



Basque Children of '37 Association UK

To mark the 70th Anniversary of the flight of 4,000 Basque children evacuated from Spain during the Spanish Civil War a number of customised Smilers Sheets were produced by the *Basque Children of '37 Association UK*.

Two different designs were used; the first depicted the *SS Habana*, a converted liner used to evacuate the children, and the second featured a pair of British charity labels issued at the time to raise funds for the children. Five sheets of the *SS Habana* were printed and ten sheets of the charity label design.

Of the charity label sheet; four sheets were broken up to service covers and one sheet was broken up as singles for sale to members of the Association. Four sheets of the *SS Habana* sheet remain in tact with one sheet being broken up for covers. Of the remaining sheets one pair and a single sheet of the Charity stamps remains in the Association's Archives, two pairs were sold privately and one pair was sold at auction on eBay realising over £1500. All profits went to the Association's fund.



The Story Behind The Smilers Sheets

ONE day late on in May 1937 a liner looking the worse for wear and filled to overflowing with children came alongside at Southampton Docks. Her entry was silent. No ship's siren bid her welcome in case it frightened the children. They were Basques, refugees from a region of Spain that was suffering terribly from the Civil War then raging in that country. So on this silent note began a saga that closely involved Southampton. At times the bitterness and passion that divided Spain was to spill over and reveal itself in the Basque children and the English participants...



For the trip to England the old converted liner *SS Habana* was used. The children were taken down to the quay in trainloads of 600 amidst scenes of great emotion. All through May 20th the ship was loaded so she was ready to sail on the early morning tide. Before she left the Basque President Senor Aguirre went on board to bid them farewell. The ship *SS Habana* left the port of Santurce on the 21 May 1937 on its journey to Southampton. The *SS Habana* was escorted by two Royal Navy warships. A storm broke out in the Bay of Biscay and caused much sea-sickness amongst the children.



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The *SS Habana* was escorted by a Spanish destroyer until she picked up the British convoy under the Royal Oak and the Forester a few miles offshore. The crossing was rough and spirits were low till England was sighted midday on the 22nd. By that evening *SS Habana* was anchored off Fawley awaiting clearance from health authorities under Dr Maurice Williams.

The next day, Sunday 23rd May 1937, saw the *SS Habana* docked at Southampton with first group of children moved ashore to the temporary camp where they received a visit from the home Secretary, Sir Kingsley Wood. The numbers of the children who came to Great Britain vary in the different accounts, but according to the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, some 3,840 children came, together with 80 teachers, 120 auxiliaries and 15 catholic priests.

This pair of charity labels (issued in Britain during the Spanish Civil War to raise money for the Basque Children Refugees) appeared on the personalised labels of the Association's Smiler Sheet.



Some 19 sets of Commemorative covers were prepared by the Basque Children's Association to mark this event both dated 23rd May 2007 the official date of embarkation into Britain of the Basque Children refugees. The signature on the first cover is that of the boy who is pictured at the right hand end of the top row in the photo on the cover.



A third cover was produced by Clifford Kirkpatrick, a member of Association, on the occasion of Clifford's Grandson 7th Birthday which coincidentally was on 22nd May 2007 the date on which the Basque children entered into British waters. Two of the three covers are in the Kirkpatrick family and the third in a private collection.



The image shown on two of the covers depicts a group of young Basque children and at the Moor Hill camp, Southampton, shortly after disembarking from the *SS Habana*.