Cherry Embury and Jane Larsen, both living in Barcelona, had helped with the organisation of the events there and became strong supporters of FIBS. Friendly exchanges of letters between Brigader Wally Togwell, his friend Bert Carnall, nephew of volunteer Jack Coward, Dolly West and Cherry and Jane, concerned a lift they were given by a sympathetic taxi driver during the Homenaje. He must have gone out of his way to help them when he realised that the party included an International Brigader and letters concern the exchange of gifts.

Apart from the exchange of pleasantries between friends, more important were matters discussed in the letters. Wally wrote to Dolly on 6th March 1997 mentioning a campaign to get a street in Morata de Tajuna named after XV Brigade and urging Dolly to write to the Mayoress of Morata, giving her support to the project. In a letter of 17th November 1997, Cherry Embury told Dolly some shocking news of the Mayoress. The Mayoress of Morata had been due to accompany Ana Perez and Cherry to Jarama. Ana contacted Cherry to explain that this could no longer take place, because on leaving a meeting one evening, the Mayoress had been heckled and insulted by a group of women who then started to push her. When the Mayoress tried to defend herself, she was arrested and put on trial. Her sentence was to be confined to house arrest for four weekends and to pay a fine of 40,000 pesetas.

“Living as I do in Barcelona I forget that this sort of thing happens...” Cherry reflects, and mentions that she had seen a Falange building just across the square from the Town Hall in Morata.

Dolly reported the incident to the FIBS committee meeting of 30th November, and: “The feeling of the meeting was that a letter of support should be sent with a contribution towards the fine.”

At the committee meeting of January 10th 1998, Dolly reported that “the Amigos have been to see her [the Mayoress of Morata] and she is fine now.”

Continued growth in 1998

During 1998 over forty letters would be received seeking information about the Friends, including some twenty relatives of Brigaders, a similar number of friends, some of whom had been friends of volunteers and six historians, mostly amateur, who had developed an interest, some through friendship with Brigaders. There would be a spate of replies from the North West of England, from Scotland and from Wales, depending on where and when Martin had sent letters. Not all of these people would go on to join FIBS, but it gave a considerable boost to the membership.

Abe Smorodin of Volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion (VALB) wrote in March 1998: “We are delighted that you have organised a Friends of the International Brigades. What’s that old cliché – better late than never.

“We met a lot of British IB’ers at the Homenaje 96 and like the rest of us they were contentious and crotchety and wonderful. If octogenarians can’t be that way, who can?” He promised to send FIBS copies of VALB’s newsletter, ‘The Volunteer’.

A letter from Fred Thomas to Dolly dated May 5th 1998 sheds light on Abe’s “better late than never” quip. He mentioned an “interesting article in the ‘Volunteer’ “[newsletter of VALB] in which he quoted from an interview with Bill Sussmann, a Lincoln volunteer. “.....Some 22 years ago we discussed the fact that (the Vets) would eventually disappear, and the story of the International Brigade would fade. We decided to help establish and autonomous organisation.....which would assure its continuing renewal with young members.” This positive attitude of the VALB contrasts favourably with Bill Alexander’s adamant opposition to the establishment of the Friends in Britain.

Gerry Gable, editor of Searchlight, the anti-fascist magazine, was another good friend to FIBS. He had put information about the new group in the magazine and referred on to Dolly several people who had responded.

The FIBS committee meeting of 10th January was followed by another on 8th February so that preparations could be made for a successful launch meeting on February 21st. The first item at this meeting under Minutes and matters arising, reads tersely: “Dolores has seen B.A. and he doesn’t want to be associated with our organisation.” Relations with Bill Alexander appeared to have broken down, terminally.

Reports were received from the Amigos in Spain, in a letter of 4th February 1998 from Brigadier Fred Thomas, that “The Provincial Government of Castilla La Mancha has approved the establishment of an archive of the International Brigades in Albacete”. The German group, KFSR, which had been set up in 1991, informed FIBS of their events in the year ahead.

Cherry Embury wrote to Dolly West on 4th March 1998 suggesting that an English-speaking member of AABI should be invited to FIBS meetings. “I think that they should clearly explain their position (as opposed to that of Dolores Cabra)...” and seems to suggest that members might consider placing memoirs and interesting papers in the new archive.

Dr. Jo Barnes, writing from New Zealand, whose father, ‘Babs’ Ovenden, fought at Boadilla with the Thaelmanns and returned to England with Esmond Romilly, expressed surprise “that the IBA have declared us ineligible to join. What will happen to the Association when their members have passed away?” [letter dated 21 January 1998]

Financial affairs were on a firmer footing as a minute for the 8th February committee meeting notes: “We are opening an account with Giro Bank. We have tried the Coop several times with no success. Prior to this, cheques had been made payable to Green Rivers Press. Pauline Fraser sent in a cheque for £10.00 in the summer of 1997 on receipt of the first newsletter. It was returned pending the opening of a bank account.

The meeting on February 21st 1998 at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, was the first public event of the new organisation. It had created a good deal of interest among members, and several notes of apology from those who could not attend were received. It was a success, attracting fourteen new members who, with the committee and their families, swelled the numbers to twenty three. There were exhibitions, food and wine and music, a fund-raising raffle and plenty of time just to chat. Pauline Fraser introduced the evening and spoke of her how father, Brigadier Harry Fraser, 92, was “getting rather frail...and that highlights the need for our organisation – an organisation that will keep alive the memory of those brave internationalists who fought, and in many cases, gave their lives, for the freedom of the people of Spain and to oppose fascism”. [21.02.1998 flyers stapled to hand-written attendance list; Speakers’ notes by Pauline Fraser].

Notwithstanding Bill Alexander’s opposition, Interest in FIBS continued to grow throughout 1998 and membership was reported as approximately 108, in Newsletter No. 2, dated September 1998. Eighteen more relatives and the same number of friends contacted FIBS, many after reading Martin Green’s letter in their local paper. In addition, five more historians got in touch and a couple of other interested people, making a total of forty three new contacts, so doubling the numbers from the previous year.

One of the relatives was none other than Jim Jump, later to become editor of the IBMT newsletter and magazine, and Secretary. He is currently Chair. He wrote to Dolly West on 15th June 1998, explaining that Wally Togwell had given him Dolly’s address. He said he was: “very interested in joining/supporting the Friends of the International Brigade. My father, who died in 1990, was an IB veteran, and we are all still very proud of his memory.” Replying to Jim’s letter, Dolly mentions that her father was Frank West “and I remember him talking about your Father so your name was known to me.”

There was particularly strong growth in the North West and it was agreed at FIBS’ April committee to explore the possibility of a meeting there in the autumn. Dolly West wrote to Hilary Jones on 29th May 1998: “We felt that we would like to organise a meeting in the Manchester area in early autumn September/October time.

“Now we would need some help setting it up obviously. Would you be able to give us some help to do this, organise a room, check that the date does not conflict with anything else being organised and so on?

“Would you have some thoughts and let me know how you feel about it? I feel very strongly that we don’t have everything London based.”

Dolly sent another letter on 9th July 1998 after Hilary had set about organising a meeting, enclosing “a set of addresses” and asking if she had “had any thoughts about the agenda for the evening or even the afternoon” she adds, “because some of them are quite elderly [or] are coming from Liverpool...”

Dolly apologised “for the handwritten postal codes. I am still trying to come to grips [Dolly’s spelling, perhaps a play on words] and like most of the things in my life it doesn’t always do what I tell it to do.”

In London the next milestone in FIBS’ progress was a gathering at the Paper Moon in Blackfriars Road, to take place at 3pm on July 18th, after the International Brigades Memorial ceremony in Festival Gardens and the lunch in John Marshall Hall. Writing to committee members on 20th July 1998 following the gathering, Dolly commented: “I thought Saturday went well and people enjoyed meeting each other, at the Memorial, the lunch and the gathering afterwards.” Twenty seven people attended, including volunteers Bob Doyle and Reg Saxton, and five of FIBS’ committee, which comprised: Dolly West, Secretary, Pauline Fraser, Chairperson, Dolores Wild, Treasurer and Martin Green, Newsletter editor, Bert Carnall, Katie Green and Patrick Rudd.

Later in July, Hilary received the report, with a hand-written note at the bottom from Dolly, asking Hilary if she could “let me have a date when you have booked somewhere.”

Hilary Jones arranged a meeting for the afternoon of Saturday 5th September 1998, with the help of Judith McKenna, Brigadier Bernard McKenna’s wife, who signed letters of invitation to those on the mailing list and asked them to phone either Hilary or herself if they intended to come.

Dolly West sent up a video to show at the event as she could no longer go in person. Pauline Fraser went instead and gave a report to the Manchester meeting concerning the formation of FIBS and achievements so far.

Pauline gave a report-back of the Manchester meeting to the committee on 4th October 1998. She said there had been a very useful discussion. Among the suggestions that came forward were a need for a national logo, an exhibition called Now and Then dealing with the rise of fascism, with a weekend conference to launch it, the need for good communications between the North West and London groups, bi-monthly education meetings for the group and some suggested amendments to the constitution.

The rift in the Amigos continues

Evidence of a continuing rift between the Amigos cast a slight shadow over the Paper Moon event. Martin Green wrote in the September newsletter that Amigos representatives

Lala Isla and Jesus Gonzalez, “both of whom had addressed the meeting....have subsequently written to our Friends organisation expressing divergent views.”

Dolly related in a letter to Brigader Dave Goodman, who had requested information about the situation in Spain:

“...Lala got up and made a statement about her work in Britain. Jesus who as far as I am concerned was a representative of the Amigos made a few comments. As I remember either Pauline or myself interrupted to stop what seemed to us was starting to be an argument....” [letter dated 26th November 1998, DW to DG]

Lala Isla wrote to Pauline Fraser a few days after the gathering at the Paper Moon, to introduce herself to Pauline and to praise the work of Dolores Cabra, who she credited with organising the 60th anniversary Homenaje. She told Pauline of her involvement with the Homenaje and said: “one of the aims of the Amigos was to create a national archive” which would not only house the Brigaders’ archive, but “all the exiles, the Basque children’s, the guerrilleros, the Resistance etc. that is scattered around the world. We start now with the oral history.”

In the next paragraph, however, the divisions within the Amigos surfaced. “Jesus, the representative of the Amigos who attended the 18th of July commemoration [Lala’s spelling] said in the Friends of the International Brigades meeting that the present Management Committee of the Amigos could not find money for their next invitation of the Brigaders to Spain...I had to contradict him. I am very sorry if I created a bad feeling in the meeting but I cannot stand lies.”

She then proceeds to list all the organisations that she says contributed to the Homenaje and ends that section in capital letters: “AFTER THE HOMAGE WE HAD A SURPLUS OF 17 MILLION PESETAS...” [London 21st July 1998, L.I. to P.F.]

Two days later, Lala sent a hand-written letter to Dolly West with details of AGE’s delegate in Luxembourg and a ‘PS’ at the bottom that reads: “I hope the letter to Pauline clarifies something.”[letter dated 23.7.98 from L.I. to D.W.]

Dolly West wrote to Pauline Fraser and the rest of the committee on 12th September 1998, saying: “I have had a discussion with Fred Thomas re the letters from Lala and Los Amigos. He very kindly sent me a suggested reply....and I will put it on the agenda for our meeting in October.”

The letter that the committee agreed bears the hallmarks of Fred’s style. “we feel very strongly that it would be both unfair as well as unwise to all concerned if we were to take part in the unfortunate controversy involving our Spanish friends and comrades” it states. “If we can express a hope, it is that our many, much respected friends in Spain will be able

to resolve their differences. This would do much to pay homage to the IB's and also do justice to the real History of Spain."

The following month Dolly West received a letter from a member of the Amigos committee concerning arrangements for the 60th anniversary of the 'Despedida' (Farewell) to the International Brigades. It would take place in Barcelona from 13-15 November 1998. If FIBS had been aware of difficulties within the Amigos, this letter shows that AABI knew about problems in Britain too.

