



¡NO PASARÁN!

International Brigade Memorial Trust ● 2-2023 ● £5

Hidden family history





Saturday 1 July 2023, 1pm

Music ● Speakers ● Remembrance

**International Brigade Memorial
Jubilee Gardens, London Southbank**

**INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE
ANNUAL COMMEMORATION**

International Brigade Memorial Trust
www.international-brigades.org.uk



◀ Kate Armstrong at last year's IBMT Annual General Meeting with a photo of her great uncle Alec. Photo: Jim Jump. See page 6.

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Oscar Rodríguez



MONUMENT: Marchers lay wreaths at the memorial plaque dedicated to the Polish International Brigaders.

International Brigaders honoured in Spain

The annual Battle of Jarama memorial march saw around 500 people, from England, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Scotland, the US and Spain, mark the 86th anniversary of the desperate fight in which International Brigaders and their Republican allies defended Madrid from fascist encirclement.

This year's event, held on 25 February and organised by the IBMT's Spanish sister-organisation AABI (Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales), toured the south-east of the Jarama front and particularly honoured the Polish volunteers of the International Brigades. Expert guide Miguel Ángel led the tour, highlighting key sites of action and the remains of military constructions.

The march concluded with wreath-laying at the monument to the Dąbrowski Brigade, installed by the Arganda city council in 2016. Members of the Polish Volunteers of Freedom Association delivered a tribute at the monument, where they quoted the anti-fascist slogan of the Brigaders, who proudly fought 'for your freedom and ours'.

Oscar Rodríguez



▲ Marchers crossing in front of cement factories near the site of the Jarama battlefield.



◀ Máximo Molina delivers a tribute at Tarancón cemetery.

Tarancón: Supporters from Spain and across the world gathered on 24 February in Tarancón cemetery for the town's annual anti-fascist commemoration. They laid wreaths and paid their respects at memorials dedicated to Republicans killed during Franco's repression and to Scottish International Brigaders who fell during the Battle of Jarama.

The event was organised by the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) of the province of Cuenca, as part of the annual Jarama memorial weekend. Association president Máximo Molina led the tribute and proceedings concluded with a performance of 'The Internationale' in various languages.

The town of Tarancón was the site of four hospitals which served the Jarama front. ARMH Cuenca have been working with the regional government on a project to restore the Hospitalillo de Santa Emilia – one of the facilities used by the International Brigades.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF



NEWS

...and across Britain

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Manchester: The IBMT-affiliated North West International Brigade Memorial Group hosted its annual commemoration of the Battle of Jarama on 11 February at Manchester Central Library. The event featured a range of illustrated talks, songs, poems and speeches.

IBMT members and activists from the North West took the lead. Chris Hall, author of 'The Nurse Who Became a Spy', spoke about the lives and contributions of Manchester nurse volunteers Lilian Urmston and Madge Addy. He was followed by Lisa Croft, one of a group of writers behind the new book 'Our Fathers Fought Franco', discussing her Brigader grandfather Archibald Williams.

The event proceeded with songs performed in front of the Manchester International Brigade memorial, with the Bolton Clarion Choir and a group of Spanish visitors taking the lead.

Dundee: On 12 February Dundee honoured the Spanish Civil War volunteers who died in battle with a commemoration held at the city's International Brigade memorial in Albert Square.

Over 50 people were in attendance as IBMT Scotland Secretary Mike Arnott led the proceedings and member John O'Neill read the roll of honour of Dundee volunteers.

Stockton: A day of dedication for the Stockton International Brigade memorial was held on 23 April. The proceedings began with a basketball tournament named in honour of Teesside International Brigader

Otto Estensen. This was followed by a march through town to the memorial plaque in Wasps Nest Yard.

Attendees then made their way to Stockton's Georgian Theatre for an evening of talks, music and poetry. Relatives of International Brigaders were in attendance, including Elizabeth Estensen, Kate Quigley, and George and Alan Short.

Earlier in the year, on 12 February, supporters in Stockton held a commemoration for Teesside volunteers who lost their lives at the Battle of Jarama. Flowers were laid at the memorial, followed by poetry readings and a rendition of 'Valley of Jarama'.

Four Teesside volunteers lost their lives at Jarama. George Bright and David Halloran were killed in action, whilst Thomas Carter and John Unthank died later as a result of their wounds.

Pub owner John Christie, and the community around him, played a key role in fundraising for the Stockton memorial, which was unveiled in September 2022.



▲ Flowers on the Dundee memorial.

◀◀ Bolton Clarion Choir at the Manchester commemoration.

◀ Spanish group in front of the Manchester International Brigade memorial.



► Supporters holding the Golden Smog Warriors basketball team banner at the Stockton memorial dedication.

►► Tony Fox introducing International Brigader relatives at the Georgian Theatre.



The International Brigade Memorial Trust keeps alive the memory and spirit of the men and women who volunteered to fight fascism and defend democracy in Spain from 1936 to 1939

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iNo Pasarán! Raffle 2023



Raffle draw
7 October
2023

FIRST PRIZE £500 in cash

SECOND PRIZE Six bottles of
Spanish wine

PLUS MANY OTHER RUNNER-UP PRIZES

Supporters can buy
tickets (£1 per ticket)
for the online raffle
via RallyUp:

[https://go.rallyup.com
/nopasaran](https://go.rallyup.com/nopasaran)



SCAN ME

Your local IBMT affiliated memorial group

Several independent locally-based International Brigade memorial groups have sprung up around the country in recent years. The IBMT welcomes this development and supports their work.

IBMT affiliation costs £30. You can affiliate through our website here: www.international-brigades.org.uk/membership.

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COVER STORY

Discovering Alec Armstrong

KATE ARMSTRONG explains how she unearthed the identity of her great uncle, International Brigader Alexander Armstrong, and why it's important to remember lesser-known volunteers.



was before. We lost my grandad to some scandal when my father was in nappies. Consequently we never knew or even talked much of that side of the family. It wasn't until I was browsing on one of those find your family tree sites that I discovered a whole raft of relatives, including a grand uncle

‘Alec left school young and went to work as a roofer, though he was often unemployed. He went to Spain at the age of 25.’

Alexander, who died in Spain.

Now my family tree is stumpy and stunted. An amorphous mass of mill and cannon fodder, working hard in unremarkable jobs, drifting from country to city, to live in slums that have long since been cleared. My origins are plebeian to say the least, so I very much doubted Alexander expired from consuming bad oysters on a Mediterranean beach holiday. So what was he doing there? More research revealed that an Alexander Armstrong from Manchester was killed in February 1937, in Jarama. He was listed as a British casualty of the Spanish Civil War.

This was almost as unbelievable as the bad

Families are funny things. You wonder how they can possibly fall apart but suddenly whole chunks of history disappear. Like a cliff face sliding into the sea, the landscape quickly changes and no one remembers quite how it

oyster. I mean – how could I not know that? On asking, murky family memories resurfaced – yes there had been talk of an uncle Alec who had died fighting. It wasn't until Google led me to the International Brigade Memorial Trust website that I really got a picture of who Alec was. Both literally and figuratively.

The Trust of course celebrates the lives of those who went to Spain to defend democracy and fight fascism. It also is a great research resource. I was able to find an entry for Alexander Armstrong in the volunteers' database. Sadly there wasn't much more personal information but I now knew he was a communist, a volunteer in the International Brigade and someone who fought on the right side. From Britain alone around 2,500 volunteers went to Spain and while that number includes some famous names and well connected, upper-class communists, most of the British volunteers were working-class men, with an average age of 29, from the big industrial cities. Men who left hard jobs to go to and fight a hard fight. Men like uncle Alec.

Manchester

Born in 1909 in Manchester, Alexander was the seventh of the Armstrong children. His father worked in various jobs, from hoist man to labourer, to keep his large family. But like so many in Manchester in the depression, he was in and out of work. Even at the best of times money was short. The family lived in Hulme, in a small rented house, one of the sprawl of gerry-built terraces. Alec left school young and went to work as a roofer, though he was often unemployed. He went to Spain at the age of 25. He was one 540 of the volunteers killed out there.

The database biographies of many volunteers are often little more than a few lines. Nobodies like my family often didn't leave much in the way



Armstrong before departing for Spain.



Armstrong (front row, third from right, in shorts) at the Kinder Mass Trespass, April 1932.



