

Baydon Hole Refugee Camp

“The Spanish Civil War was a bitter conflict, which divided the nation. Even now, the Spanish people are still learning to come to terms with their past which saw tens of thousands of deaths and millions uprooted and destitute. The plight of the Basque people was particularly tragic following the bombing of the town of Guernica in April 1937 by the planes of the Nazi Condor Legion.

“The destruction of Guernica, which inspired Pablo Picasso to paint his masterpiece of the same name. Public opinion was outraged by the bombing of Guernica, the first ever saturation bombing of a civilian population. The Basque government appealed to foreign nations to give temporary asylum to the children, but the British government adhered to its policy of non-intervention. A reluctant British government bowed to public pressure and accepted nearly 4,000 children to Britain as refugees from the Spanish Civil War.” <http://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history>

100 Basque children were evacuated to Baydon Hole.

“The lease of Baydon Hole farm, near Lambourn, was secured in early May for five months. A Berkshire Committee, with Mr. McIlroy as chairman, had already been formed. Major J.W. Tomkins was appointed Superintendent and, thanks to his military knowledge and energy, three large huts and several smaller buildings were erected with such speed, that it was possible to receive 25 children on June 7th and a further 75 five days later, a total of 100, in the first voluntary home in the country. During a glorious summer these children regained their physical and mental health, but the site was not suitable for winter quarters. After great difficulty, Bray Court, near Maidenhead, was found, and a lease was signed for a year.

“On October 16th a foggy day, the children were moved by coach, a distance of fifty miles, to their new home. Just in time, for the weather broke the next day. They soon settled down under Miss Burke’s care, and although about forty of the original number have returned to Spain, their places have been more than filled by children who have come from other homes, which have been closed.

“During the twelve months at Baydon and Bray Court, there has been very little illness. No cases of infectious disease have arisen, notwithstanding the prevalence of Measles, Mumps and Chicken Pox in the neighbouring towns. The conduct of the children has been exceptionally good, and they have endeared themselves to all who have come into contact with them.”

Dr R.S. Gilford, “Story of the Children”, *Recuerdo de los Niños Españoles*

<http://www.basquechildren.org/-/docs/articles/col026>

Berkshire Archives have a letter from National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief (Berkshire Section) concerning rent, 1937, Baydon Hole Farmhouse then being occupied by Major J.W. Tompkins, Camp Commandant of the group. Reference: D/EX 898/2/759/1-8

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/cf7ea376-bb3f-43e8-9965-c3a4975cc780>

For more information see <http://www.basquechildren.org/colonies/history>



The old steamship '*Habana*' that used to travel to/from to Cuba, bringing a cargo of almost 4,000 children to Southampton Docks, 23rd May 1937.



Basque children and staff outside Bray Court, 1938. Source unknown.