"Bill Alexander has informed us that he will not be attending, on the other hand, Fred Thomas, would like to attend on his own." they write. "Since the situation regarding the British brigadistas is rather unique, I wanted to inform you personally so that all those who may still be unaware of the activities in preparation can be informed. We would be very pleased to see several of you in Barcelona." [letter from AABI dated Madrid, 22 October 1998]

The tone of Dolly West's reply reflects a weary exasperation: "The situation between us and Bill Alexander is very difficult. I send him everything we send out but he makes no acknowledgement. He does send me the IBA newsletter. But he will have nothing to do with us at all. Many of the Brigaders do if they contact us we make them Honorary members. We send all our postings to them. We tried to become associate members of the IBA and were refused. We have found evidence of an associate membership in the 1940s and 1950s. It is also mentioned in Bill's own book. But he is an old man – nearly 90 years old now. So we carry on." [letter to 'Dolores' (Dolores Pelayo) November 13, 1998]

Cherry Embury wrote to Martin Green and Dolly West on 16th November 1998, saying that Robert Coale [ALBA] had written to Bill Alexander "asking him which two brigaders would be representing Britain....Bill wrote back that nobody would be going from England as they were all too busy."

In the event four veterans from the British Isles attended the Despedida. Wally Togwell explained in his report: "My co-delegate was Bernard McKeller [McKenna] from Manchester. Also I saw Dolores Wild but no other Brits there. I travelled with Bob Doyle who was the Irish Rep along with Michael O'Riordan. I was sadly disappointed at the absence of other British supporters...."

Wally Togwell's frustration is echoed by Fred Thomas in a letter to Dolly West. "We were pleased to learn of the increasing number of interested people wanting to support the 'Friends'. Possibly the most effective method of breaching Bill's private fiefdom (well, almost private!) will be with sheer weight of numbers.....

"The current edition of the American 'Volunteer' is indeed interesting. From it I learnt that Bill A. had been to a 3-day international conference 'of historians and others'... I await his next Bulletin to see if he bothers to tell us about the conference." [letter to Dolly West dated May 5th 1998]

Welcome news from the Amigos

By 1999, the fraught situation in Spain seemed to have calmed down, as Jesus Gonzalez wrote to Dolly West sometime during the summer of that year: "Last 5th June was our national and annual meeting [of AABI] and I consider it was a wonderful success I mean no problem at all which is a success.

Lala Isla replied on 20th April 1999 to a letter from Dolly West, who had written to her following a bereavement. Lala thanked Dolly for her "nice and kind letter.....I am a very positive person and I am taking the best out of both experiences, AGE and my parents, and I have learned a lot." Perhaps Lala was grieving both for the loss of her parents and for the end of her association with AGE, a time which she regrets.

"While I am in Madrid I will try to know more about the study centre in Salamanca that the Spanish government has approved.....Dolores [Cabra] tends to be over optimistic with everything. She talks about things like they are ready made when they are in the state of a proposal and that has created a lot of problems for me here.

"Something that the last management committee wanted is a normal and healthy relationship with the Amigos in Madrid. We are all in the same business. The Spanish Civil War is not a patent."

Not only were there differences of opinion between Dolores Cabra and Lala over methods of working, but money that Lala feels was owed her, was a sore point as well.

Lala also suggested filming the British Brigaders, by a film-maker who had previously filmed them in "America, France, Germany, Italy and Austria..." [Letter dated 20 April 1999 from Lala Isla to Dolly West]

"My Dear Comrade Anna," wrote Dolly West in a letter to Ana Perez dated 12th May 1999. "I have just received the marvellous catalogue of the Exhibition in Albacete last March. "I have to tell you I was in tears at one point because....as I the turned the pages over [there] appeared a photo with my Father in it. I am so proud that his photo was among those chosen, especially when I think of all the people who will see it. Is it a permanent exhibition or will it travel around Spain and possibly other countries? Is it possible to buy copies of the catalogue? If so how much will it cost? I am sure there will be a lot of people here who would like to buy one.

"Thank you too for the press cuttings. I will get them translated for people to read....."Our Friends has had its first Annual General Meeting. We had a good number of people turn out and a new committee elected....."We have had an invitation to the meeting in Berlin in September. I am going to make every effort to go myself. I want very much to meet the

other Friends. It would be nice to see you there.” As Ana Perez worked in higher education in Germany this was quite likely.

In her concluding paragraph, Dolly writes: “Incidentally, I have had a letter from Lala informing me of her break with the other group.”

Clearly relationships with the Amigos in Madrid were growing stronger and warmer. There was no further correspondence on the subject of relations with Spain during 1999, so the conclusion must be that the problems that had caused the IBA and FIBS so much concern were happily a thing of the past.

Links with KSFR, the German sister organisation of FIBS

In January KSFR, German sister organisation of FIBS, sent details of their events programme for 1998 and invited us to send a delegate to their autumn meeting in September. Dolly West asked for volunteers and Martin Green agreed to go, but there must have been problems, so Dolores Wild went instead and provided a detailed report. In a letter to Dolly West, she confided that the meeting: “was really interesting but very tiring because it was all in German.

“I’m also sending you a copy of a report that went out on Radio 4. Gideon (my son) heard it and got a copy.” [letter dated 16 September 1998 from Dolores Wild to Dolly West]

Dolores reported that 110 delegates attended and there were now friends groups in several countries: France, Germany, USA, Sweden, Denmark, Bulgaria, Poland, and of course, Spain. She confirmed that the archive in Spain would be in Albacete. [Minutes of FIBS committee meeting 4th November 1998] The meeting had agreed that an efficient communication network and a website be set up in Spain and one person should be nominated from each group to be the link. There would be an annual meeting in Berlin on the second weekend in September to coincide with an annual weekend of anti-fascist activity. [Report on Conference for Friends of the International Brigade Berlin 12/13 September 1998]

Progress of FIBS into 1999

In October Martin Green sent condolences to Pauline on the death of her father, Brigadier Harry Fraser, who had died on 10th September and commented: “George [Martin’s father] died on 23 September 1938, and Harry had another sixty years....” Martin felt the loss of his father throughout his life and was both moved and consoled when, at a reunion on the Ebro in Spain in 2003, a local historian took him to the spot where it had been identified George had been killed, on the last day of action by the British Battalion before they were withdrawn from the line. [21.10.1998 letter from Martin Green to Pauline Fraser]

1998 doubled the volume of correspondence from the previous year: 107 items were sent or received compared with 54 in 1997. This imposed a huge workload on Martin Green and Dolly West in particular.

A letter from Dolly to Dave Goodman dated 22nd November 1998 sheds some light on Dolly's hectic workload and its impact on her health. Writing to Dave on the same day that he made a speech dedicating a memorial tree outside Wootton-under-Edge, near Stroud, Gloucs, she apologised for not turning up. She had lost her way and got delayed by a herd of cattle, "but then my asthma started to play up and I just could not get up that hill." She explained that she had driven the previous day to the unveiling of a plaque in Ammanford, South Wales, commemorating Jack Williams and Sammy Morris, both killed at Brunete.

Evidence of paper correspondence plummets in 1999 to 34 items. It looks as if Dolly's son did indeed 'get her on the internet' and from then on much of what had been paper correspondence was carried on by email. No less than eight of the thirty items of correspondence were official business of the association, such as notices of meetings and minutes. Twelve were to or from Brigaders, who may have been less familiar with the internet and preferred to correspond on paper.

Plans had been made at the October 1998 committee meeting for the long-awaited reading of Martin Green's elegy 'Gandeses' to be held in February 1999. However, the timing of FIBS' first AGM, which was planned for late February 1999, a year after the launch meeting, had still not been settled by New Year 1999, when Dolly wrote to Jane and Luis Larson-Torres on 7th January 1999: "I am hoping to persuade the committee to keep the AGM until March, mainly because Bert Carnall is in hospital, Dolores Wild has gone to East Africa for three years and I will be away."

Martin Green wrote to Hilary Jones on 16th January 1999 that: "I've just sent off copy for Newsletter No. 3 to Patrick Rudd for a professional-looking typesetting job. There are now over 100 members of Friends due to receive the newsletter, and the cost of printing and postage will have to be provided. Dolly West has gone away for a couple of months and Dolores Wild has gone back to Africa, VSO. which makes it difficult for the rest of us, though I've no doubt that Dolly's rest was well earned, she bearing the burden of Secretaryship all this time....The Newsletter will include a flyer about the reading of Gandeses on 27 February at the Conway Hall."

At the March 1999 committee meeting it was minuted that "the [Gandeses] meeting was a success. It was agreed that it should be done again." Charles Watkins wrote that he "was lucky enough to attend the Jarama Anniversary Memorial at the Conway Hall on 27th February and was deeply moved by the reading of Martin Green's poem by the Stroud Football Poets. I felt it was a wonderful occasion and it seems a pity that there were relatively few people in attendance. I was born in Madrid in September 1935 to a British father and a Spanish mother, and my family and I left Spain early in 1936, as British refugees from the Spanish Civil War. I would be very interested to learn more of the

activities of the Friends of the International Brigades and would like to join the association, if possible.” [letter dated 22nd March 1999]

Also under Gandesa, the committee meeting notes: “Pauline had collected names and addresses of people attending and sent letters to those who were not already members.

“The main item of the meeting was deciding how the AGM should be run.” Under Treasurer’s report was included “the need to increase the subs: £5.00 unwaged, £10.00 waged.”

Under ‘Other items discussed’ number 1. minutes: “It was pointed out that there was a need to raise with the media the point that in the expected review of the century that is likely to happen at the end of the year, the story of the IB should not be forgotten.” [02/04/99 Minutes of Committee Meeting March 1999]

FIBS AGM took place on 10th April 1999. Brigadier David Marshall had sent his apologies to Dolly West on behalf of himself and partner Marlene Sidaway. He wrote: “Dear Dolly, I can’t get to the meeting, but wish you luck – you have my support – which I regret I did not proffer earlier.

Salud, Dave and Marlene.”[note from Dave Marshall at foot of Notice of Annual General Meeting 23/3/1999]

There were eighteen members present at the AGM and seven apologies were given. In the Secretary’s Annual Report: “There was a brief report as to how the Friends were set up. This included a summary of the efforts made to work with the IBA. These efforts have all been to no avail. A number of I B’ers have become members.” It was reported that membership had now reached 140.

Members suggested: “that we collect interviews or accounts of why people went to Spain and publish them as a pamphlet, to raise money”, get together “an exhibition to take round universities and community centres” and “raise money to enable members from outside London to come on to the committee”.

Under ‘Finance’ it was agreed to raise subscriptions to £10.00 waged, £5.00 concessions and £25.00 for organisations. There were as yet no affiliated organisations, but this wording was inserted in expectation of future affiliations.

“There was discussion on the aims [of the constitution] and how to express them more appropriately. Amendments would be discussed at the next AGM.”

Bert Carnall had been tasked by FIBS committee to draft its constitution. However, he had only recently recovered from a period in hospital where he underwent an operation and clearly didn’t feel up to the task of attending six-weekly committee meetings. His close friend, Wally Togwell, the only Brigadier nominated for committee, was to die later in the year and may already have had underlying health issues.

Five members of the new committee were relatives of Brigaders, whereas in 1997 there had been seven. This better reflected the composition of FIBS membership, although caused by ill-health. [Minutes of AGM 10th April 1999]

Dolly West wrote to Pauline Fraser, and presumably, to the rest of the committee, suggesting four possible dates in May or early June for the next committee meeting following the AGM. However, the meeting would be postponed until the autumn, due to Dolly's ill-health. Explaining this to Pauline, she asked for help to find a suitable venue for lunch following the IBA's commemoration at Jubilee Gardens in July, as "Bill had been unable to book the hall [John Marshall Hall] for lunch."

Fred and Sadie Thomas had told Dolly the date and time of the Jubilee Gardens commemoration when they met at the unveiling of the Soviet War Memorial, as she had not been notified of the event by Bill Alexander. The Thomas's said that the IBA "had got a quarter of an hour to hold their meeting at the Memorial." [letters from Dolly West to Pauline Fraser of 14th April and 29th May 1999.]