◀ Armstrong had been involved in the Red Megaphones communist street theatre group. They are pictured here performing in Preston in 1932.

of obvious historical records. Certainly Alexander's is sparse. But the Trust details what it can and functions as a memorial to those who would otherwise be unknown, for which I am extremely grateful. But more than that it is a catalyst. Those scanty biographies of working class men and women who charged off to fight a war that wasn't theirs only raise more questions. And the trust attracts writers and historians and any one else wanting answers. So thank you IBMT Trustee Dolores Long for introducing me to Mike Crowley, Tony Fox, Mike Wild and Stuart Walsh who were kind enough to talk to me through their research.

What emerges is a mosaic of Mancunian activism, of protest marches, speedway riders, communism and clashes with the fascist Blackshirts. It became apparent that there were multiple connections and interactions. Some who went to fight in Spain were also members of the Young Communist League. Others were on the famous 1934 Kinder Mass Trespass

protesting the landowner limitations to ramblers' rights to roam on Kinder Scout.

They were marching alongside the British Workers Sports Federation and members of the street theatre troop the Red Megaphones – 'Our theatre awakens the masses!'. And some like Alec did it all.

Enthusiasm

Eddie Frow, a contemporary, writes that Alec radiated enthusiasm for the cause and there can be no doubt that he was keen as mustard. He was a member of all the major organisations, went on camps, rambled, leapt fawn-like while developing his theatre skills, protested unemployment and of course eventually went to fight and die in Spain.

He died so young that he is very much a footnote in other longer histories, but he casts a shadow. Jimmie Miller (better known as Ewan MacColl), folk singer and fellow activist, writes of Alec in his autobiography. He also features in the

Walter Greenwood novel about poverty in 1930s Salford, 'Love on the Dole' (1933). MI5 record his activities rather more dourly. He appears in letters home from Spain and there is an audio account of him walking to his death by the man who saw him do it. If you know where to look, there are numerous snippets of information to be found and a flickering picture of Alec develops. Of course I would never have known where to look if I hadn't been helped by people who did.

And yes the Trust literally has a picture of Alec. There's a famous photo taken at the Kinder Trespass in 1932 showing a group of jubilant young men and women striding forth to reclaim the moors. It was displayed at the Kinder Trespass 90th anniversary event in April 2022. A visitor – a middle-aged man – pointed to a figure in the image and told Mike Wild that that was his uncle Alec. He then disappeared back into the throng without leaving a name. As with so much of Alec's history – another tantalising glimpse! But it reminded me that there very likely were living relatives. I was determined to track him down. I haven't yet, but I did find other relatives and I now have a verified photo of Alec.

Alec died on 12 February, killed in the bloody massacre that was the first day of the Battle of Jarama. His body was never found and there is no grave. His bones are likely scattered among the olive groves.

Families can so easily fragment. People disappear, their history forgotten and the voices of ordinary people are so often unheard. But thanks to the IBMT and all those who work alongside them, Alexander Armstrong, uncle Alec, a heroic nobody from the back streets of Hulme, is remembered and celebrated. On a

‘What emerges is a mosaic of Mancunian activism, of protest marches, speedway riders, communism and clashes with the fascist Blackshirts.’

personal level I now know more about him than I ever thought possible. On a practical level, in terms of social history, this extraordinary story is preserved for posterity.

I would like to conclude by expressing my thanks to the IBMT, the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, Dolores Long, Stuart Walsh, Mike Wild, Mike Crowley, Tony Fox, Richard Baxell, Dave Toft, Keith Warrender and the long lost family.

In 2021 *iNo Pasarán!* featured the story of a student-faculty team from the Martin-Springer Institute at Northern Arizona University researching the history of two objects linked to the Spanish Civil War – a fan and a photograph.¹ Johann (Hans) Maslowski, a German-American volunteer of the International Brigades, presented these souvenirs to his great-nephew, Bernd Häber, when he visited East Berlin in 1969. Hans died a year later in Florida at the age of 71.

A young child at the time, Bernd did not have the chance to talk to Hans about his time in Spain. But he preserved those cherished mementos and took them with him to Arizona where he now resides. When Bernd approached the Martin-Springer Institute to help reveal the history behind the fan and the photograph, the research project began to take form.

One of the first questions the team had was how these two artefacts related to each other. Initially we speculated that the photograph might represent some of the 31 volunteers who had signed the fan. As the lettering on the side of the fan indicated, these men (from the UK, the US and Canada) had fought with Hans in the Anti-Tank Battery of the 129th Brigade, in Levante, from May to September 1938. But as our research proceeded it became clearer that the photograph might be connected to another period of Hans Maslowski's stay in Spain, before he joined the Anglo-American Battery. The seal on the bottom-right corner of the photograph pointed the way. It had been taken in the studio of Luis García in the town of Villena, Alicante.

With the aid of Laura Hernández, director of the Museum of Villena, Santiago Hernández, author of a popular blog on Villena's history, and journalist Inmaculada Alcaráz, we were able to share our project with readers in Villena and to ask for help identifying the men in the photograph.

Enquiries

Those enquiries led to a trip to Villena last summer that allowed the author to meet the children of some of the men in the photograph, as well as the daughter of photographer Luis García. While there are still some gaps to fill, we now have a better

Photo tells the story of a town

ANA VARELA-LAGO updates on the research project into a photo which once belonged to International Brigader Hans Maslowski and the stories of the civil war that it captures.

understanding of the history behind the image.

Born in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, in 1899, Hans Maslowski migrated to the United States in 1927. Ten years later he returned to Europe to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Hans left New York on 6 February 1937 aboard the *SS Paris*. By mid-February he was in Spain. He was assigned to the 1st Battery 'Ernst Thälmann' of the 13th International Brigade. His military card shows that during the following six months (February-August 1937) he fought at the front in 'Aragón-Huesca-Madrid-Center.'

In April 1937 the 'Thälmann' battery, together with the batteries 'Karl Liebknecht' and 'Antonio Gramsci', were organised into an artillery group. Commanded by Hungarian Szántó Rezső (alias Michael Baller), the group was known as Skoda II or Skoda-Baller. In the summer of 1937 the Skoda group fought at Huesca and Brunete. In August they were sent to Villena to rest and to continue training as the artillery group again faced reorganisation due to heavy losses sustained at the front.

The volunteers seem to have integrated well into the life of the town. An article in *Nuestra Bandera* (Our Flag) titled 'The International Brigades Fraternise with the People of Villena,' reported on a children's festival organised by the artillery group. A flyer called on locals to attend a festival organised by the Unified Socialist Youth in honour of the artillery group.

Proceeds from the festival went to aid refugees fleeing the areas occupied by Franco's Nationalists. *El Artillero Internacional*, the newspaper of the artillery group, also reported on the celebration and on the flag the volunteers had received as a gift at the festival.

They also made an impression on local Francisco Soler. A child in 1937, Francisco lived just a few blocks away from one of the buildings where the International Brigaders were quartered. Eighty-five years later, when I visited him in Villena, he still remembered meeting some of the soldiers as he

‘Enquiries led to a trip to Villena last summer that allowed the author to meet the children of some of the men in the photograph.’

walked with his father, Antonio Soler, in the neighborhood.² He recalled particularly a man named 'Willy' who sometimes would bring food (chocolate, cheese) to the family.

'Willy' is most likely Willy Richiger (13), a Swiss volunteer who holds the right hand of Francisco's



◀◀ Article in the Spanish Communist Party newspaper *Nuestra Bandera*. The title reads: 'The International Brigades Fraternise with the People of Villena.'

◀ *El Artillero Internacional*, the newspaper of the International Brigade artillery group, reporting on the celebration in Villena.



◀ (1) Hans Maslowski, (2) Ricardo Pérez, (3) José Lillo, (6) José Valera, (8) Johannes Niebuhr, (9) Fernando Forte, (10) Tomás Baenas, (11) Juan Cañizo, (13) Willy Richiger, (14) Antonio Soler.

father (14) in the photograph. Like Hans Maslowski (1), Richiger was a member of the 1st Battery 'Thälmann'. So was Johannes Niebuhr (8), a German-American who had travelled with Hans on the SS *Paris*. It is likely that the other volunteers in the photograph were also members of the battery or the Skoda II artillery group, but we have not yet been able to identify them.

Relatives

Francisco Soler and the relatives of other men in the photograph helped us identify most of the civilians from Villena in the image.³ They were part of a tight-knit community of family, friends and neighbours; workers in the region's renowned shoemaking industry, which became even more important during wartime. In the fall of 1937 the Skoda group returned to the front. Willy Richiger died in Aragón a few months later, in

June 1938.⁴ Niebuhr was wounded during the Ebro offensive but survived and returned to the US in December 1938. Hans Maslowski was assigned to the 35th Anglo-American Battery. In February 1938

'A child in 1937, Francisco lived just a few blocks away from one of the buildings where the Brigaders were quartered.'

he was promoted to sergeant and sent with his comrades to the front at Teruel. He later fought in Levante with the 129th Anti-Tank Battery whose names appear on the fan.

