



## The National Archives

### Press release

5 November 2009

### CHILDREN FROM THE BASQUE 'TAKE FLIGHT' TO CARSHALTON

It's common knowledge that during the Second World War, many children living in big cities and towns were moved temporarily from their homes to places considered safer, usually out in the countryside. However it's a little known fact that the town of Carshalton was home to Basque refugees in 1937.

Today as part of the Archive Awareness [www.archiveawareness.com](http://www.archiveawareness.com) *Take Flight* Campaign, Sutton archives reveals a heart warming story of how Carshalton embraced children evacuated from the Basque Country into their community during the Spanish Civil War.

Sutton Central Library will be hosting a free exhibition from the Basque Children of '37 Association. The exhibition will tell the story of the children's exodus from the Basque Country, their arrival in Southampton and eventual dispersal across Britain with special emphasis on the Carshalton colonies. Additional boards on display describe the journey made by Ana María Gonzalez Garate, the children's "Maestra" or headteacher. She came from the Basque country herself and was responsible for the children here.

**Carmen Kilner, daughter of Ana María, said:**

"I am delighted that my mother's story is being told. It's heart warming that her many photographs and documents are being used illustrate an eventful part of her life along with that of the Basque Children who came to Carshalton. It was a unique and historic event; the largest ever number of child refugees to arrive in Britain, and totally supported by the good will of the British people – from individuals to companies and organisations."

August 1937 saw the arrival in Carshalton of 22 Basque refugee children along with three teachers. They were just a small number of the 4000 children evacuated from the Basque country to Britain after the bombing of Guernica in April 1937.

The British Government had taken a position of non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War and did not provide funding or support for the children. A local Basque Children's Committee was set up in Carshalton and raised funds and persuaded the Urban District Council to let them house the children in the Oaks Mansion. The children also helped raise the much needed money to feed and clothe themselves by putting on concerts and displays of traditional Basque dancing. It was not an easy life and several colonies closed due to lack of support with many children eventually being transferred to the Carshalton colony.

Three years after arriving they were moved to The Culvers on the banks of the River Wandle, Carshalton, where the colony continued until 1947 – the last remaining in Britain.

**Kath Shawcross, Borough Archivist & Local Studies Manager**, said

“This is an important yet little known part of the history of Carshalton and the role played by its inhabitants in helping the Basque refugee children. Through this exhibition we hope to raise awareness amongst the local population of Sutton about their role in past conflicts and show how the story is relevant today.”

**Angela Owusu, Archive Awareness Campaign Officer**, said:

“This fascinating story about human endeavour shows just how archives throw up the most fascinating documents. This autumn and winter Archives across the UK are opening their doors to the public so that people can search for captivating documents such as these”.

– Ends –

For further details, spokespeople or images on Archive Awareness Campaign, please contact **Angela Owusu** on **0208 392 5237** or email

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## Notes to Editors

### The exhibition runs until 30 November 2009

**Venue:** Europa Gallery, Ground Floor, Central Library, Sutton Central Library, St. Nicholas Way, Sutton, Surrey SM1 1EA

**Gallery opening times:** Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 9am to 5pm. Sunday 2pm to 4 pm.

- The boards contain the 'local' story being done by the library
- Anna Maria's daughter lives in Surrey and has lent the Library photographs for the display.
- Archive Awareness Campaign (AAC) [www.archiveawareness.com](http://www.archiveawareness.com) is an ongoing celebration of all kinds of fascinating archive treasures. It celebrates and promotes local and national archives. Throughout the year archives across the country open their doors to showcase history, hold open days and present workshops to help the public discover a piece of their own history.
- This year's AAC theme, which launches on 9<sup>th</sup> November, is *Take Flight*. It lends itself to a wide variety of archival work, in economic and industrial history; the impact of movement of peoples; innovation and ideas; engineering and science.
- Archive Awareness Campaign is spearheaded by the National Council on Archives ([www.ncaonline.org.uk](http://www.ncaonline.org.uk)) and funded by The National Archives ([www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)) and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council ([www.mla.gov.uk](http://www.mla.gov.uk)).