Martin Green wrote to Pauline Fraser concerning Newsletter No. 4: "I trust you will by now have received the smartened-up copy of the newsletter from Patrick Rudd." [letter dated 28th July 1999]

The newsletter carries a brief report of the AGM and other events, a couple of pieces from 'The Volunteer' with news of the Albacete Archive and the unveiling of a memorial in Seattle, "The first permanent tribute to the men and women who went from the USA to take part in the International Brigade in Spain." These were contributed by Bert Carnall, while Martin Green reviewed a couple of recently published books: 'Into the Heart of the Fire: the British in the Spanish Civil War' by James R. Hopkins and '!Comrades! Portraits from the Spanish Civil War' by Paul Preston. [Newsletter No.4 July 1999]

Dolly West wrote to Bert Carnall giving him news of the summer school, organised by Dave Goodman. "Stanley Foreman....spoke on and showed films of the war that I hadn't seen before. Another speaker was Paul Preston who "spoke twice, once on Mussolini and then on the life of one of Franco's aristocratic officers, who, when the war started, took out and shot six of his labourers (slaves in fact) and came up with the theory that the main problem for Spain was the invention of sewers...lack of sewers meant the population was controlled!!!!....Paul Preston came across and asked me to get in touch with him at the end of the summer to meet him to discuss how and if he can help us....with the Newsletter.

"...I have one of his post-graduate students who has joined us as a contact.." Dolly West must be referring to Richard Baxell, as he wrote her a letter the following month, saying: "Paul spoke to me briefly about the Friends. I have no doubt he was sincere in his offer of support. The main problem with Paul is that he is always busy, but I'm sure he will do what

he can and delegate to me what he can't..." [letter dated 19.08.1999 from Richard Baxell to Dolly West]

Selwyn Evans mentioned that "Natalie Stuart gave a paper on the Spanish International Brigaders and their children at the recent summer school of the Institute of Contemporary British History at Senate House." Natalie Stuart, née Meller, had written to Dolly West in March 1998 asking about the Friends. She was a PhD student at De Montfort University, Leicester. "My research is on the family memory of veterans of the Spanish Civil War." Dolly answered some of her questions, but queried others. Later Dolly made family members aware of Natalie's research and some came forward to be interviewed. [Letter dated 11.03.1998 from Natalie Meller to Dolly West] Selwyn Evans also gave details of the Socialist History Society "and a copy of my report on Dr. Crome lecture" which unfortunately is not included. [letter 19th August 1999: Selwyn Evans to Dolly West]

Brigader Frank Graham, who was a publisher in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, said he would "be pleased to become a member of the friends of the International Brigades. He sent Dolly a copy of his book, together with four complimentary copies. "You can have more complimentary copies if you can use them", he offered. The book referred to would have been: 'Spanish Civil War: Battles of Brunete and the Aragon'. "The review in the New Worker was very good indeed. The Morning Star has not reviewed it. I sent them a letter complaining but got no reply. A strange way for a working class newspaper to behave," he comments. [letter dated 16th September 1999]

Concerns were raised at committee about the lack of response from the Morning Star. They had not printed the letter that Martin Green had circulated to newspapers in 1998 to make readers aware that a new association of Friends of the International Brigades had been set up, and had now disappointed Frank Graham in failing to review his book. In a handwritten note on the minutes of the September committee meeting, Pauline Fraser wrote: "PF to phone Mike Parker re- review of 'Spanish Civil War: Battles of Brunete and the Aragon', indicating that she would take it up with the Morning Star, which Mike wrote for.

On 28th September, Dolly West received a postcard from Dr. Reg Saxton announcing his change of address to one in Vancouver. As a volunteer with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee Reg had played a key role in the development of the mobile blood transfusion service, where he met Rosaleen Ross, who was working as a hospital administrator. They were to spend several happy years together at Rosaleen's home in Vancouver.

Dolly replied on the same day, writing: "Dear Reggie, You know people like you give so much hope to those of us a little younger....I am so happy for you and your future plans....the Friends asked me at our committee meeting last Saturday to send their good wishes too....."

Perhaps there is a connection here between Dolly's "hope for those of us a little younger" and her statement heralding "New address new man!!!" in a letter to Hilary Jones of March 23rd 2000.

Later in the letter she writes: "We are planning an AGM and a meeting early possibly April/ May." However, no meeting or AGM would take place.

A week before the committee meeting, on 18th September, Martin Green had written to Dolly saying: "I really must get down to the next newsletter but I have been caught up in all sorts of other things. Mainly book reviews for 'Tribune' and elsewhere and also suffered the loss of someone very close to me, which came unexpectedly out of the blue." He also enclosed an obituary from 'The Guardian' of 09.11.1999, of Herbert Southworth, who had died aged 91. Martin adds: "His book on the bombing of Guernica was one of the three or four most important volumes written on the Spanish Civil War."

It was not only Martin who felt that things were falling behind. While committee meetings took place roughly every six weeks in 1998, that September 1999 committee meeting would prove to be the last.

On Pauline Fraser's copy of the Agenda for the committee meeting of 25.09.1999, there are some handwritten notes. The first reads: "Membership c. 160", indicating that around twenty more people had joined between March and September, so the association continued to grow in numbers, and members were actively engaged, some making positive suggestions and some requesting information about Brigaders. The reading of 'Gandesa' had been a success, as had the AGM and the informal gathering at the Paper Moon that followed the Jubilee Gardens commemoration, although marred by an altercation between Lala Isla and Jesus Gonzalez.

Despite the inevitable deaths of older members, in particular Brigaders, membership of the Friends was still growing, but activity, at least in Britain, appeared to be tailing off. The attention of the Secretary and Newsletter editor was clearly elsewhere.

In addition to the mysterious 'new man', Dolly had on-going health concerns, Dolores Wild was working abroad, and Bert Carnall had been seriously ill in hospital. Bert's close friend, volunteer Wally Togwell, died on February 14th 2000 and Bert had the unenviable task, as his executor, of "attempting to sort out and clear out the contents and personal effects that have been accumulated over 60 years!!!!....." he wrote to Pauline Fraser, in a letter dated 10th March 2000.

Bert continued: "I too in the past year have been concerned at the lack of activity plus the non appearance of a Newsletter...." and referring to the meeting in Berlin: "whilst I am all in favour of us being involved at International level; My reaction was that at such an early stage in our formation I felt that our efforts should be spent on building our organisation."

Also responding to other concerns that Pauline must have expressed in her letter, he starts another paragraph in capitals: “YES INDEED Dolly needs support and in my personal opinion work as a collective. I am reluctant very much so to suggest there is a personal attitude sometimes expressed which doesn’t make for a positive direction.” In a hand-written postscript Bert adds: “A sincere and honest question could you really work with Dolly?”

Bert ends this letter by reiterating: “Seriously something must be done to get the Friends on a firm footing an AGM surely is due soon an urgent call should go out for more executive support!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Then, in his letter to Pauline of 31st March 2000, Bert wrote: “Hopefully (all hopes) everything will work in her [Dolly’s] favour, and introduce some stability in life, which I suspect has been lacking.” This suggests that Bert also knew about the new man in Dolly’s life.

Bert and Pauline both had the highest regard for Dolly West, whose passion and commitment to the Friends was unquestionable, but in Bert’s opinion she was not a team player.

On 21st June 2000, Dolly West sent FIBS members a notice of the Annual Memorial ceremony, which was to be held on 15th July 2000. She wrote: “It is hoped that Rodney Bickerstaffe will be the speaker. There will be a gathering in the Pub (I think it is called the One to One) [the ‘All Bar One’] after the ceremony” and she gives directions.

On Pauline Fraser’s copy, there are some handwritten memos. The first reads: “1) Meeting date – Dolly will get back to me re- dates”, indicating Pauline had asked Dolly to set a date for a committee meeting.

Then, in a letter to Pauline of 19th July, Martin Green asks: “What do we do about the Friends? I haven’t been in touch nor heard from Dolly since I’ve come back, but there does need to be a meeting as soon as possible. We want more helpful members and activities and also an approach to the IBA to suggest some form of association if this would be helpful to them.”

At some point in early 2000, Pauline Fraser received a copy of the IBA Newsletter, headed January 2000, that threw light on Bill’s thinking. This may have been his last newsletter, as he died on 11th July 2000 following a short illness. Pauline later sent a copy of the newsletter to Martin Green, which he thanked her for in his letter to her of 15th March 2000.

The IBA newsletter starts with a short account of the armed struggle against Fascism. Then Bill reflects: “The question is often posed, Why did the Republic lose? The real question which should be asked and answered – How did the Republican Spain hold out for so long against such overwhelming odds.”

Bill Alexander proceeds to praise the Spanish people's "immense resources of ability, courage which had been untapped, underdeveloped under the old regime.....The Spanish people were not alone – the best of humanity everywhere identified with their struggle, recognising it as an example for all mankind."

He then reiterates why the International Brigade Association was set up in 1937. It had "one sole purpose to help the Spanish people win their liberty.....Today Spain has achieved democratic reform.....In that sense the 44 surviving Brigaders in Britain have helped the fulfilment of their aim."

It summarises his view that the IBA had fulfilled its aim and had no further reason to exist, although he recognises that: "Because of the general respect for the British Volunteers, the wide interest in the unity of the International Brigade, the program of activity for the year 2000 shows we still have a role to play. In the different acute dangers today of war, racism and world domination show that Unity and Strength is as necessary today as in 1936."

That final paragraph is prescient. Bill would not live to see how the fight for world domination has led to endless war and devastation, nor to what extent racism would continue to be used as a tool for a reactionary ruling class to cause divisions in society worldwide.

Problems on the South Bank

On 15th March 2000, Martin Green wrote to Pauline Fraser thanking her for sending the IBA Newsletter and enclosing the draft of FIBS Newsletter No.5. As well as concerns about lack of meetings and associated activity, another threat loomed over the IBA and FIBS, which Bill Alexander mentioned in the IBA Newsletter, under the title: THE JUBILEE GARDENS SOUTH BANK, LONDON.

"The future, indeed the existence of the Jubilee Gardens, is increasingly uncertain. A recent proposal involves the Gardens being changed into a forty-foot hill with buildings underground. It appears to be very very unlikely that any redesigned garden will be agreed this year 2000, let alone the next few months.

"The London Eye Ferris Wheel now appears to be capable of safe movement but with fare paying trips only beginning in February. One of the supporting struts of the wheel comes within about 6 feet of the I.B. Memorial.

"Work is still going on at the new Pier at the foot of the Wheel. A thirty metre wide Boulevard is being built parallel with the old County Hall to allow the people and services to get to the Wheel. A 75cm hedge will separate the Boulevard from the Memorial.

“During all the construction work the Memorial, still in its old position, has had a small wire cage around it.

“The Memorial is not and never has been the property of the International Brigade Association. The present owners, the SOUTH BANK CENTRE, have said it will be placed somewhere in the New Gardens.”

Martin’s letter of 15th March responds to this alarming information: “With regard to the monument, [the Memorial in Jubilee Gardens] we need to know who the MP for Lambeth area is and it would be worth drafting an appeal to send out to anybody who might be helpful, including Edward Heath, with whom I’ve corresponded and who was helpful in the Morata memorial.”

Bert Carnall replied to a second letter from Pauline Fraser in March 2000, in which he thanked her for enclosing a copy of the letter she had received from Bill Alexander about the ownership of the Memorial. Bert posed several questions about its ownership: “It is inconceivable that the Memorial is no longer the property of the I.B.A.

“I would have thought the Guardians? of Jubilee Gardens would have control say in the placement of the Memorial.

“This reference to the South Bank Centre as being the Owners? does raise the question: Who agreed to this, who was consulted, was it a condition when the site was agreed?

“When the appeal went out under the auspices of an Appeals Committee (the original copy I have) surely it was never in doubt as to who were the Owners. Unless the I.B.A. Committee (if one existed at that time) had to agree on ownership, in order for the memorial to be erected? Hopefully Bill can satisfy your questions.”