In September 1938 Spanish Prime Minister Juan

Negrín announced the dissolution of the International Brigades, but it took Hans six months to return to the United States. After being held several weeks at the French camp of Saint-Cyprien, he finally reached New York on 25 March 1939. A few days later, on 1 April 1939, General Franco declared victory. It marked the beginning of a dictatorship that ruled Spain for almost four decades. For many Spaniards who had supported the Republic, the Nationalist victory meant persecution and exile.

Some of the men in the photograph taken in Villena in 1937 spent time in jails and labour camps before they were allowed to return to their homes. Others across the region joined thousands in the port of Alicante seeking to leave the country, many never to return to Spain.

Notes

¹ Emily Moore and Elizabeth Washburn, 'A fan, a photo and the International Brigades', *iNo Pasarán!* 3-2021, Issue 58, pp.6-8.

² Sadly, Francisco Soler passed away a few months after our meeting, in November 2022.

³ Thank you to those who helped identify the men, and to the Colectivo Luna de Mujeres de Villena, whose website provides valuable information on the civil war in Villena: www.villena.es/biblioteca/espacio-violeta/fondos-violeta.

⁴ Ralph Hug helped to confirm Willy Richiger's identity. Information on Swiss volunteers is available at: www.spanienfreiwillige.ch/index.html.



► Inset: Francisco Soler.

► One of the buildings in Soler's neighbourhood that housed volunteers from the artillery group during the Spanish Civil War, in the town of Villena.



The British Battalion, the 16th of the International Brigades, was officially formed in January 1937. The English-speaking unit, initially provisionally named after British Communist Party MP Shapurji Saklatvala, was made up of around 500 British, Irish and Dominion volunteers, and was placed alongside American, Canadian and Balkan battalions within the 15th International Brigade.

Throughout their time in Spain the British Battalion saw substantial action. Of the 2,500 volunteers who made the journey to fight for the Spanish Republic, more than 500 of them never returned. The Spanish Civil War is in danger of fading from wider public memory and living history is one aspect of public history in this country that can provide a visible resource. Through the physical presentation and utilisation of uniforms, equipment and everyday items, reenactment is a viable method of reconstructing material culture and experiences of the British Battalion. It is already a thriving and popular hobby, often found in the reconstructed battles of the medieval age or the Second World War.

However, the living recreation of the Spanish Civil War is a niche topic. Our aim then, was to combine the academic study of the British

‘Our aim then, was to combine the academic study of the British Battalion with authentic historical reenactment.’

Battalion with authentic historical reenactment in order to cement the memory of the International Brigades firmly in the public mind. There have been many debates about the ‘politicisation’ of reenactment or whether living history can be ‘non-political’. We believe fundamentally all reenactment is to some extent political and reconstructing the International Brigades is no exception. In this sense, we are glad to stand on the right side of history and promote solidarity with the British Battalion and all anti-fascists so that their story lives on and is not forgotten. There is a long way to go but we are heading in the right direction.

Group

The Lost Sons of Albion living history group was founded in 2022, named after a fitting lyric in a ballad to the British Brigaders, by a small group of seasoned reenactors with a strong passion for the history of the civil war. For us, living history revolves around experimentation, material culture and the human experience of conflict. Thus we

Thomas Conyard



Living the history

ETHAN HARVEY writes about the inspiration and activities of a recently formed British Battalion reenactment society. The Lost Sons of Albion seek to play out the experiences of the volunteers and share their story with wider audiences.

believed we could apply this to the Spanish Civil War. We created a Facebook group and spoke with likeminded friends across the world who were also intrigued by the history of the International Brigades and now we have a growing number of comrades, all seeking to reproduce and acquire the clothing issued to the British volunteers.

Our first step on the journey of recreation was to engage with the evidence; the study of photographs, including images from the Harry Randall collection, personal accounts of the volunteers in Spain, and even some

archaeological material from the conflict.

Unlike other regulated military forces throughout history, the supply issues facing Republican Spain and particularly the International Brigades meant that uniform, arms and kit were largely a mishmash. This complicated the reconstruction as in many cases no two volunteers appeared the same. Our research led to the creation of uniform guides for the group and clothing patterns. Then, with careful tailoring we were able to produce a copy of the famous *cazadora* tunic, ubiquitously seen in use with the



The Lost Sons of Albion and their equipment at reenactments in November 2022.

of the volunteers

British volunteers. In some cases, we have been able to obtain original items from the civil war; field equipment and other common objects. However, this is often acquired from Spain and must be imported to us.

Similarly, the leather equipment sets were reproduced in Spain as such pieces of uniform simply did not survive the passing of time. The group is still very much learning and sourcing reproductions of original paperwork, passes and identity cards held by the Brigaders. The personal objects carried make just as much of the impression as the clothing.

In November 2022, in homage to the volunteers, we travelled across the channel to take our group to events in Europe, as the recreation of the conflict is larger there than at home. We met up with friends in France to 'relive' the experiences of those international volunteers, their training and initial preparations when they arrived in Spain. It was a highly educational experiment for

us, as it placed us in a reconstructed period village with only the equipment and amenities available to our 1937 counterparts.

Sleeping in only our uniforms and original Spanish blankets and eating wartime rations provided some understanding of what the British volunteers went through in Spain. We were then

'Everyone we have met has been keen to thank us for shining a light on the conflict and the international volunteers in such a visible and unique way.'

able to convey these experiences to audiences back home, to show that we not only wore the uniform but that we knew to some extent the everyday feeling of living in it, of how to use the

equipment, not just carry it.

Reenactment can never fully simulate the conditions and horrors of war for obvious reasons, yet it is very useful as a vehicle for stimulating conversation. Back in Blighty, the Lost Sons of Albion have put on displays of our collections, using living history events to promote interest in the British Battalion. The public reaction has always been engaging and positive!

From conversations with those who knew the original volunteers, to members of the public who had never heard of the war, everyone we have met has been keen to thank us for shining a light on the conflict and the international volunteers in such a visible and unique way.

We have been lucky as a group to support the work of the IBMT and to work with other organisations and events to bring this aspect of the conflict to life, to continue to honour the memory of those that fought and fell. It is of vital importance that the memory of the British Battalion, and the memory of all those that sought to save Spain from fascism, is not forgotten or lost in today's world.

The effective educational value of living history and reconstruction is thus a key avenue for remembering those men and for education on the Spanish Civil War as a whole.



FRONT LINE: Republican soldiers entrenched in Madrid's Casa de Campo park, November 1936. Captain Elio González of the 75th Mixed Brigade captioned the photo, 'Party in the trenches'.