Pauline Fraser wrote to a ‘Mr. McCart’ [Mike McCart of the South Bank Employers’ Group] on 21st June 2000. “I wrote to you on April 2nd this year with some concerns regarding a suitable site for the International Brigade Memorial. Since then, some ten weeks have elapsed, in which I have not received so much as an acknowledgement. I enclose a copy of the original letter. I await a reply at your earliest convenience.” The letter was copied to Karsten Witt, Chief Executive, South Bank Centre, Bill Alexander, Honorary Secretary, International Brigade Association, Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London and the Honorary Secretary, the Queen’s Walk Park Society.

There is no record of a reply to this letter but concerns continued to be actively pursued after the IBMT came into being. These concerns were only taken seriously after persistent lobbying of the South Bank developers.

FIBS’ Newsletter No. 5 reports on recent events: the Summer School at Wedgwood Memorial College, from 26-30 July, the Berlin meeting, the first monument in France to the

International Brigades, America's second memorial to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the first international forum on the International Brigades, held in Madrid, and an "informal gathering at the house of Lala Isla" where Milt Woolf, of ALBA, who had been at the Madrid forum, was guest of honour. A meeting at Marx House, where Sam Lesser gave an eye-witness account of the Battle of Lopera, was reported. Clearly a lot was happening, but nothing was being initiated by the Friends.

Under 'In Memoriam' "We regret to announce the deaths of two British Brigaders. Fred Thomas gave us much encouragement when we formed Friends. Many tributes were paid at the funeral, including one by Gerry Gable, Editor of 'Searchlight'. Gerry had been a pupil of Fred's when he was a teacher....Wally Togwell, a member of the International Brigade Association, was also a staunch supporter of the Friends."

Moves to begin closer cooperation between FIBS and the IBA

A meeting in the All Bar One following the Jubilee Gardens commemoration was a friendly and informal affair and served to develop good relations with IBA Treasurer David Marshall and partner Marlene Sidaway. The couple had started to play a more prominent role in the IBA since Dave had taken over as Treasurer.

On her copy of the notice for the July 15th commemoration, Pauline wrote a memo: "Notice for Bill – check Star [Morning Star]" Perhaps Dolly had asked Pauline to check the Morning Star to see if the FIBS memorial notice for Bill Alexander had been printed.

On 22nd July, a week after the All Bar One meeting, Dolly West wrote a letter to members of the IBA. In a letter dated 9th August 2000 from Dolly to Steve Fullarton, she explains how it came about.

"David [Dave Marshall] and I had a little discussion before Bill died. After I offered to write a letter to the I.B.A. members asking for co-operation and that that you received was the result." It appears that no one else on the committee knew about the "little discussion", as is apparent from this letter from Bert Carnall to Dolly West.

"I am sure the present members of the IBA are wondering what is their future now that they no longer have the leadership of Bill," Bert wrote. "The situation presents itself with an opportunity for an approach to be made by FIBS for a discussion on a form of joint approach to both our aims."

Bert suggested contacting key Labour movement people who attended Bill's funeral and asking them for a free advert in their trade union journals. "After all many of them are involved with anti-racism."

“I am sure you will wholeheartedly agree and perhaps have similar thoughts, therefore I would suggest that our Committee meet and draw up some specific proposals and invite known IB members to have a discussion about closer co-operation.”

Two days later, in a letter dated Monday 14th August 2000, Dolly West sent the following letter to Pauline Fraser, Bert Carnall and Katie Green. Could she have received the letter from Bert that same morning if he had sent it by first class post early on Saturday 12th August or is the timing of the letter a complete coincidence?

As the letter is addressed to Pauline, Bert and Katie, Dolly must have contacted Martin at some point after 19th July to seek his agreement to be the other representative of the Friends at the forthcoming meeting. It was in a letter of that same date that Martin expressed his concern to Pauline about the future of the Friends.

Dolly’s letter explains: “Before Bill died Dave Marshall was in touch with me and we had a brief discussion as to where we are going now. I said I thought we would like a meeting with their committee to discuss this. Dave asked me to write a letter to the remaining I.Bers (copy enclosed). I also sent a copy of our constitution so that they knew where we are coming from. The Brigade then sent me a copy of the other enclosed letter.” [from Dave Marshall to Brigaders]. “I understand space is limited and Martin and I have been asked to go. I think it is most important that we have a committee meeting to discuss what we can offer to support and take on the work of the I.B. as suggested in my letter to them. You will note that most of the invitees are academics not involved in our sort of work and aims.” She suggested a committee meeting on Sunday 3 September and asked for “some thoughts and.....suggestions.”

Dolly’s letter to Brigaders starts: “Dear comrades, First of all may I say how well the Memorial Day went. It was good to see so many people there. In view of the gradual decline in the numbers of active International Brigaders we [FIBS] were wondering if there is anything we can do to help. Is it possible for representatives of our two committees to discuss this proposal? I would like to make it very clear that there is no way this should be considered, to put it crudely, a take-over bid. We would like to know what things and areas of work you consider should be carried on by our organisation. I am enclosing a copy of our constitution so that you may see what we think we are about.”

Dave Marshall wrote to IBA members on 3rd August 2000. His letter starts: “Following the death of our Secretary, Bill Alexander, there is an urgent need to consider the future of the work done until now by the IBA. Very few members of the association are now left and it is clear that the organisation is no longer viable. The question is how best to ensure that its legacy is in safe hands....This is an invitation to take part in an open discussion on how to proceed in this situation.”

He sent the letter to the remaining Brigaders, Marx Memorial Library, FIBS, “academics with a special interest in the Spanish Civil War”, the Working Class Movement Library, “the National Movement [Museum] of Labour History” and the Wedgwood Memorial College.

The Principal of the Wedgwood Memorial College had agreed to co-host with the IBA a residential week-end, which was to be held on one of two dates in late September/early October.

“It would be appreciated if you could let me know your response to the invitation...and which of the two dates you would prefer.”

Dolly West received several letters encouraging closer cooperation between FIBS and the IBA.

Steve Fullarton wrote to Dolly on 8th August 2000. “My immediate response is that Dolly, Frank [Martin] Green and friends are capable of carrying on the work of keeping the name and the interests of the I.B.A. alive as shown in their constitution. When I met them at the Homenaje in 1996 I was impressed by their enthusiasm and determination to press ahead and set up the F.I.B. organisation in spite of opposition.”

Brigader Conrad Singer, in his letter of 14th August, thanked Dolly for the video [of Jubilee Gardens commemoration] but “for the propositions for the Intern. Brigade I am unable to [make?] any suggestions” However he ended: “Wishing you all the success in the project and greet you with a Salud”.

Brigader Fred Clarke wrote an undated letter, but assumed to have been posted some time in August, saying “I was very upset to learn about Bill Alexander” and generously offering “a small donation” “if you are going to carry on with the Brigade’s work”.

Stephen (P. E. Varea) wrote: “Dear Comrade, of course I was sorry to hear the passing away of Bill. However, let us hope that the Brigaders are a torch, and are remembered as passing the torch of Freedom from one generation to another.”

Others wrote to express their sadness at the death of Bill Alexander. Brigader Cyril Sexton, resident in Tenerife, gave a potted history of his service in the International Brigades and World War Two, and Wirral Cllr. Gordon Paterson, enclosing a £10 cheque for subs. “We will all miss Bill Alexander whom I can without hesitation describe as one of the finest communists I have had the pleasure of knowing in the last 60 years.”

Sadie Thomas wrote an undated letter to Dolly West with her £5.00 sub some time in July 2000 following Bill Alexander’s death, to let her know she had phoned Lena, Bill’s widow, saying: “she is getting plenty of good help, and her son lives nearby, of course she is lonely, I know what that is like,” a reference to her recent bereavement. Fred Thomas died in the previous December.

On 19th August 2000, Bert replied to Dolly's letter of 14th of that month. "...I suspect he [Dave Marshall] is aware of the urgency of continuity. His letter appears to me to indicate a desire to have a wider organisation to continue the work of the IBA. The meeting at the [Wedgwood Memorial College] of the numerous organisations involved is an ideal situation to launch the setting up of Committee to consider this possibility. For my part I would welcome a much wider and National organisation to carry forth the aims and ideals of the IBA.....there is every reason to expect that its work can be carried out on a much wider scale than ever we in FIBS could hope to achieve....[and] greater resources at its disposal and the possibility of access to grants.

"There is no doubt in my mind that there is a big task ahead not least the question of the memorial on the South Bank. A national organisation could undertake a greater role in the labour movement, one thing that crossed my mind is the setting up of a mobile exhibition. Then there is the question of such an organisation producing a regular newsletter or bulletin advertising events etc. Another very important work would be the involvement of the organisation in the International field."

Pauline went to Spain in August 2000, and deposited several items in the new International Brigade Archive at Albacete. While she was in Madrid, Jesus Gonzalez of the Amigos took her on a tour of the Jarama battlefield, and later sent her memorabilia they had collected there, together with a videotape recorded when he and his wife visited Belchite and the Ebro battlefields.

Following her return from Spain, Pauline wrote to Bert Carnall. He replied to her on 19th August 2000, delighted to learn that Wally Togwell's memoirs had been deposited in the Albacete Archives, together with a booklet of Alf Salisbury's memoirs, the tape-recorded memoirs of her father, Harry Fraser and a copy of Martin Green's Gandesa Elegy.

Commenting on Dolly's reference to academics in the letter to committee of 14th August, he wrote: "A mite sectarian methought? This I thought wise not to raise in my response to request for ideas...Dolly's letter to me referred to her having a mini-stroke and was about to see her GP....I am sure it can be looked upon as a warning for her to take it easy. Yet I would anticipate that Dolly would be loathe to relinquish the Secretary's job.....the setting up of a national organisation is the only way forward..."

On 1st September 2000, Dave Marshall wrote another letter to IBA members:

"Dear Comrade, Further to my letter of 3rd August – It appears that more of our members would be able to attend a meeting in London, rather than a seminar in Barlaston.

"Accordingly, the Marx Memorial Library, 37a Clerkenwell Green, EC1 has been booked for

SATURDAY, 28th October from 11.00am to 5.00pm"

“We have had several interesting proposals in reply to the original letter, and these will all be discussed at the meeting, the include -

1. Disbanding completely, either now, or when it is obviously impossible to any members to carry on.
2. Establishing an “Association of Veterans and Friends of the I.B.A. to be jointly responsible for maintaining the Memorials, keeping the “Memory and Spirit” alive and disseminating information.
3. Appointing a new Honorary Secretary in order to maintain the independence of the Association.
4. Establish closer ties with the “Friends of the International Brigades Association” and asking them to carry on the work of keeping, the names, the interests and the spirit of the IBA alive.
5. It is essential that the Memorial on the South Bank is preserved and maintained, “The Friends” might be asked to undertake responsibility for this, and the other monuments round the country.
6. Bill willed his records to go directly to Marx House, and there is concern that these are essentially the property of the IBA, and that their confidentiality should be preserved until they can be released for public scrutiny.

Further subjects for discussion would be welcome, please also let me know if you can attend the meeting.”

The letter is signed by Dave Marshall and on his personal copy, he has hand-written notes that read: “1st 3 letters – coming to meeting; other 7 expressed opinions of above.” Beside the first five points listed above, Dave had recorded ticks to denote support. There were twelve ticks recorded from the seven letters so several Brigaders supported more than one option. One of the seven letters received would have been from Reg Saxton, now living in Canada, who wrote to Dolly West on 18th August 2000, saying he had: “written to Dave Marshall urging maximum possible cooperation” with the Friends.

The Agenda for the meeting on 28th October noted: “Bill’s death is a turning point, the Association must find new ways of continuing the Legacy of the I.B.A.” There would be a general discussion of all the points and the opinions from Brigaders who can’t be at the meeting, but want their views known would be read out.

The agenda continues:

1. “What do we consider is essential to maintain the Legacy of the I.B.A.?
 1. Maintenance of the Memorials, Particularly on the South Bank.
 2. A regular NEWSLETTER.
 3. Establishing a WEBSITE.
 4. NETWORKING with other groups at Home and Abroad.

5. An EDUCATION PROGRAMME (Exhibition, Performances? Poetry? Etc. which could always be available to Universities, Colleges etc.
 1. Form a broader Association of WORKERS who could achieve the above. Something like an "Association of Veterans and Friends of the I.B."
 2. list Volunteers prepared to do this work.
 3. From this list, elect a committee, which should also included some Brigaders (3?), a working Secretary, a Treasurer and Chairperson."

On the day of the joint meeting, Dolly West's notes begin: "Before the meeting I was told that the Guardian was wanting to do a feature [on] the IBA and would like to spend the day with us.

"I said no - they could take the photos they wanted lunchtime, which is what they did."

Someone from among the invitees must either have been contacted by the Guardian or have contacted the newspaper and clearly that someone was not Dolly. She spoke on behalf of FIBS when she said "no" to the Guardian's request, but whether this reflected the opinion of the other constituent groups is unknown.

The decision for a lunch-time photo shoot was propitious, as everyone had had a chance to meet and socialise in the morning and over lunch. The photos were to form part of a historic Guardian supplement that included extensive interviews with several Brigaders.

Minutes of the meeting were taken by Marlene Sidaway on behalf of the IBA. Dolly West and Pauline Fraser also took notes, which would have been circulated to members of the Friends. The provenance of the notes and minutes is indicated after each quote with the first name of the note or minute-taker in square brackets.

At the meeting, "The top table consisted of:-

"Prof. Paul Preston who acted as Chair. Dave Goodman and Dave Marshall. Both IB'ers who have been running the IBA since Bill Alexander died. Marlene Sidaway who acted as minutes taker. [Dolly]

As the pre-eminent British historian of the Spanish Civil War, Professor Preston had developed friendships with many Brigaders. He had also met Dolly West at the Barlaston Summer Schools co-organised by Dave Goodman, so the invitation for him to chair the meeting was entirely appropriate.

Thirteen Brigaders were present at the meeting, roughly a third of the membership of the IBA at this point, and sufficient for a quorum. Contributions were read out from another six who were unable to attend. "These points ranged from disbanding the organisation, to the need for an organisation to look after the Memorials, to working with the Friends." [Marlene Sidaway's notes of the meeting]

Such was the importance of the crucial decisions to be taken that day, that it was ruled that a formal motion “to disband the association [IBA] within the next decade,” proposed by Alf Sherman, could not be taken at the meeting “as there were not enough Brigaders present” so a postal vote on the motion and on the election of officers would need to be carried out. [Marlene]

In addition, there were twenty other people at the meeting, including eight members of the Friends, several historians or archivists, relatives of Brigaders and two representatives of Marx Memorial Library.

Paul Preston “opened the meeting making a number of points:-

- tribute to B.A. [Bill Alexander] for his work for the I.B.A.
- that the legacy of sacrifice in the aid to Spain – there and at home - has not died
- he asked if there is enough energy to project a committee forward.”

Dolly West explained how and why the Friends of the International Brigades was set up. She said that “the Spanish Civil War was an important part of British working class history [and] this was not taught in schools....Representations to Bill [Alexander] for an ‘Associate’ membership with the I.B.A. had been unsuccessful, but they contacted as many Brigaders and families as they could – also sent all documents to Bill. 14 people turned up to their first meeting, they now have over 160 members, form all over Britain and have contacts with organisations in Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, U.S.A. Germany, Poland, Switzerland, and have sent delegates to other functions abroad...They have a NEWSLETTER, edited by MARTIN GREEN. She believed there was a role for the Friends in publicising the S.C.W. with Exhibitions, Videos, etc., caring for the memorials around the country. She hoped we could work together in the fight against Fascism NOW.” [Marlene]

The over-riding issue was whether or not there should be a new organisation to take forward the legacy of the International Brigades, and if so, what form it should take.

Several important contributions were made at the meeting, that were to shape the future IBMT. Dave Goodman, who had co-organised several summer schools on the Spanish Civil War and the role of the International Brigades at Wedgwood College, Barlaston, near Stoke, said “this was not just about preserving the past, it takes stock of the situation we are in.” [Dolly]

It was “also to take forward the significance of the Brigaders and their work. “The importance of it is not just to a narrow group of survivors, families and friends, but in the education of young people. Expect that there will be no end of interest in the Brigaders and their experience. There is a need for an organisation with resources that can produce material from school through to university.” Dave reminded the meeting that the Archives of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion were set up about twenty years previously and ALBA had developed a school curriculum. [Pauline]

Peter Carroll of ALBA had sent in a written submission and “strongly urged the I.B.A. not to disband, the moral stature of the veterans is a valuable asset in building a new organisation. Two groups have a stake in any new organisation 1. Family, children, friends of veterans 2. Historians, academics and scholars. Think of organisation as one which DOES things, sponsors lectures, public screening of a video on SW, demonstrations at monuments, social gatherings, picnics, etc i.e. give the membership something to do.” [Marlene]

Paul Preston said he “didn’t think we should go down the U.S. route and be politically active in other conflicts – individuals [should] make their own choices on that.” [Marlene]

It was agreed that the IBA Archive should continue to be housed at Marx Memorial Library, but the importance of maintaining links with other museums that kept archives, namely the Imperial War Museum, the National Museum of Labour History, and the Working Class Movement Library, was stressed.

Summarising contributions from a number of Brigaders present, Paul Preston said: “There was BROAD agreement on item 3 of the agenda. [Establishing a Website] General agreement that it was crucial not to try to go beyond our remit of ‘Protecting the past struggles and defending the legacy of the S.C.W. and projecting forward its ideals.’” [Marlene]

The question then was how to proceed in the interim. Paul Preston proposed a liaison group consisting of two IBA committee members, two from Friends of the International Brigades, one from Marx Memorial Library, one from an informal group of historians, and one representative of families. [Marlene]

The last named was to accommodate a representative of partners, wives or widows of Brigaders, and was raised by Rafa Kenton, Sadie Thomas and Con Fraser. There were five present, including Marlene Sidaway, but no agreement was reached to decide who would represent them and the idea was later abandoned.

The other major concern over the previous year, both for the IBA and FIBS, was the future of the International Brigade Memorial in Jubilee Gardens. Jack Jones proposed making “an immediate approach to Ken Livingstone, asking if the G.L.C. will take responsibility for the care of the memorial in Jubilee Gardens, and ensure that, as a National Memorial to the S.C.W., it remains in a prominent place,” [Marlene]. Pauline’s note reads: “Possibly approach new Mayor and London Assembly re- preservation of South Bank Memorial.” Ken Livingstone had been recently elected as the first Mayor of London.

A motion was moved and carried unanimously to convene a meeting of the Liaison Committee early in the New Year “to give effect to the wishes expressed in the meeting today.”

The following day, Pauline wrote a report of the meeting which was printed in the Morning Star a few days later, and she copied a cutting of this to Martin Green, Bert Carnall, and possibly to other members of the committee.

A fortnight later Pauline wrote a letter to Martin Green, during which time there is no evidence of written communication between FIBS committee members. She wrote: "As we are so pushed for time regarding the liaison meeting, I suggest we put out a mailing to our members with:

- 1) a brief report of the meeting of 28.10.00 (I enclose a report which could be considered.)
- 2) suggesting that in view of the tight timescale for holding a liaison meeting in the New Year, two members of the committee of FIBS should attend as the delegates. As a committee, we can agree between ourselves who we wish to put forward, but on the understanding that if, for any reason, those members cannot attend, then other members of the committee will be asked to substitute.

"We also need a committee meeting, not least to plan for the AGM, as it is now more than 18 months since the last one. Bert Carnall would be happy for us to meet at his house on a weekend afternoon in December, or else we can meet in the Betsy Trotwood [a pub near Clerkenwell Green where the committee had frequently met] if it's on a Sunday. I think we will have to go for the first or second weekend in December....as otherwise it's getting too close to Christmas. Perhaps committee members can all get in touch by phone so we can reach a consensus on how to proceed."

From the tone of this letter, Pauline must have been getting increasingly frustrated and concerned about the lack of action following the meeting of October 22nd, which had agreed there would be a meeting of the liaison group in the New Year. Was there a difficulty with getting a response from the Secretary, Dolly West? Was she travelling abroad? Perhaps she attended the Amigos' commemorative ceremony that was held "in Rivas-Vaciamadrid on 4th November 2000, to mark the anniversary of the arrival of the first elements of the brigades to Madrid in November 1936." [Robert Coale ALBA]

On the same day as the letter to Martin Green, Pauline wrote to Bert Carnall enclosing her report of the meeting. His reply, dated 16.11.2000, launches straight in.

"1. FIBS two members to attend the liaison, surely the logical choice is the Chairperson and Secretary..." He then laid out a detailed timescale to build for an AGM, "at which we could invite members of the liaison group etc."

Bert was still very ill and in pain, so "could not guarantee that I would be available for any meeting this side of the new year at least..." but "I can see no reason why arrangements cannot proceed to book the AGM, that surely will be an impetus to ACTION!! YOU agree."

Dolly received the following supportive letter from Brigadier Bob Peters on 30th November 2000. "As a veteran of two battalions of the IB's I am very concerned regarding the future

of the British Battalion, & their lack of an associate membership to keep their memory alive after all the veterans have passed on.

“The MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion of Canada, of which I am also a member, have an excellent backing association....& despite the declining numbers of the remaining veterans (17 at the last count) their association is strong and very active & with such a huge country that's an achievement.

“Without a backing group of our own the British Battalion Association cannot survive & could fade into obscurity & that cannot be allowed, which is why I will back you & your organisation all the way in your offer to carry on the work of our association, depending of course on the votes of our remaining veterans.”

Explaining how it came about that he was a member of two IB associations, Bob Peters ends: “I hope that this letter will give some encouragement to your aims.”

Martin wrote to Pauline on 21st November 2000: “I'm very pleased with the outcome of the meeting at Marx House.” He suggested a meeting on weekend of 16/17 December. This was arranged and the committee meeting took place, on 17th December 2000, at the ‘Bread and Roses’ in south London.

The minutes of the FIBS committee meeting read:

“LIAISON COMMITTEE

As a result of the meeting with the I.B.A. and some historians it had been decided that a joint Liaison Group should meet and discuss joint work and association.

“The committee decided that Pauline and Dolly would attend those meetings.

ANNIVERSARY MEETING

“It was decided to try and have a meeting at the Marx Memorial Library on 17 or 24 February....” at which Bob Doyle's TV video diary would be shown.

NEWSLETTER

“Martin has sufficient material for another Newsletter.

Dolly reminded the meeting that Paul Preston had offered help from his department to get the Newsletter sent out.

Dolly would contact Paul and see if the offer still stood.

E-MAIL SENT.” Dolly appends a handwritten note “- reply received.”

Dolly emailed Paul Preston and asked if his offer of help with ‘getting out’ the newsletter still applied.

The IBA and FIBS both circulated newsletters to their members in January 2001.

The FIBS Newsletter No.6, dated January 2001, would be the last Dolly would send out as Secretary.

The Newsletter carries a report of the International Brigade ceremony at Jubilee Gardens in July of the previous year, as there had been no FIBS newsletter since March 2000. It

covers the meeting in Berlin on 9-10 September where it was reported that there were “about thirty-two veterans still surviving....On 14 October, in...Corbera d’Ebre, in Southern Catalonia, the inauguration of a Memorial took place dedicated to the volunteers who left their homes to defend to defend democracy in Spain. Dolly West Shaer, our Secretary, attended this, and later circulated her account.”

Two accounts exist in the archive, one from Dolly, and one from film-maker David Leach, who interviewed British survivors of the battle in in the Sierra Pandols where a number of their comrades were killed, and memorialised on a monument hidden from Franco’s forces, to make the film ‘Voices from a Mountain’.