The anti-fascist fight

ADRIAN SHUBERT and
ANTONIO CAZORLA-SÁNCHEZ

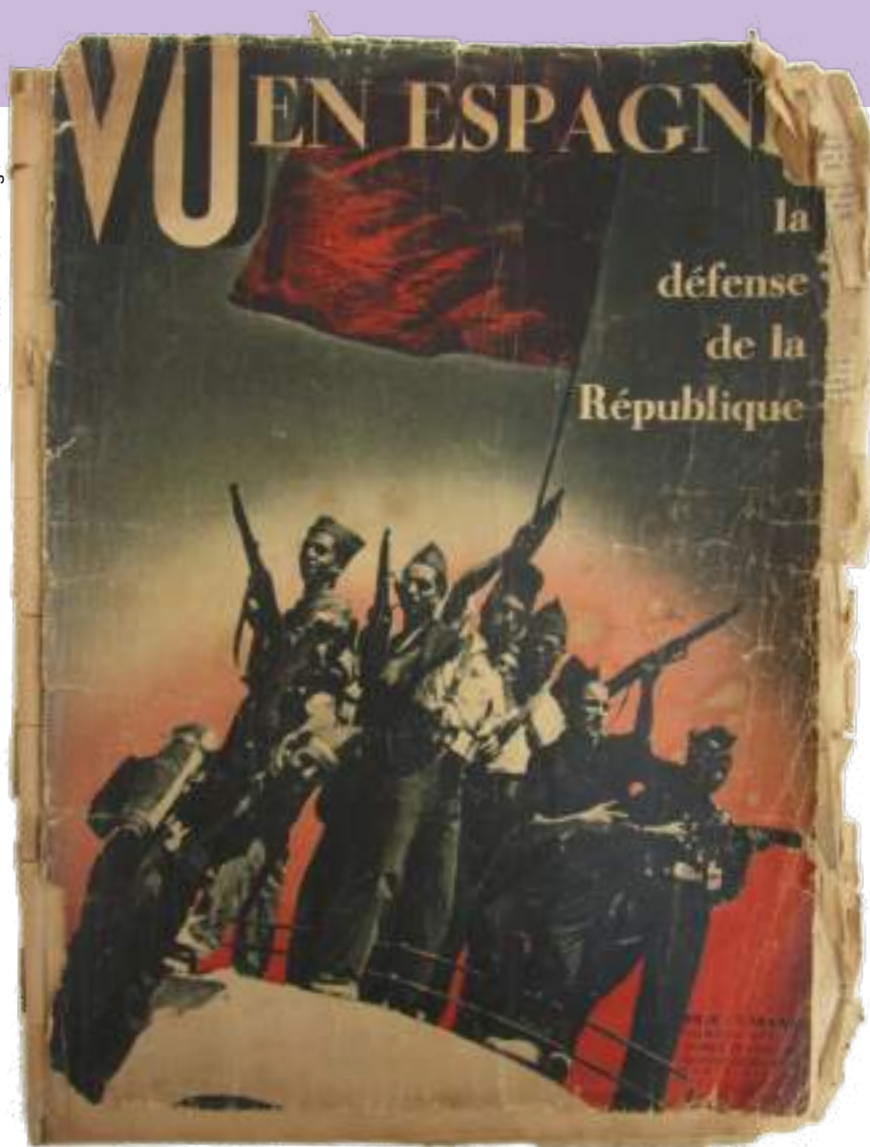
are part of the founding team behind the Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War. Here the two academics explain the inspiration behind the pioneering new online collection.

The Virtual Museum of the Spanish Civil War (VMSCW) is a project built by volunteers from many countries. It's an educational initiative but it is also a political one. The expansion of knowledge about the Spanish Civil War still arouses suspicion and sometimes rejection in Spain. Those of us who promote historical education can be pejoratively described as militants or, worse, people who want to recreate the war only to win it in the realm of memory after having lost it on the battlefield.

This accusation is linked to two other reasons that make our work political. One is that we are democrats, and thus we refuse to accept that both sides on the war were equals. As we have repeatedly said, there were enemies of democracy on both sides, but the democrats only fought for the Republic. The other is that we are humanists: we believe that crimes cannot be excused for any reasons, political ones included.



▲ Illustrated pamphlet on the work of Britain's Spanish Medical Aid Committee.



► Special edition of the French pictorial magazine *Vu*, highlighting the cause of the Spanish Republic, published in August 1936.

online

This position creates suspicion in many quarters – we can live with that.

The VMSCW was launched in Canada on 15 September 2022. It is housed, in the degree that any digital information has a home, in the library of Trent University. The road to the museum's opening has been a long one. It started with a conversation between this article's authors in late 2014. At the time we knew next to nothing about digital humanities. But this was not our only problem. We also knew very little about the situation of public history in Spain, museums in particular, and how it functioned in the wider European context. The project thus had two aspects: to devise how to create an online museum and to understand what content a museum should have in a post-Cold War and post-colonial world.

An additional but crucial aspect was where to find funds to pay for the project. For two

historians based in Canada, it did not help that the topic of the museum was about a distant and relatively wealthy European country. The enlightened attitude of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) permitted us to obtain two grants. One was for a preparatory, brain-storming meeting at the University of Warwick in June 2015 and a subsequent conference on public humanities and the Spanish Civil War held at Barcelona's Memorial Democràtic in June 2016.*

The second grant came from SSHRC's Connections program and gave us the funding to proceed to the actual construction of the

‘We are democrats, and thus we refuse to accept that both sides on the war were equals.’

museum. We received official notification on 10 January 2020, just two months before Covid-19 put many normal activities on hold. Perhaps appropriately for a digital project, we did most of

the work without actually meeting in person.

In addition to the SSHRC grants, we received crucial financial and in-kind support from the University of Warwick, York University, Trent University and the Spanish Embassy in Canada. One source of support that brought a special emotional connection was the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion Memorial Fund.

Initiators

While the initiators of the project work in Canada, building the VMSCW has been a team effort. Memory studies expert Alison Ribeiro de Menezes in the United Kingdom, historian of fascism and the civil war Joan Maria Thomàs and archeologist Alfredo González Ruibal from Spain were involved from the first meeting at Warwick. Digital historian Andrea Davis from the United States joined the team later. Gender historian Sofía Rodríguez López and archivist Jesús Espinosa Romero provided crucial support. Dwayne Collins, digital scholarship librarian at Trent University, was essential to bringing the museum online.

Once funds were obtained we proceeded to ask prestigious colleagues, including journalists,

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to contribute to the creation of the virtual galleries. We looked for people, in addition to the team members, from different parts of Spain and with a diverse set of research interests. The idea was to create a museum that reflected as closely as possible the variety of experiences of Spaniards and foreigners during the conflict.

The main obstacle was to find objects for which copyright restrictions did not prohibit us from including them. We signed agreements with institutions in the US, UK and, crucially, in Spain where most of the images of the original objects were located. Two institutions, both belonging to Spain's Ministry of Culture and Sports, provided most of the more difficult to obtain objects: the Center for the Documentation of Historical Memory in Salamanca and the General Archive of the Administration (AGA) in Alcalá de Henares, Madrid.

‘The idea was to create a museum that reflected as closely as possible the variety of experiences of Spaniards and foreigners during the conflict.’

After many thrills and last moment situations, the virtual museum was finally opened in a ceremony at Trent attended by the newly appointed ambassador of Spain to Canada. The result is a bilingual museum in both English and Spanish. The content is currently divided into five galleries: the Course of the War, the International Context, Daily Life at the Front, the Rearguards, and Historical Memory.

Project

But this is only the first phase of an ongoing project, and we are already at work on phase two. This will include new language and new content. We expect to have the entire museum translated into three co-official languages of Spain: Basque, Catalan and Galician. There will also be interactive maps and new galleries such as the origins of the war, the soldiers' experience, regional and international sections by country, the consequences of the war, (the first years of the Franco regime), educational modules, and a database of sources for the study of the conflict. New colleagues, most of

them younger professionals, have agreed to collaborate. Last but not least, the museum is planning to have an open gallery with objects and texts offered by the public.

One of the most rewarding, and often moving, aspects of our work has been the number of citizens from many countries who have contacted us with ideas, offers of support and with objects and stories that they would like to share with us and perhaps post in the museum.

If readers are interested in the museum, please visit us at www.vscw.ca. And if you want to contact us, you can write to vscw@yorku.ca. We are all volunteers here!

* The proceedings were published as 'Public Humanities and the Spanish Civil War: Memory and the Digital in Contested Histories' edited by Antonio Cazorla-Sánchez, Alison Ribeiro de Menezes and Adrian Shubert (Macmillan, 2018).

VMSCW/ Sociedad de Ciencias Anzadi



◀ Morphine ampoules uncovered at an excavation site in Peña Lemoa, a Republican position defending Bilbao that changed hands repeatedly until it finally fell to the Rebels on 5 June 1937.

▼ Piece of a 'Milk for Spain' poster. British shoppers at the Co-operative Wholesale Society were encouraged to buy tokens to fund aid sent to Spain.

▼▼ Republican graffiti on the inside wall of a concrete pillbox fortification near Zigoitia in the Basque Country. The hammer and sickle and slogans were carved by the Madrid Battalion, a communist unit incorporated into the Basque Army.

VMSCW/Working Class Movement Library



VMSCW/Ketura, Álava-Araba

Volunteers from the coalfield

TONY FOX discusses renovations to Durham's International Brigade memorial and the effort to tell the story of the volunteers from around Durham.

The Durham International Brigade memorial plaque was unveiled by Jack Edwards on 10 October 2009 in Redhills, the Durham Miners' Hall. The Durham Branch of the Historical Association had their offices there and, as chairman from 2005, I would see the plaque in the reception hall often. In 2010 I sent a photograph of the plaque to IBMT Film Coordinator Marshall Mateer, noting that the important red star had not yet been replaced.

In 2019 I remarked on a Twitter post of the plaque that it was still without the red star. After a brief conversation, the Miners' Hall agreed to include the repair as part of the multi-million-pound renovation being undertaken. This project

► Plaque to Durham volunteers in the city's Miners' Hall. Unveiled by Jack Edwards, 10 October 2009.



is due to be completed in the spring of 2023.

Our current plan is to rededicate the Durham International Brigade memorial plaque in time for the Big Meet in July 2023. To publicise this, I was asked to write about the Durham miners who fought in the International Brigade.

This task gave me a little difficulty, for despite Will Lawther being on the general council of the Trades Union Congress and Deputy President of

‘Our current plan is to rededicate the Durham memorial plaque in time for the Big Meet in July 2023.’

the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), the Durham miners did not officially support the International Brigades. Will Lawther, who became President of the MFGB in 1939, did attend

fundraising and memorial events, especially the latter where his brother, Cliff, was commemorated.

However, the plaque is in fact dedicated to ‘those brave men and women from the Durham area’, which allows me look at people from the mining communities and not just those who were employed as miners.

Cliff Lawther (1912-1937) is one of the dozen men I have chosen to write about. He enlisted in the British Battalion on 7 January 1937 and was killed on the first day of the Battle of Jarama five weeks later. Would it have been difficult for Will to reconcile the TUC policy of supporting non-intervention when his brother had given his life for the Spanish Republic?

In this piece I am mainly considering the men from the city of Durham and from the surrounding pit villages that fell within the limits of the county at the time. I've discovered no female volunteers so far, which may be due to medical aid recruitment hubs being based more in large urban areas. At the time, the boundaries of Durham did

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Cliff Lawther.

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include the pit village of Chopwell, the birthplace of George Short, one of the Communist Party district organisers who played a key role in recruiting volunteers in the North East. Short was born in Chopwell in 1900 and **Wilf Jobling** was born there nine years later. Jobling had been at the head of the North East contingent on the 1936 National Hunger March before being given responsibility for a large transport of volunteers who arrived in Spain on 25 January 1937. Jobling was killed at Jarama on 27 February 1937.

Cliff Lawther and Wilf Jobling are not, however, the only high profile volunteers amongst the dozen men. **Anthony Craft** rose to the rank of sergeant in the 15th Brigade Anti-Tank Battery, serving alongside Teesside volunteers Otto Estensen and Tommy Chilvers. Joe Rawlings, though Durham born, is mostly known for leading the Birkenhead Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement on Merseyside. Rawlings and his co-organiser Leo McGree were imprisoned in 1932 as a punishment for the 'Birkenhead Riot'.

Rawlings arrived in Spain in January 1937, fought as a sergeant in No.1 Company at Jarama before falling ill and being repatriated in July 1937. At the 2022 Miners' Gala we were joined by Sheila Grey, a niece of **Edward** (1907-1937) and **William Tattam** (1915-1938) of Whitburn – possibly the only two Durham volunteers who had been a miner. William was one of the earliest volunteers to enlist. Arriving in December 1936, he was killed in an accident in July 1937. Four months later Edward arrived in



Spain and was killed in the Aragón retreats in March 1938.

Possibly the most unusual of the volunteers is **Thomas Worsley** (1907-1977), who was born in

‘Would it have been difficult for Will Lawther to reconcile the TUC policy when his brother had given his life for Spain.’

Durham as one of the five children of a clergyman, Cuthbert Worsley. Thomas Worsley was a writer, editor and a theatre and television critic. He is best remembered for his ground-breaking



◀◀ Wilf Jobling before Spain.

◀ Sheila Grey, niece of the Tattam brothers, at the unveiling of a plaque to volunteers from Newcastle, November 2016.

autobiography 'Flannelled Fool: A Slice of a Life in the Thirties' (1967).

Worsley was in Spain well before the formation of the British Battalion, having travelled there with Stephen Spender to investigate the whereabouts of the crew of a Russian supply ship sunk by the Italian navy. He was also friends with Esmond Romilly and Tony Hyndman, both of whom served in the International Brigade, and mentions meeting them in his autobiographical book 'Behind the Battle' (1939). Worsley did not serve as a fighter in the British Battalion, but his work with Norman Bethune places him within the International Brigade medical services.

We are only in the early stages of the effort to recognise and celebrate the stories of the Durham volunteers but, after the fantastic reception the IBMT banner received at the 2022 Big Meet, we feel confident that people will find it of interest.



Members flying the IBMT banner at the Durham Miners' Gala, 9 July 2022.



Heinrich Hoffmann/Getty Images

◀ Franco and Hitler meet in Hendaye in 1940.

Spain outlived the Third Reich. Twelve editions were published, alongside many other antisemitic tirades, during the Franco dictatorship that lasted until the generalísimo's death in 1975.

As the tide of the Second World War turned against the Axis powers, efforts were made to deny that antisemitism had been central to Francoist propaganda. Preston demolishes the myth that paints Franco as a saviour of Jews during the Holocaust. Up to 35,000 Jewish refugees did manage to pass through Spain to safety during the Second World War, many of them clandestinely. Others were turned away at the border or imprisoned, and Jewish relief organisations were banned.

'The foul lunacy of the Jewish-masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy theory is brought to life via mini-biographies of six of its ardent adherents.'

A few heroic Spanish diplomats – in Berlin, Bucharest, Budapest and Sofia – took unilateral initiatives to save hundreds of Jewish lives. But consular protection for Sephardic Jews in Greece was refused (at least 45,000 were sent from Salonica to Auschwitz), Franco did nothing to save hundreds of Jews with Spanish nationality in Nazi concentration camps and German Jewish refugees were handed over to the Gestapo.

Several prominent Republican politicians were freemasons. The Catholic Church hated them and so did Franco, though for him it was personal. They were 'the great invasion of evil' and, he wrote in 1962, 'atheistic traitors in exile, delinquents, swindlers, men who betrayed their wives', the latter categorisation a thinly concealed swipe at his father, who was a mason and a womaniser.

Pathological

His antipathy to the left was just as pathological. In 1938, with the civil war still raging, the Caudillo authorised funding for Dr Antonio Vallejo-Nágera, head of the military psychiatric services, to find the 'red gene' that linked Marxism with mental disorders and moral degeneracy. The premise was that left-wingers were polluting the pure Spanish race with Jewish strains. Nágera's team of investigators included two German scientific advisers and tests were carried out on captured International Brigaders and Republican women prisoners.

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'Fake news' as justification for hatred and war



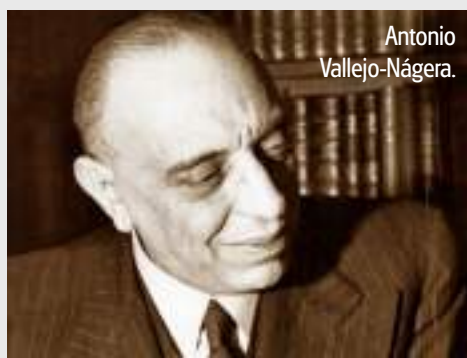
'Architects of Terror: Paranoia, Conspiracy and Anti-Semitism in Franco's Spain' by Paul Preston (HarperCollins, 2023).

that brought General Franco to power and in the process killed half a million Spaniards and inflicted misery and exile on countless more.

Antisemitism has deep roots in Spanish history, going back to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 and the Catholic Church's efforts in the Inquisition to 'cleanse' the country of non-believers. Then, early in the 1930s came publication of the fabricated antisemitic text, 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', which supposedly showed Jewish plans for world domination. The forgery found fertile ground among the enemies of the newly installed Republic, having already been seized upon by Hitler and the Nazis to underpin their antisemitic creed. Its influence in

Before the Spanish Civil War began in July 1936 there were no more than 6,000 Jews living in Spain and the Communist Party was tiny. Yet the plotters who launched the coup that started the war declared they were fighting, not the Spanish Republic's elected government, but a Jewish-masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy. Their enemy was an 'Anti-Spain' responsible for every disaster that had beset the fatherland, from the Muslim invasion to the loss of empire.

Such an interpretation of Spanish history may have been chronologically bizarre, as Paul Preston notes in this characteristically powerful and chillingly entertaining book. But it proved highly effective in justifying and generating enthusiasm for the uprising



Antonio Vallejo-Nágera.



▲ Francoist propaganda poster from the Spanish Civil War (c. 1938), showing a Rebel soldier sweeping away Bolshevism, social injustice, masons, separatism, the anarchist FAI and enemy politicians.

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The foul lunacy of the Jewish-masonic-Bolshevik conspiracy theory – a classic case of ‘fake news’, according to the author – is brought to life via mini-biographies of six of its ardent adherents, each with their own chapter. They are a motley and unsavoury crew. There is the police chief and intelligence agent Mauricio Carlavilla, who kept a portrait of Hitler on his desk until retirement in 1957 and who was the author of several diatribes, including ‘Sodomitas’, which set out to link homosexuality with communism.