The newsletter then reports the meeting of 28th October 2000. “This opened with a statement that ‘Bill’s death is a turning point: the Association must find new ways of continuing the legacy of the I.B.A. Paul Preston chaired the meeting and it was agreed to set up a liaison group, which would:-

- Maintain the memorials, particularly the national memorial on the South Bank
- Publish a regular newsletter
- Establish a website
- Network with other groups
- Develop an education programme

The ‘joint committee’ would be made up of:

- 2 delegates from the IBA committee
- 2 delegates from the Friends of the International Brigade
- 1 delegate from Marx Memorial Library
- 1 delegate from an informal group of historians
- 1 delegate from a families association (to be formed)

All groups will elect their representatives and inform the coordinator, Marlene Sidaway, who will convene a meeting early in the New Year.”

The newsletter includes a notice of the meeting on 24th February at Marx House and a reminder that subscriptions are due. There was a flurry of interest from members following the reports of the October 28th meeting, which led to a spate of renewals. Jo Carritt expresses her interest “to hear the report of the meeting with the IB Association. I imagine that with the death of Bill Alexander the situation may have changed somewhat. He was a very fine man, but could be more than a little inflexible.

“I saw the obituary of Dave Goodman in the ‘Guardian’. Another fine man and another sad loss.”

Joan Brown, widow of Brigadier Chris Smith, sent the leaflet produced for his funeral, together with a card thanking Dolly for her letter on the death of Chris. She writes: “Chris

never gave in. Cuba and Amnesty were supported by him almost to the end....His active participation in all of the branches of struggle added to the respect and love he had from everyone of the left. As he was fond of quoting from Bill Alexander 'If you don't fight you cannot win.'"

Arnold Owen wrote several times, firstly concerning his work in Wales to get plaques put up to all the volunteers from the Welsh Valleys and then to inform Dolly of Brigadier Lance Rogers' failing health. Lance's brother Neil also gave Dolly news of his brother, including a letter to tell her of his death. Dolly had replied sympathetically to these.

"On 4 November 'The Guardian' newspaper published a series of interviews [of 23 Brigaders] under the headings 'They shall not pass – the last British survivors of the International Brigade.' [This was published as a special G2 supplement.]

The 'Guardian' obituaries to Ralph Bates "first husband of Winifred Bates – a nurse in Spain", and to Brigadier David Crook were mentioned, as also the deaths of Johnny Longstaff "a close supporter of the Friends" and Dave Goodman.

Dave Marshall sent out an IBA newsletter dated January 19th 2001 that starts: "Since the last Newsletter, three more comrades have died – Chris Smith and John Longstaff within 24 hours of each other, and suddenly and unexpectedly, Dave Goodman died in early January."

News of Dave Goodman's death would have been fresh in Dolly's mind when she wrote the following obituary in the FIBS newsletter: "It is with the utmost regret that we also have to report the loss of Dave Goodman, a stalwart International Brigadier who never ceased fighting for social justice, most latterly for pensioners, ever since he returned from Spain. He was one of the moving spirits behind the proposed liaison committee..." Dave had spoken at the 28th October meeting and was one of the Brigaders interviewed by 'The Guardian'.

Dave Marshall's newsletter continues:

"We have also had many letters from those who have a slight connection with the S.C.W. - and those who simply admired all of those who went, and want to help keep the memory and spirit of those times alive." Perhaps the publicity given to the Brigaders in the Guardian supplement may have led to more people contacting him.

"We are holding our 'Umbrella' meeting (see prev. letter) in early February, and all of these people will be notified of the resulting plans and proposals." A full account of the 28th October meeting must have been given in the letter to which Dave Marshall refers.

There is a link with an item in the FIBS newsletter, regarding David Leach who "has already contacted some of you regarding his film about those whose names are on the newly restored, contemporary memorial in the Sierra Pandols – LEWIS CLIVE, DAVID

GUEST, WALLY TAPSELL, HARRY DOBSON and MORRIS MILLER. The latter remains a mystery, as no one seems to know much about him – do you know?” Dave Marshall then gives a phone number for David Leach.

“Provisional date for our MEMORIAL MEETING in JUBILEE GARDENS is Saturday 14th July. It is hoped that we can arrange to have a large room to ourselves nearby, where we can have a light meal and drinks.....Further to the Memorial Meeting – do any of you have any ideas for a suitable speaker? Bill would have had it sorted by now!”

Bill Alexander would indeed have booked the John Marshall Hall in Blackfriars Road for a meal following the commemoration. It was a long-standing tradition. However, the venue was never conducive to socialising, diners had to stay in their places at long tables, the food was bland and of indifferent quality, and this had led some Brigaders and their families to drift away in recent years.

A meeting date for the ‘Umbrella’ meeting was agreed for 10th March 2001. The meeting was held at Marx Memorial Library and there were nine people present: Paul Preston, who chaired the meeting, Richard Baxell and Angela Jackson, as historians, Dave Marshall and Sam Russell representing the International Brigade Association, Dolly West and Pauline Fraser for the Friends, and Tish Collins from Marx Memorial Library. Marlene Sidaway took the minutes. Apologies were received from Martin Green (FIBS) and Connie Fraser, the latter who would have come as a representative of families.

The agenda was as follows:-

1. Name of organisation
2. Constitution (Aims)
3. Charitable status?
4. Funding
5. Communications/amalgamation
6. AOB
7. Meetings – Next? - Frequency?

Under item 7 Pauline Fraser handwrote the words: “1 more meeting of committee”, meaning the FIBS committee, to consider the recommendations of the meeting.

The full minutes of the meeting make interesting reading as they give an insight into the thinking of the participants. Dave Marshall expressed the view that “we shouldn’t deviate from the track Bill put us on of not being officially represented at political gatherings and demonstrations other than those relevant to Spain.” Sam Russell agreed with Dave, “but didn’t want to put a straitjacket on the new organisation, we can’t expect to impose our views on the future activities. Agreed we should continue the years of support for a Free Democratic Spain....We wouldn’t be reflecting the views of ALL veterans if we started widening the ambit – there are other organisations which individuals could join.” Paul

Preston is minuted as having said: “we must Protect and Evangelise the Legacy and Sacrifices made for the SCW.”

Dolly West explained the circumstances and reasons for the setting up of the Friends. In her speakers’ notes she said that this “very proud part of British working-class history should be kept alive....We are aware that the generations following ours do not have the knowledge that they can fight fascism. They are not taught the history and many other parts of our history in schools today.”

On the approaches that FIBS had made to Bill Alexander, she said: “Martin had already approached Bill to ask for associate membership and was told it did not exist. We both wrote to Bill and Dolores went to see him to see if there could be some cooperation. It was rejected.” In a hand-written addition, she writes: “I would like to say from here on Bill was sent..” and there it ends. It must be assumed that the sentence should have continued: “all FIBS newsletters” as she mentioned that being the case elsewhere in the papers. “We then composed a list of Brigaders and families whose addresses we knew to see if there was any support.”

Dolly refers to fourteen being present at the first Friends meeting, that now there were one hundred and sixty and the organisation was solvent. She referred to international links with similar organisations across Europe and the USA. “The Friends publish a newsletter three or four times a year, she told the meeting”. This was somewhat of an exaggeration, as the newsletter was circulated at best every six months. She was concerned “that the monuments need keeping an eye on. As many of you may know the one in Hammersmith has been shot at.”

Clearly she had to say what had transpired between FIBS and Bill Alexander, but she did not want it to cloud the discussions taking place. She remarks that: “We are most interested to hear how you think the work could develop, which ways we should be going.”

Item one of the agenda, under draft constitution, gives the name of the new organisation as: “Veterans & Friends of the International Brigades”. It was altered to International Brigade Memorial Trust when it was agreed at further meetings to seek charitable status.

On Item 2, the summary of minutes say: “there was...general agreement that our main aim was to preserve the legacy of those men and women who had gone to help achieve a Free and Democratic Spain. Ways in which to do this – Establishing a Web-site, Mounting a touring exhibition, Publishing our own Education Pack for schools, Preserving existing Memorials, campaigning for new ones – particularly for one in Cambridge.” This last was added at the insistence of Sam Russell, who was passionate that Cambridge should remember those from the university who had given their lives.

Those elements of the constitution of the new organisation which included parts of the Friends’ constitution, are bolded. A draft FIBS constitution was presented to the FIBS

committee meeting of 30th November 1997 by Bert Carnall. The first FIBS constitution and modification are archived together with these minutes to show how it developed.

“AIMS: To promote education, learning & knowledge concerning the historical legacy both of the men & women who fought with the International Brigades against Fascism in support of the legally Elected Government of Spain, and those who sustained their fight.
To maintain contact with relatives and friends of International Brigaders.
To develop links with comparable organisations throughout the world. [‘comparable’ had been substituted for ‘like-minded’ in the FIBS constitution and ‘Europe and’ had been deleted, as unnecessary.]

Item 4 on the agenda, Funding, did not get discussed.

The summary of minutes continues:

“Friends committee to meet and hopefully agree on change of name, and changes to their constitution. Friends governing body extended to include representatives from all sections present. (I.B.A. - right of veto) If all agreed, the re-vamped committee meets to draft application for Charitable Status, and to draft a further paragraph for constitution - ‘In furtherance of these aims...’”

So the ball was now in the Friends’ court to move things on. However, after a month had elapsed, there was still no letter from Dolly to members of the Friends.

Marlene Sidaway and Dave Marshall produced a newsletter to IBA members dated 9th April 2001, copied to Dolly with a covering letter of 13th April.

The newsletter encloses the “summary of the meeting held at Marx Memorial Library, following up the proposals made at the previous, larger meeting. It is possible that your next Newsletter will be from the new Organisation – hopefully a much grander affair than this!”

In the accompanying letter to Dolly, Marlene reports that she has sent “the summary of the minutes of our last meeting...” and makes reference to arrangements for the Jubilee Gardens commemoration in July. “We now have official permission from the South Bank Centre to hold the meeting, but we’re still waiting to hear from Ken Livingstone’s office..” Presumably Ken had been invited as guest speaker, as it was under his auspices as Leader of the GLC, that the memorial had been erected in 1985.

As a ps, referring to an invitation from AABI to attend events in Madrid to commemorate 65th anniversary of the International Brigades, Marlene wrote: “If you sent the A.A.B.I. translation out to your members, and got a response from any of the Brigaders, please will you let us know. Ta.”

The tone of the letter is light-hearted and friendly, but masks what must have been concern that there had been no communication from Dolly about progress with a Friends meeting.

In late May, Dolly sent Pauline Fraser a copy of the translated letter from AABI, with hand-written notes asking her to copy for her mother Connie Fraser, “and let me know if either of you will be going. I am co-ordinating with Marlene.”

Earlier in the month, on 10th May, Martin Green wrote the following letter to Pauline Fraser. “Dear Pauline, I trust that you’ll have seen Dolly West’s note by now and I’m writing to say how sorry I am for her and the trouble she’s had with her health. Katie called me last night to say she’d had the note and that she’d spoken to Dolly, and perhaps I should speak to her too. I had intended to, though not sure what to say. When I did, I suggested that she should immediately offer her resignation as Secretary of Friends of the I.B.’s, as her responsibility here was only adding to her trouble. She agreed and sounded relieved that I had suggested the idea.

“Which leaves us in a bit of a quandary.

“What I would like to suggest or propose is that you become acting Secretary, if you feel you have enough energy and time from your other activities, and that you, Katie and I meet up in the near future to see our way forward.

“If this seems a good idea, do give me a ring or drop a note.”

Martin was clearly in a state of frustration verging on panic, that the whole structure of the new organisation might be undermined at the last minute due to Dolly’s inability to act. Martin did not enclose a copy of the note he refers to having received from Dolly, but it must be assumed that it contained details of deteriorating health problems.

On receipt of Martin’s letter, Pauline no doubt telephoned him to say that she was prepared to step in as acting Secretary of FIBS.

Hand-written notes by Pauline Fraser, dated 12th May 2001, followed the memorial meeting for Johnny Longstaff.

“* Letter to members – convene another meeting with IBA, FIBS, historians, MML.

* Deadline for responses to new organisation

* Should we call ourselves friends....

* AJ [Angela Jackson] going next week to discuss plaque – what should we call ourselves? Will refer to IBA pro tem.”

Pauline’s hasty notes reflect the urgency of making a number of important decisions and getting them out to members as soon as possible.

At some point following Johnny Longstaff's memorial event, Dolly West handed over the entire contents of her four plus years of work on behalf of the Friends to Pauline Fraser

On 10th June 2001 Pauline Fraser wrote to FIBS members that:

"A number of changes and developments have taken place recently.

1. I have taken over from Dolly West-Shaer as Acting Secretary
2. A meeting has taken place with a view to establishing a new joint organisation to continue the work of the International Brigades.
3. FIBS has received information concerning a commemoration of the International Brigades to take place in late October 2001.

1. "Dolly has worked indefatigably on behalf of FIBS since its inception and I think it is safe to say that, without her drive, our organisation would not have got off the ground. She has established wide networks of friends both in Britain and throughout the world by liaising with sister organisations in other countries. She has organised FIBS events in Britain and has taken part in a number of events by Friends' organisations abroad. In recent times, she has also taken over control of the FIBS' financial affairs, and has kept meticulous records of all income and expenditure. In short, Dolly has been the bedrock of this organisation and I cannot praise too highly what she has achieved.

"However, Dolly has come to the point where she has recognised that she must put her health and well-being first and has handed over the work of FIBS Secretaryship to myself. This decision was taken at the behest of Martin Green, the FIBS Newsletter editor."

The letter then gives a summary of the meeting of 10th March 2001.

"Dolly and myself were your representatives at that meeting and were in agreement that FIBS should join with the IBA, Marx Memorial Library which keeps the IBA archive, and the historians, to form a new organisation.

"The main changes to our organisation would be in changes to our constitution (see page 4) and that representatives from all sections named above [IBA, FIBS, historians, MML] would be incorporated on to an enlarged FIBS Committee.

"The benefits would be particularly in terms of resources: establishing a joint IBA/FIBS newsletter, establishing a web-site, expanding the work of the new organisation through the receipt of donations, possibly by applying for charitable status.

"Since that meeting several months have elapsed and it is now a matter of urgency that a new organisation is established. I am therefore writing to ask members to endorse the formation of such an organisation. Please read through the draft constitution, which is largely based on the FIBS constitution, and contact me at the latest by 22nd June 2001 if you have:

- any objections to the new organisation being established
- any comments to make on the constitution
- any comments to make on the procedures outlined above

“If you do not reply by 22nd June, I will take this as an endorsement of the proposals at the 10th March meeting for the establishment of the new organisation. The next meeting of the liaison group is due to take place on 23rd June hence the short notice.”

Pauline then gave details of the 2001 commemoration in Madrid and asked members to let her know as soon as possible if they would like to go. She also gives the date and time of the annual International Brigade Association Memorial meeting at Jubilee Gardens, and following it, a get-together in the Bar Med.

This letter was followed closely by another from Pauline to members of 29th June 2001. She writes:

“Dear Member,

I would like to thank all those friends who replied to my request for comments on the proposed constitution and procedures for moving to a joint organisation. I received 17 replies, all endorsing the moves.

A second meeting was held on 23rd June which did the following:-

- Welcomed the news that Jack Jones had agreed to become the President
- Agreed that the name of the new organisation should be the International Brigade Memorial Trust
- Finalised the constitution, agreeing to keep the same membership criteria and subscription rates at the ‘Friends’
- Agreed to apply for charitable status
- Agreed that an Action Committee would process the business of the amalgamation until an AGM was held. (A date for the AGM, probably in the Autumn, will be announced and the membership of the International Brigade Association and Friends of the International Brigade invited to attend.)”

The Action Committee, consisting of Dave Marshall, Marlene Sidaway, Pauline Fraser and Angela Jackson, met on July 29th 2001. They had a full agenda:

1. Finance – A new International Brigade Memorial Trust bank account had been set up and it was agreed Pauline would transfer Friends funds into this, while Marlene would transfer £1,000 from the IBA account.
2. Membership lists – Pauline was to add the IBA membership list to her spreadsheet of former Friends members and forward a copy to Marlene.
3. Charitable Trust – Marlene was liaising with Jack Jones on applying for charitable status.
4. Unison – “Action to be taken to follow up offers of help from Unison, including possible venues for an AGM.” No one is named to take responsibility for this.

5. Logo - "Marlene to ask Richard Baxell to design a logo for the Trust, and possibly the heading for letters etc."
6. Memorials - "A list of all the IB memorials in Britain is needed to enable the Trust and members to maintain them and to arrange events with a focus on local memorials. Marlene to ask Jim Carmody, Pauline to ask Arnold Owen, Lyn Hurst and Ray Davies in the compilation of a list."
7. Future memorials – Working parties to be set up in areas where memorials are still needed, for example in Cambridge and Islington....Angela Jackson to finalise arrangements for a plaque in the cemetery at La Bisbal de Falset for those who died in the cave hospital. Details to be sent to Marlene and Pauline for circulation amongst members. Marlene to send donation from the IBA to the town hall in La Bisbal de Falset."
8. Imperial War Museum exhibition - "Ascertain who is opening the exhibition. Ask Paul Preston if he is going to be involved in the preparation of the text needed for the displays."
9. International Brigade banner - "Pauline to take the banner to Poole for an estimate for repair." The banner was left with The Textile Conservation Centre of the University of Southampton who sent an invoice on 29th August 2001 "in respect of the estimate report you have asked us to prepare on the International Brigade Association flag.....On receipt of payment we will proceed with preparation of the report which we will forward to you in due course." A cheque was posted on 3rd September 2001, after which the Centre prepared a report on the banner. The estimate proved to be prohibitively expensive, so the banner was donated to the MML as part of the IBA collection and put behind glass.
10. AGM – "November 17th 2001 proposed as the date of the AGM." This was firmed up as the actual date of the AGM.
11. Madrid Homage in October – AABI had sent details of the Homenaje for 65th anniversary of the International Brigades earlier in the year and Marlene and Pauline had asked their respective members to let them know if they wished to attend, if they would take a carer/assistant with them, and so on.
12. Officers of the Trust - "Until the election of officers at the AGM, Marlene and Pauline to co-ordinate their efforts in the work of treasurer and membership secretary, but Marlene to take primary responsibility as treasurer and Pauline to be primarily responsible for membership."

It was an extremely busy but exciting time, with much to look forward to in the new organisation. As well as organising an AGM, there were letters to be sent out to members about the events at Madrid and La Bisbal, and groups of participants to organise for the two events, which took place on consecutive weekends in late October and early November 2001.

Pauline Fraser's report to the Annual General Meeting of the International Brigade Memorial Trust held on 17th November 2001 gives a reflection of the work covered over that period.

"I took over as Acting Secretary of the Friends of the International Brigades on 3rd June 2001. Since then I have done the following:

- been involved in meetings of the interim committee to set up the IBMT
- helped with the organisation of the British contingent to the 65th Homenaje in Madrid
- assisted Marlene Sidaway and David Marshall with the day-to-day work of the organisation
- processed new membership enquiries
- supported a proposal for a memorial to International Brigaders on Clerkenwell Green
- had day to day contact with members of FIBS on a variety of issues"

Pauline also "took over as Acting Treasurer" of the Friends. She presented a Treasurer's report that covered the period from 24.11.00 to 15.11.01. "Following this meeting, I shall close the FIBS account and pay the balance into the IBMT account. I have kept it open until after this meeting in case members would like to scrutinise the accounts more closely."

The reports were dated 16.11.01, the day before the AGM, when the International Brigade Association and the Friends of the International Brigades became the International Brigade Memorial Trust, open to all who supported its aims.

Concluding remarks

That first IBMT AGM could be likened to the crock of gold at the end of the rainbow for members of FIBS. It was what they wanted, but for several years, looked as if it was unattainable and then when it was almost within their grasp, threatened to be snatched away.

Now the strong following the Friends had built up would pour energy and enthusiasm into the newly-created IBMT. Many of the features that FIBS had started were to be taken up and expanded by the IBMT, such as the wording of the constitution and the AGM being held in a different town or city of the British Isles. Without the establishment of the Friends, it is unlikely that an organisation such as the IBMT would have developed.

Problems remained, such as the need for a resolution of the uncertainties surrounding the national IBMT memorial in Jubilee Gardens, but gone were the tensions between the protagonists in the story - strong figures of enormous determination, but confronting one another, like the tectonic plates that make continents collide - rather than building an organisation together.

It should not have been like that. No other country encountered the resistance from leading members of their International Brigade Association in the way that FIBS did. Not only did it require unremitting hard work, which any new organisation would have done, but

this was carried out against soul-destroying opposition. It certainly took its toll on Dolly West, whose health suffered and Martin Green, who almost gave up hope.

There were additional concerns over the direction of AABI in Spain, where a similar drama was being played out, but rifts in that organisation were thankfully resolved over a shorter timescale.

‘If not me, who? If not now, when?’

Who was best placed to write a history of FIBS? Of those who had been active in the Friends, Dolly West, Martin Green and Bert Carnall had since died, leaving Dolores Long, Hilary Jones and myself, all in our seventies, so time was of the essence. Most of the documents relating to FIBS were stored in my loft, since I took over in early 2001 from Dolly West-Shaer as acting Secretary of FIBS. Everything therefore pointed to me.

It is fortunate that in the period of FIBS’ activity, 1997 to 2001, digital was still an emergent technology, so a wealth of paper documents exist. It is this written record that I have used to tell the story, checking details with other participants or their relatives. Ten years later, none of that would have been the case. Paper letters would have been replaced by emails, so easily deleted unless the far-sighted recognised their significance.

During the period covered, Dolly West-Shaer was wrestling with the wonders of her new word processor, while Martin Green was still using his tried and trusted manual typewriter and many letters received were hand-written. On 6th December 1998, Dolly wrote with delight to her friend Cherry Embury, that: “my son is going to get me on the internet at Christmas so that will help with this correspondence.”

The ‘How’ of writing the story

First I went foraging into the loft to track down the various files I had about FIBS. Then I put everything I found into chronological order and filed by month and year in two venerable lever-arch files. Next I collated all the items on a chronological database, under date sent, by whom, to whom, whether Brigader, relative, friend, historian or other, and with a comment column to give a snapshot of the contents.

Acknowledgements

I contacted Dolores Wild and Hilary Jones, and tracked down Crispin Green, Martin Green’s son. They all gave me invaluable additional information, but for Crispin, it was a particularly time-consuming task, as rooted through his father’s large collection of papers to find material concerning FIBS. My thanks to them for sharing these documents.

A big thank you to IBMT President Marlene Sidaway, who sent me useful information concerning the coming together of the IBA and FIBS. Together with partner David

Marshall, she carried much out much of the work of the IBA in its final years before the merger with FIBS.

Despite grave personal problems, Dolly West-Shaer's daughter Carole Mathurin took the time to look through her mother's papers to see if there was anything else that her mother had not passed on to me when I took over as Acting Secretary of FIBS, but it seemed Dolly had done a clean sweep and there was little left which I didn't have.

I would like to thank everyone on the IBMT Committee for welcoming the fact that I was writing this history.

Lastly a big thank you to David Convery, of Queen Mary College, University of London, whose work on digitising some FIBS documents suggested the idea to me of writing a history of FIBS.

Appendix – The Letters

Martin Green and Dolly West first contacted those they thought might be interested in joining FIBS, including Brigaders who might be sympathetic. These sometimes included well-known people such as Martha Gellhorn, who had been a journalist during the Spanish Civil War and former Prime Minister Edward Heath, who had led a fact-finding group of conservative students to Spain and was known to have favoured the cause of the Republic.

New members Martha Gellhorn and artist and illustrator Paul Hogarth were mentioned in the committee meeting minutes of 8th February.