Influential

The influential priest and author Juan Tusquets began compiling lists of Jews and freemasons well before the civil war and, at the cost of innumerable lives lost and ruined, continued his work within the Sección Judeo-Masónica of Franco’s military intelligence agency. Just as well-placed in

Francoist circles was the poet José María Pemán, who extolled the brutal murder of Republican supporters in the reign of terror that followed the 1936 uprising. The war was necessary to protect the Virgin from being Russian or Jewish and ‘had been sent by God to teach Spaniards a lesson, to



◀ General Emilio Mola.

permit them to purify themselves, to leave behind their past sins and errors, and to reach the end pure and cleansed’.

Perhaps even more crazed was the aristocratic, polo-playing sadist Gonzalo de Aguilera who, as Franco’s press officer during the civil war, would explain to foreign correspondents in perfect English (his mother was Scottish) that, like plague-ridden rats, the Spanish masses had been infected with the virus of Bolshevism. He blamed this on sewers

‘The Caudillo authorised funding for Dr Antonio Vallejo Nágera, head of the military psychiatric services, to find the “red gene” that linked Marxism with mental disorders and moral degeneracy.’

and modern plumbing, which had allowed too many of these ‘animals’ to survive. A vicious bully and toadying snob, he almost certainly sexually abused his daughter Magdalena over several years. The end of his life was fittingly and gruesomely tragic. By 1964 he was seriously paranoid and liable to fits of wild rage. In one of these he shot dead his two sons at the family estate. He was locked up in an asylum in nearby Salamanca, where he died in the following year.

The final profiles are of two generals in Franco’s rebel army: Emilio Mola and Gonzalo Queipo de Llano. Both professed to be waging a crusade to save Spain from, as Queipo de Llano put it, ‘Marxist hordes’ and ‘the [Jewish] race that propagates communism, hoards gold and aspires to subjugate the world’. Mola was cold-bloodedly responsible for the murders of some 40,000 civilians in northern Spain. Queipo de Llano, Franco’s corrupt military strongman in Seville, was a bombastic psychopath who oversaw the murder and rape of thousands of Republican supporters in the working-class districts of the city.

Mola died in a plane crash during the civil war, while Queipo de Llano lived until 1951. Of the trio profiled by Preston who survived until Spain’s return to democracy only Carlavilla seems to have stuck to his ideological guns, though his final years were spent in a sordid room of a Madrid lodging house. Tusquets and Pemán by contrast tried with some success to deny and downplay their pasts. Preston’s devastating new book will hopefully make sure that, in posterity at least, they won’t get away with it.

JIM JUMP



‘A People’s History of Catalonia’ by Michael Eade (Pluto Press, 2022).

Since the dramatic events of the referendum and declaration of independence in October 2017, media attention has understandably shifted away from the Catalan issue. This volume by Michael Eade, author of ‘Catalonia: A Cultural History’ and ‘Barcelona: the City that Reinvented Itself’ is therefore particularly timely. The author places Catalan history within the context of developments in Spain as a whole and the book provides readers with an overview of Spanish history from quite a different perspective than that more commonly encountered in English.

The book is divided into two parts, the first covering the early history of Catalonia while the second, headed ‘The Working Class Moves Centre Stage’, focuses on the period beginning with the Napoleonic Wars. The volume includes a useful timeline, a glossary and a list of acronyms. Each chapter concludes with a short profile of a rebel figure from the period covered in that chapter.

‘The book provides readers with an overview of Spanish history quite a bit different than that more commonly encountered in English.’

The author recognises the book’s limitations as a ‘people’s history’ which, he stresses, ‘should rescue from oblivion the silenced voices of the oppressed.’ ‘A People’s History of Catalonia is’, by contrast, ‘a book of interpretation’ reliant on the work of ‘real historians’, although the last two chapters, covering the period since the transition of the 1970s, are partially based on his own experiences of the struggles of the period and his conversations with other participants.

Understanding

Eade argues that the key to understanding Catalonia’s modern history is ‘through the intertwining of national and class demands, or often their failure to intertwine’. Thus, for example, his discussion of the events of the Catalan Rebellion of 1640-1659 and of the War of the Spanish Succession, which culminated in the siege of Barcelona in 1713-1714, stresses class conflict as an element in Catalan resistance. Similarly his

Class and conflict in Catalonia



account of the 1920s and 1930s emphasises the overlapping positions of the anarchists and the leftist Catalan nationalists of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) rather than their differences.

The author rejects the arguments put forward by Spanish nationalist historians and others, who claim that a Spanish state was established by the union of the crowns of Castile and Aragón in 1469. The narrative is punctuated with references to the arguments of opponents of the nationalist movement, both in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain. These are roundly rejected. Ultimately, he argues, the opposition to Catalan independence by Spanish political elites is based on two little-confessed reasons: that Catalan (and Basque) independence would weaken the Spanish state's influence in Europe and would make it poorer.

However, Eade also rejects the versions of history propounded by Catalan nationalist historians, arguing that 'when you read Catalan nationalist histories, the glories of the past are often exaggerated while the sins are skipped over

lightly'. He is particularly concerned to expose the claims of writers such as Ferran Soldevila, who argue that Catalan medieval expansion in the Mediterranean was based on 'pactism' (agreements or deals) and who ignore the violence and destruction involved. As an example he highlights the brutal conquest of Mallorca from the Moors in 1229-1230.

'Eade rejects the versions of history propounded by Catalan nationalist historians.'

His discussion of the 19th century largely ignores the *Renaixença*, the bourgeois nationalist literary and cultural movement which is often the focus of accounts of the development of Catalan identity. He is also, understandably, dismissive of the 20th century conservative Catalanism of the *Lliga Catalana*, the party led by the financier



▲ A woman dressed as a personification of Catalonia, celebrating the declaration of the Republic in Barcelona's Plaça de Sant Jaume, 14 April 1931.

Francesc Cambó and supported by other business leaders. He points to their reliance on governments in Madrid for the repression of the Barcelona working-class movement led by the anarchist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* in 1919-1923.

Governments

Although not all Spanish governments in this period were equally willing to support this repression, the industrial elite also developed a close relationship with the army leadership in Barcelona, which led to their support for Primo de Rivera's coup d'état in September 1923. It would also later culminate in the financial and political support given to Franco by Cambó and other business leaders during the civil war.

The final chapter discusses the events leading up to the independence referendum of 2017 and the subsequent declaration of independence. Here the author's sympathies are clear as a supporter of the *Candidatures d'Unitat Popular* (CUP), the coalition of grassroots pro-independence movements. He defines the modern independence movement as 'a reactive nationalism, in defence of Catalan rights and identity against a more powerful Spanish state...a coming together of sections of a bourgeoisie fed up with the lack of political influence consonant with its economic strength and a working-class/petit bourgeois movement fighting for socialism or, at least, a more just state'.

Not all readers will agree with his interpretation of the historical relationship between Catalonia and the Spanish state and his views will be particularly unpopular in some quarters in Spain. However, this book should be essential reading for anyone looking for an introduction in English to the complexity of Catalonia's relationship with the rest of Spain and the still-unresolved issues in this relationship.

CHARLIE NURSE

'Our Fathers Fought Franco' by Lisa Croft, Willy Maley, Jennie Renton and Tam Watters (Luath Press, 2023).



As we are reminded on the first page of this absorbing book, the aim of the IBMT is to 'keep alive the memory and spirit of the men and women who fought fascism in Spain'. Few publications about the Spanish Civil War achieve this with such dramatic impact.

This compilation of fascinating, yet often harrowing, stories arises from a meeting of four descendants of British International Brigaders who write about memories of their fathers, and a grandfather. All were members of No.2 Machine Gun Company, captured at the Battle of Jarama in February 1937.

As the excellent foreword by Daniel Gray puts it, these accounts are: 'representative of fathers (and mothers) from across the world who went to Spain with one shared aim: to smash fascism.'

James Maley, Donald Renton, George (Geordie) Watters and Archibald Campbell McAskill 'AC' Williams were together in captivity for some 14 weeks, before being released as part of a prisoner exchange which involved repatriation of Italians captured in the Republic's successful Guadalajara campaign. Three of them were Scots and the fourth, AC, had Scottish ancestry. All of them were activists against the evils of class-divided Britain and America in the 1930s and all of them joined the Communist Party.