Martin Green had written to former Conservative Prime Minister Sir Edward Heath in February inviting him to join the Friends of the International Brigades. Heath had led a group of conservative students on a fact-finding mission to Spain during the Spanish Civil War, so this was not such an outlandish idea. Martin received a polite and supportive reply from Heath dated 3 March 1998. While declining the invitation to join, citing other commitments, the letter ends: "I wish you every success with the new venture..."

Martin Green's letters were sent, in batches, to local newspapers and trade union journals all over the British Isles. It was a simple and effective strategy, although time-consuming for Martin. Robert Earl, pasted Martin's letter in his reply of 18th February 1998. Unfortunately, the only paper that does not appear to have printed the letter was the 'Morning Star'. Had it done so, this would have no doubt increased the amount of interest and support greatly.

The letter is printed below. "A number of descendants, relatives and friends of volunteers in the British Battalion of the International Brigade met recently in London to form a group of Friends of the the International Brigades. This came about following a visit to Spain last

November of surviving members of the International Brigades throughout the world at the unanimous invitation of the Spanish government.

“The surviving ranks of the members of the British Battalion are thinning and as membership of the International Brigade Association is open only to those who actually served, it will eventually pass away. Hence the need for Friends of the International Brigades, not only to keep alive the memory of the ‘volunteers for liberty’, but also to affirm the ideals that inspired them to continue today. It is proposed to hold social gatherings in London and other regional centres throughout the year.

“We are seeking membership from those interested in joining, whether or not with any family connections,...” and then he invites those interested to write to him at his home address.

Replies came from readers of the ‘Belfast Telegraph’, ‘Camden New Journal’, ‘Tribune’, ‘CPS Bulletin’, ‘Liverpool Daily Post’ and ‘South Wales Echo’, among others. It was helpful that they frequently mentioned the name of the newspaper in their reply, although addresses also pointed to the source. It gave the committee a good idea where pockets of support lay to for the future development of the organisation.

A chain reaction began, with some who joined suggesting friends or relatives who might also be interested in joining, while Paul Barrett informed Dolly that he had taken the initiative to write to “all the main South Wales newspapers”. [letter 30.01.1998]

As well as seeking further information about the new group, some respondents were keen to show their support. Some mentioned activity they had undertaken, either during the period of the Spanish Civil War, or later, to support the cause of Spain and the International Brigades.

Others requested information about particular Brigaders, volunteered important details of their lives, or made suggestions about the future of the Friends, while some led to unsolved mysteries.

Some of the most important of these letters have been grouped together under relevant headings.

Support for FIBS

Cllr. Gordon Paterson of the Wirral, responding to Martin Green’s letter in the ‘Liverpool Daily Post’, wrote: “I am very interested in the ideas you put forward as I have maintained a close contact with the IBA during the whole of its existence and have in younger days organised many of the functions on Merseyside.” [letter dated 1st June 1998]

Kathleen and Joe Lumb from Rossendale, Lancashire, wrote: “We are proud to still be involved having been members of a very active committee for Spanish Relief who raised enough money to send an ambulance to Spain in 1937 and then carried on collections for

Food Ships.” [letter dated 18th July 1998] This may have been the ambulance that Frida Stewart drove to Almeria. [see Frida Stewart’s memoirs “Firing a Shot for Freedom” 2020]

In a letter of the same date, Dolly West writes to John Murphy, thanking him “very much indeed for the casting of the Spanish tile that you did for us (through Bert Carnall). It is a beautiful replica and we are very grateful indeed.” It would be interesting to know what the subject of the replica was and its whereabouts. [letter dated 26.07.1999 from Dolly West to John Murphy]

On January 7th 1998 Jo Carritt, niece of two Brigaders, Anthony and Noel, spotted the letter in the CPS journal, and wrote that she “would be very interested in joining”. She explained that Anthony was killed in Spain and Noel twice wounded and recently deceased. She gave contact details for her cousin Colin and uncle Noel’s widow, Nan. The following month, Jo’s cousin Colin wrote: “You can certainly count me in and my daughter Angela Carritt.”

Writing on 4th February 1998, Colin said that: “an invitation [to the inaugural gathering of FIBS] was never more welcome.” He explained that his daughter had interviewed Bill Alexander for a dissertation and “I expressed the view that we ought to set up a successor to the IBA. Bill had his reservations....” He offered to write “some personal history of my father Noel Carritt’s involvement in the brigade and also that of his brother Anthony who was killed at Brunete.”

So began a long association with members of the Carritt family. At the time of writing, Colin remains an enthusiastic member of the Oxford Memorial Friends of the IBMT group.

Brigader Sam Hannah wrote an undated letter to Dolly in July 1999 stating that “the present committee should carry on en-masse as they have the know-how required.” He thanked her for the recent newsletter [assumed Newsletter No.3] and said it: “brings back some incidents which I have forgotten...” He is concerned that Dolly has received his postal order subscription [reply dated 26.07.1999 from Dolly West to Sam Hannah]

After receiving the latest newsletter, with its run-down on International Brigade events internationally, Sam Hannah wrote again to Dolly West on 30th June 2000, enclosing his £5.00 sub and mentioning that he had two sons in British Columbia who were going “to scout around to see if they can come across some old members of the Brigade”.

Requests for information about Brigaders

Joseph Moss, a final-year BA student, wrote to Dolly on 6th March 1998 to request any information about his uncle Augustine (Gus) Harris, killed at Brunete. He sent photocopies of photos of his uncle and asks Dolly to pass them on to anyone who might have known him. Joseph was “almost certain he was killed on the first day of the Brunete offensive on 6 July 1937 while attacking a church tower in the village of Villanueva de la Canada...Bill

Alexander feels sure that he was at Jarama as well.” According to the IBMT database of volunteers, Joseph was right in thinking his uncle had been killed at Brunete, but puts the date of death as 21st July 1937, near the end of the battle. The IBMT database also states that he arrived in Spain on 21st March 1937, so could also have been at Jarama.

Information about Brigaders

Mark Silcock was one of the relatives from the North West who wrote to Martin Green from a Liverpool address on 15th November 1998 asking to join the Friends and explained that he was the grandson and great nephew of two brothers, Tommy [Thomas] and Bobby [Robert] Silcock. Grandfather Tommy was “killed at Jarama, February 1937. His brother Bobby was captured in the same action, he later returned to Britain via a prisoner exchange.” IBMT volunteer database records that they both served in No.2 Machine Gun Company of the British Battalion at Jarama. Thomas was ‘taken out of the column and shot’ on 13th February 1937. The database records Robert’s year of birth as 1915, his arrival in Spain as 21.12.1936 and date of departure 16.11.1937. The records do not show a d.o.b. for Tommy, but one might assume that he was the elder brother, as he would have then been more likely to have had a son, Mark’s father. We do not know how it affected family members, but Mark writes: “The fact that my grandfather and his brother went to Spain to fight Fascism, is something my family is very proud of.”

Jack O’Connell, of Schull Books, who described himself as “an old mate” of Martin Green “since the 60’s” said he had recently attended the funeral of Peter O’Connor who “must be the last of the Waterford members”. He had discovered a family connection, “that one of the Dorans who fought in the IB was a cousin of my mother’s.....I remember clearly seeing him at lunch in our house about the middle 1930’s when I was a youngster. He wore a black beret and a reefer coat.....When he had left the house, presumably on his way to Spain, the Ma cautioned me: ‘Don’t tell anybody that man was here. He is a Communist’, a word more diabolical than ‘The Devil’ in some quarters in Ireland at the time. And still! I recall that the man wore a blue bow tie with spots and I grew up thinking that that was how you identified a Communist: beret, reefer coat and polka dot blue tie.” [letter dated 18.08.1999 from Jack O’Connell to Dolly West]

Suggestions for future activity

Rob Wardle, whose father, also Rob Wardle, was killed at Calaceite in 1938, wrote a series of letters in August and September to Dolly West containing suggestions for the Friends. These included having a replica IB badge made and listing Friends and their connection with Brigaders, so that information could be pooled. Rob met Jane Alexander, who lived in Calaceite and was very helpful when he went to visit to find out more about where his father had been killed. She wanted to join the Friends and offered her house on a B&B basis, as well as guiding and interpreting, for members who wanted to visit.

In a second letter, Rob recounts phoning Walter Gregory, only to be answered by his wife, who told him he had just died. He made the point that “incidents like this could be avoided if relatives like ourselves were able to receive an IBA newsletter”. He also enclosed accounts he had sent to Bill Alexander of his visits to Calaceite, one of which Bill had published in the IBA Newsletter of September 1993. [letters dated 19.08.1999, 14.09.1999 and 23.09.1999.]

Cllr. Ray Davies wrote to Dolly on 14th November 2000 with a change of address and told her that and his wife, Wendy, had “been party to erecting two memorials in Neath and recently attended the unveiling of memorials in Llanelli and Maerdy....Myself and one or two other people in Wales are still working hard to keep the memory of the Brigaders alive and more important to keep alive the just reasons why the Brigades went to Spain to fight for freedom, democracy and justice.”

Unsolved mysteries

An intriguing letter was received on 18th April 1998 from Mrs Iris Pearce, stating that “my husband joined the Brigade when in Shanghai, China, in 1939.” Did she mean 1936? There is no record of a volunteer named Pearce [IBMT volunteers’ database]. Perhaps he had joined the Chinese revolutionary People’s Liberation Army.

Mrs. Mary Irvine, from Airdrie, sent a poignant letter. She wrote that her father “was killed or died in Castellon.....he managed to write and send me a birthday card before he died.” [undated letter, reply sent 2nd May 1998]

From this information, we can assume her father was taken, badly wounded, to: “the enormous Benicassim complex providing more than 3,000 beds.” [‘Salud’ Linda Palfreman, p. 67]

Could he have been wounded at Teruel? This was where “the wounded of XIII Brigade were evacuated.” [op.cit.] Were the wounded of XV Brigade also taken there?

Unfortunately Mary Irvine does not provide her father’s name, so it is impossible to identify him, but there were five Scots Brigaders on the Roll of Honour, shown as killed at Teruel. [‘Memorials of the Spanish Civil War’ Colin Williams Bill Alexander John Gorman] Is it possible that at least one of those listed as killed at Teruel may in fact have been severely wounded and evacuated to Benicassim?

Robert Earl wrote to Martin Green on 18th February 1998, in a note next to a pasted cutting of Martin’s letter that he had spotted in a newspaper. Robert said he had gone to Spain with a friend from City of London School, where they were both in the OTC (Officer Training Corps). Robert was sent home as being too young, but his friend David Guest “stayed and I think was killed.” This seems a strange story for a couple of reasons. Firstly, if Robert and David were friends and went out to Spain together, it beggars belief that Robert would not have known that David had been killed in Spain. Secondly, there would have been quite a big age gap between David Guest, who was born in 1913 and,

according to the volunteers' database, arrived in Spain in March 1938, making him 26 or 27. But Robert Earl would have been sent home for being under 21, making his date of birth at least 1917, so four or five years younger than David – an unlikely friendship to have endured from school days. Perhaps Robert was a romancer who would have liked to have taken part in the war in Spain.

Anne Drummond wrote to Martin Green after reading his letter in the 'Daily Record'. Her uncle was William Watson, "killed just before the end of the war". This is confirmed on the Roll of Honour in 'British Volunteers for Liberty' and 'Memorials of the Spanish Civil War', but the IBMT database suggests he may have been repatriated with wounds after Jarama, but is uncertain of the date he left Spain. Was it 1937 or 1938?

Note about the author

Pauline Fraser was awarded a BA degree in History at Exeter University in 1965 and cut her teeth on the Subs' Desk at the 'Morning Star'. Subsequently she worked for many years in education, during which she completed a Master's degree by independent study at the University of East London. She has been a life-long trade unionist and active in left wing politics throughout her life. She was active in FIBS and has been a founder-member and Trustee of the IBMT.

Pauline Fraser 31st August 2020

25,556 words