Though the Spanish war brought them together, their paths seldom crossed in later life. After Spain they rarely spoke of their experiences, and it was only the determination of historians as well as the persistent curiosity of their children and their

grandchildren that got them to talk.

Maley, born in 1908, personified 'Red Clydeside', taking part in huge demonstrations against social distress following the First World War. His son Willy comments: 'James hated anti-Catholic prejudice, but he hated fascist Catholics even more.' With uncanny prescience he joined the Territorial Army with the aim of getting military experience. For all their lack of formal education, both he and Don Renton, who also joined the TA, were canny enough to realise that it would ultimately come to a shootout with fascism. Both went on to serve in the British Army during the Second World War, as did Geordie Watters.

Like Maley, Renton, born 1912 in Portobello, became immersed in agitation against

'Out of the terrible suffering and degradation imposed on the men in Franco's gaols come stories of courage and defiance.'

unemployment, poverty, and the hated Means Test. His daughter Jennie reveals newspaper accounts of Don protesting against the government's withdrawal of winter relief payments for the unemployed by leading an 'invasion' of the Ritz hotel. Don recalled: 'The manager was most upset by the fact that I wore my hat in the Grill Room'.

Geordie Watters, born 1904, into the mining community of Prestonpans, took part in the coal strikes of the 1920s and was blacklisted. His son Tam's research reveals the rawness of class conflict at that time: when further strikes were threatened Conservative MP Lady Astor commented: 'What do

Testimony



these earthworms want now?'

Born 1904 in Portsmouth, AC Williams emigrated to Canada and was soon to become unemployed. He was sentenced to two years hard labour by a court in Saskatoon after leading a May Day protest against appalling conditions in government work camps. Granddaughter Lisa Croft recites Williams's account of prejudice against immigrants, and how AC was finally deported back to Britain 'in chains'.

Recollections

Even the honest recollections of Maley, Renton, Watters and Williams could never dispel the fog of war sufficiently to clarify the reasons for the complete destruction of No. 2 Machine Gun Company at Jarama. The previous day the gunners had saved the day for the British Battalion by stemming an attack from the Nationalist's Moorish shock-troopers – but



'Behind the Spanish Barricades' John Langdon-Davies (The Clapton Press, 2022).

Originally appearing in November 1936, the softback reprint of this book is one of The Clapton Press's many fascinating recent publications.

It's been quite a few years since I read this work and this edition brings back many happy memories comparing today's Barcelona and Langdon-Davies's description of the city in August 1936. And even now, Barcelona has changed since I first read it!

His description of the Catalans he met, from various background, show the sense of fear and uncertainty that must have been evident for citizens. But there's also a distinct sense of hope

Revolutionary Barcelona

for so many who had nothing. His description of the El Raval neighbourhood can still be witnessed for those brave enough to visit it.

His visits to Madrid and Toledo are also of interest. I am pretty certain that the two 'Germans' that he met below the Alcazar are Robert Capa and Gerda Taro. Langdon-Davies's photos of the barricades look very similar to those taken by Capa and Taro. And his mention of the pilot 'M' in Madrid must surely refer to André Malraux. Langdon-Davies's love affair and admiration for Catalonia I share as well. Does that make me biased towards this book? Maybe! His description of *seny* (sense) made me think of my many Catalan friends who are also interested in the Spanish Civil War. But it also brought to mind

the Catalan *rauxa* (passionate ardour) that is also in the make-up of so many Catalans.

Regarding a moment in time in the summer of 1936 when all was possible, Langdon-Davies gives his firsthand observations of a Spain that was yet to

'He gives his firsthand observations of a Spain that was yet to experience the full horror of war.'

experience the full horror of war. His sympathy for the anarchist movement is plain to see. But his attempt to honestly describe what he witnessed is

of Franco's prisoners



◀◀ Authors and relatives of the volunteers, (from left) Willy Maley, Rosemary Williams, Tam Watters and Lisa Croft.

◀ George Watters speaking to a Nationalist guard at Talavera de la Reina detention camp, as seen in a 1937 propaganda newsreel featuring British prisoners of war in Spain.

only in the nick of time, and after originally being supplied with the wrong ammunition. What is certain is that, under heavy fire, with mounting casualties, the men became surrounded, and were duped into believing that fascist troops behind them were Republican reinforcements. Four of the 31 volunteers captured were shot almost immediately. According to Maley, only the realisation that the men were *ingleses* and not Russians deterred the Moors from killing all of them.

Eventually 27 men were transported to an overcrowded, insanitary gaol in Talavera de la Reina. Cold, lice-ridden, half-starved, they lived in constant fear of execution, witnessing mass executions of Spanish comrades and being ordered to dig mass burial pits. Later they were transferred to Salamanca. Here their treatment improved, as negotiations proceeded to arrange an exchange of prisoners.

Meanwhile loved ones at home believed the men had been killed – until they caught glimpses of them on cinema newsreels. The prisoners were filmed receiving cigarettes (confiscated as soon as the cameras were switched off) as part of a fascist propaganda stunt which presaged their release. But out of the terrible suffering and degradation imposed on the men in Franco's gaols come stories of courage and defiance. Notwithstanding the pervasive threat of execution, AC Williams even began learning Spanish.

At the end of May the men returned home emaciated and traumatised. Much of the book is devoted to how they coped with life – especially family life – in their later years. Jennie Renton recalls the poverty of her childhood which resulted from her father accepting full-time work with the Communist Party, and

then his break with the party over Hungary. There is a reflective sadness about Renton's drinking in later years and unhappiness in her parents' marriage. But her pride in her father's achievements shines through: Renton volunteered as a human guinea pig in Professor Haldane's experiments to find safe escape methods for submariners after the *Thetis* tragedy.

Struggled

Geordie Waters also struggled to find work and security for his large family in the post-war years, but he eventually returned to mining and active union involvement. He remained loyal to the Communist Party to the end and the pride in him felt by his son reverberates throughout.

Willy Maley records his father summing up a lifetime's worth of struggle against injustice: 'The rich are hard to beat...They'll fight for what they want.'

From Lisa Croft we learn of the extraordinary prison drawings and notebooks which grandfather AC managed to hide in his clothing. Her narrative includes a verbatim account of his interrogation by a Spanish officer, educated at Stonyhurst College, Lancashire.

AC Williams returned from Spain to see his two-month old baby Rosemary (Lisa's mother) for the first time. He and his wife worked for the Aid Spain movement, helping settle refugee Basque children. Later, in spite of his Communist antecedents, AC found work in Royal Ordnance factories. It made it easy for the security services to keep tabs on him, as they undoubtedly did with the other heroes of this book – patriots all.

In spite of their natural reticence, these four survivors of Franco's cruelty let their lives speak. And thanks to the fact that their children paid such close attention, their testimony is as powerful as ever.

ROBERT HARGREAVES



◀ Langdon-Davies (centre, hands together) with militiamen at the Ritz hotel in Barcelona, converted into a popular dining room in 1936.

of great value when considering the news stories that he describes of 'naked dancing nuns' as so often written about in far too many British newspapers supporting the Nationalist side.

It is a worthy story to be republished and the new prologue by Professor Paul Preston not only describes the background to this important book, but also puts into context the work by Langdon-

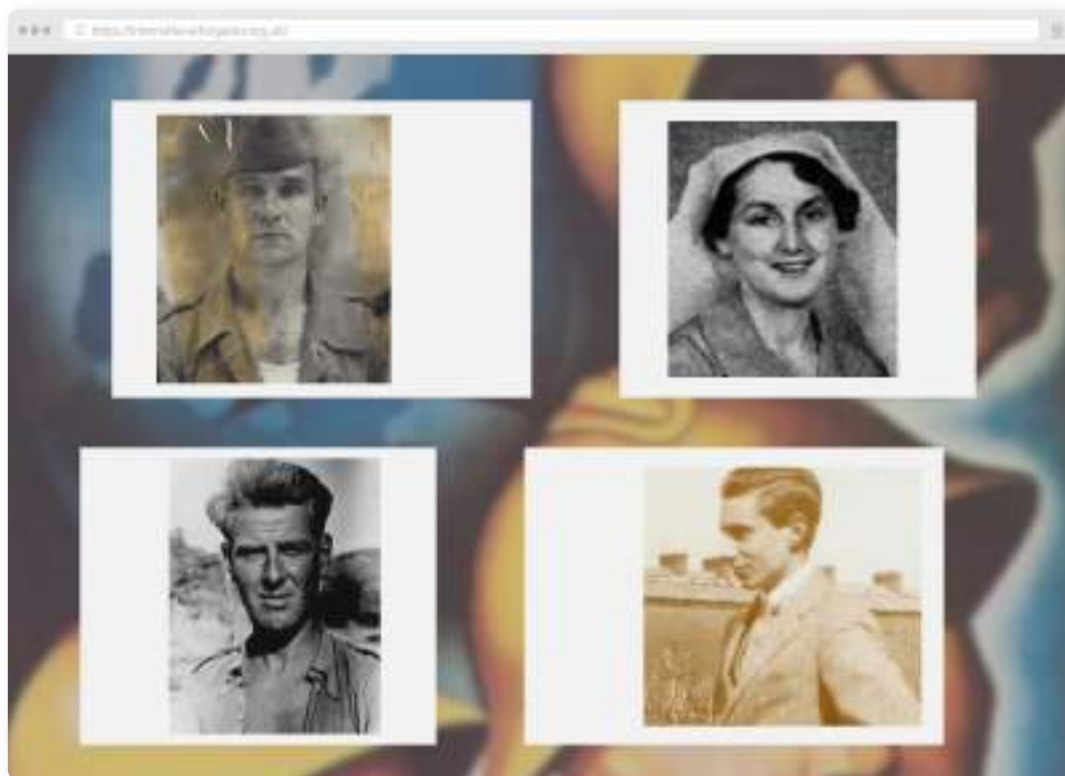
Davies later in the war in setting up the Foster Parents Plan (now Plan International) and the Colonia Inglés in Puigcerdà near the Catalan-French border. That is a subject worthy of study in itself – his Quaker background in action.

Langdon-Davies has also left an important archive of his material and other photos of his time in Spain and Catalonia in his adopted town of Sant

Feliu de Guixols. It is an archive highly recommended in visiting (and with 1,100 photos to admire). And in later life he designed the 'Jackdaw' folios on historical subjects that children in the 1960s such as myself enjoyed (I still have one on The Spanish Armada). I believe that The Young 'Uns devised their folio presentation of their musical on Johnny Longstaff based on the Jackdaw series.

I would recommend this book if only to gain an insight to the early days of the conflict. In some ways it almost complements Peadar O'Donnell's '¡Salud!' which was recently published in Ireland. Both are worthy witnesses to a time of hope for many with absolutely nothing. Much like today, sadly. Many thanks to The Clapton Press for publishing not just this but many other interesting new and reprinted books on the subject of the Spanish Civil War.

ALAN WARREN



◀ The volunteers' database can be accessed through the IBMT website at: www.internationalbrigades.org.uk/uncategorized/the-volunteers.

The role of our database

IBMT Archivist **ALAN LLOYD** reports on his work overhauling the Trust's online database of International Brigade volunteers from Britain and Ireland.

Work is under way to review each of the profiles currently held on the IBMT volunteers' database. The aim is to include as much biographical detail as is known on each of the over 2,000 entries, along with the references for interested members and relatives to follow up on if they wish.

This will ensure that relatives will find it a user friendly site to search for family members who may have gone to Spain.

In addition, potential researchers and authors will find the details trustworthy, and avoid mistakes such as the one which continually irks me, where Dorothy Rutter is said to have been killed at Dunkirk when it was, sadly, a relative.

Names

Simply getting the names correct is often a very laborious task, as the rudimentary administration of the British Battalion meant they were often misspelt. My favourite misspelling to date is perhaps the only British volunteer connected to the Channel Islands. Misspellings of his name include Decroy and Decroix, when it is actually 'de Ste Croix'.



Alan Lloyd.

Many volunteers also deliberately gave variations, or false names, for many reasons, maybe family, escaping the authorities, or political in the case of many Jewish volunteers.

I am close to finishing the entries of surnames beginning with 'D' and it is already clear that there will be too many whose real name will never be known, particularly those amongst the early arrivals who were killed at Jarama, or returned early. Who were David Abdul, James Alwyn or Gene Austin, for example?

Those who arrived before the formation of the British Battalion present an even bigger challenge. Arnold Jeans may be a well-known name amongst those of us interested in the Spanish Civil War but, apart from knowing he was a Cambridge graduate and chemist, it has been impossible to determine even a date or a place of birth. Albert Bentley was killed at the Casa de Campo, and we only know that he was a seaman.

I have also headlined each profile with the volunteer's real name, if we know it, to help with

identification. So, for example, relatives of Ronald Dennison will be able to quickly see that it is him, and read that he was in Spain as Bill Meredith further down in the script. The name Meredith will still be searchable.

Once I have finished this initial review it will be necessary to take out an ancestry.co.uk subscription, or similar, for Scottish and Irish volunteers, as I am currently restricted in the depth of the research I can

'The aim is to include as much detail as is known on each of the over 2,000 entries, along with references for members to follow up on if they wish.'

make for them. Please feel free to send an email to the office, whether it is to amend or add information, and it will be forwarded on to me. This will help the IBMT to provide the most accurate and comprehensive picture of the lives of these courageous people.

Finally, something that does not impact on my research, thankfully, but worth discussing over a drink: what is it makes somebody an Englishman or Welshman, say. For instance was Peter Daly, born in Liverpool, English or Irish? Was Bob Cooney, who was born in Sunderland, English or Scottish?

Merchandise from the IBMT

Proceeds help fund the commemorative, educational and publicity work of the International Brigade Memorial Trust.

Free postage & packing on goods totalling £30 or more for orders within the UK and Europe.

Send orders, including your name and address, a size and colour where appropriate, and a cheque payable to the IBMT to: IBMT Merchandise, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0DU.

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For orders outside the UK or to pay by credit card or PayPal, go to the merchandise page on our website: (www.international-brigades.org.uk/catalog) where there are also other items listed for sale.



Spanish Civil War postcards: Collection of 20 cards based on designs originally made in 1937 by the Sindicat de Dibuixants Professionals. Produced in collaboration with art reproduction specialists Past Pixels. £12 plus £3 p&p.



Scotland International Brigade tote bag: This tote bag remembers the 549 Scottish volunteers who fought fascism in Spain. Produced by radical merchandise specialists Red Molotov. £11 plus £3 p&p.



Wales International Brigade tote bag: Celebrate the 184 volunteers from Wales who fought fascism in Spain with this tote bag. Produced by radical merchandise specialists Red Molotov. £11 plus £3 p&p.



British Battalion t-shirt: Based on the original British Battalion banner brought back from Spain towards the end of the Spanish Civil War. Design comes in full colour or monochrome. Produced by merchandise specialists Red Molotov. Available in sizes: **XXL, XL, L, M, S** £20 plus £4 p&p.



Ireland International Brigade tote bag: This tote bag combines the Spanish Republic's flag and the starry plough of the Irish Citizen Army. Produced by radical merchandise specialists Red Molotov. £11 plus £3 p&p.



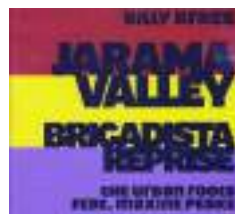
Football scarf: In the colours of the Spanish Republic. With '¡No pasarán!' on one side and 'International Brigade Memorial Trust' on the other. £13 plus £5 p&p.



International Brigades greetings cards: Featuring five different pieces of International Brigade-themed artwork. Produced in collaboration with art reproduction specialists Past Pixels. 10 cards and envelopes per pack. £10 plus £3 p&p.



IBMT classic badge: A vintage badge design back in stock due to popular demand. Metal badge in purple, red, blue and gold, with the IBMT name in a banner across the foot of the badge. £5 plus £3 p&p.



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Tote bags: High quality cotton canvas tote bag with designs based on the British Battalion banner, the International Brigade emblem or celebrating Irish, Scottish or Welsh volunteers (see designs of the respective t-shirts). Available in a range of colours. Produced in collaboration with Red Molotov. 38 x 42cms. £11 each plus £3 p&p.



International Brigades mug: 2,500 volunteers from Britain and Ireland joined the legendary International Brigades to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War. This quality ceramic mug features the emblem they wore with pride. Produced by radical merchandise specialists Red Molotov for the IBMT. £9 plus £3 p&p.



British Battalion mug: This quality ceramic mug features a design based on the original British Battalion banner brought back from Spain towards the end of the Spanish Civil War. Produced by radical merchandise specialists Red Molotov for the IBMT. £9 plus £3 p&p.



INTERNATIONAL BRIGADE MEMORIAL TRUST

Help us inspire new generations with the story of the men and women who fought fascism and defended democracy in Spain from 1936-1939.

International Brigade Memorial Trust

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¡No pasarán!
They shall not pass!

