

Basque Children of '37 Association UK – Part 2



In 2007 I wrote a short article (No. 13) for this occasional series of Smilers Information notes recording the story and history behind the then recent, Basque Children sheets and covers issued by the Basque Children of '37 Association.

Since then there have been a number of other Smilers sheets issued by the Association with profits donated to the Basque Children of '37 Association UK.

I thought it would be worthwhile to issue an update (Part 2) to the story of these sheets for collectors of these interesting issues and I am indebted to Cliff Kilpatrick for the information provided here which I hope will enhance your enjoyment of these issues.

TSL-124 - Basque Children's Homes No. 1 - Weston Manor

In May 1937, close to 4000 children from the Basque region of Spain were brought to this country as refugees to escape the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. Initially they were accommodated in tents erected on land belonging to a local farmer in North Stoneham just outside Southampton and in the weeks following, as suitable accommodation and support structures became available, were sent in groups to various homes around Great Britain. Most were located in the south of England but four were in Wales and one in Scotland.



Over 100 premises are known to have become 'home' to Basque children and most of the homes are fondly remembered by those who were taken in. Many of the buildings are of quite outstanding architectural or historical interest in their own right and include several fine country mansions, an empty hotel, a Victorian workhouse and even a medieval castle! The first sheet produced in this series shows a view of Weston Manor, a Grade II listed building, near Totland on the Isle of Wight that was home to 114 Basque girls between 1937 and 1939. Ten numbered sheets were issued c. 3 October 2009.

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TSL-150 - Basque Children's Home No. 2 - Herstmonceux Castle

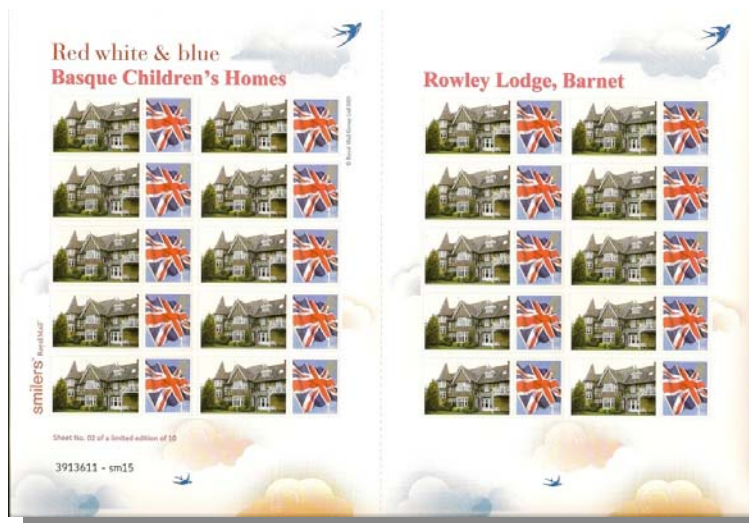
In the second sheet offered in the series of Basque Children's Homes features perhaps the most spectacular of all the homes occupied by the Basque Children refugees - Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex. In 1937 the castle was owned by Sir Paul Latham MP who that summer invited twelve Basque boys to come and stay. This was reported in the Echo newspaper on 22nd June 1937.

Only 10 sheets have been printed and this is a one-off opportunity to acquire such a rare and historically important Smilers Sheet. Ten numbered sheets were issued c. 26 February 2010.



TSL-161 Basque Children's Home No. 3 - Rowley Lodge

Rowley Lodge in Rowley Lane, Arkley near Barnet, is a beautiful house and garden. It is now in the London Borough of Barnet but in 1937 was in the county of Hertfordshire. The Catholic Church and Salvation Army were among the first institutions to provide shelter and care for about one third of the children who had arrived in this country from Spain as refugees on the 23rd May 1937, and although their intentions were no doubt sincere, their ability to supply proper facilities was not always successful.





Most children still had to be accommodated and cared for in buildings not belonging to the Church and Rowley Lodge was one of the first private properties made available for that purpose. Forty children of both sexes with accompanying adult helpers left the temporary camp at Eastleigh to take up residency at Rowley Lodge on 2nd June 1937. The matron, Mrs. Margaret Holliday, in charge of the day-to-day running of the home was a Spanish-speaking lady from Scotland. Under her conscientious supervision and the outstandingly good local support provided by the Hertfordshire Basque Children's Committee, financially responsible for the upkeep of the home and the welfare of the children, the home was one of the best run and was always willing to help out by taking in children from other homes as they were closed down. As a result, in addition to the original group sent to this home, many other children for varying periods spent time at this 'colony'.

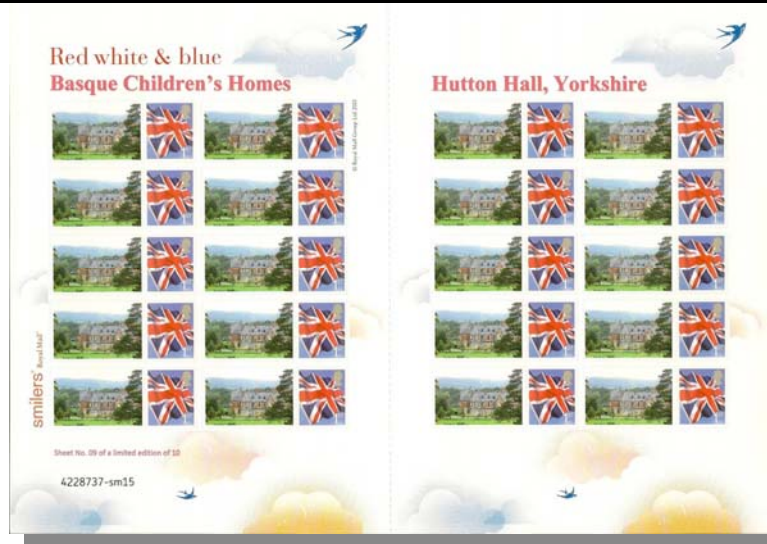
Pressure to repatriate the children was exerted as soon as Bilbao was captured by Franco's forces in July 1937 but this controversial subject was far from straightforward and around 500 of the 4000 or so children who arrived here were for a number of reasons unable to return to Spain and made England their permanent home. Funds to keep Rowley Lodge open were raised in a variety of ways. These included individuals committing to pay ten shillings per week to 'adopt' a child, local door-to-door collections and the children themselves putting on concerts, usually Basque dances in national costume, which were particularly popular. The children had to be temporarily moved out of Rowley Lodge during the war while bomb damage repairs were carried out but it resumed its function as 'home' to several children until well into 1942. A number of the 'children' now in their late 70s and 80s who stayed at Rowley Lodge still have fond memories of it. The photograph used on the smilers sheet was taken on 16th May 2010 and a photograph taken from a nearby position in 1937 showing some of the Basque children playing in the garden is shown below. Ten numbered sheets were issued c. 27 May 2010.



TSL-184 Basque Children's Home No. 4 - Hutton Hall, Hutton Village, Yorkshire

Hutton Hall near Guisborough in the Cleveland Hills area of North Yorkshire was built in 1866 for Joseph Whitwell Pease, a prominent Quaker, industrialist, and at the time Liberal Member of Parliament for South Durham. In its heyday it would have been magnificent and replaced an earlier and less grand Hutton Hall which was pulled down in 1868 when the present building was fully functioning. Its former splendour is still very evident.

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In 1937 Hutton Hall had been empty for a number of years and an approach was made to Joseph's son Sir Alfred Pease, when accommodation was being sought to house the Basque children refugees, by Ruth Pennyman who lived with her staunch landowning Tory husband Major James Pennyman in nearby Ormesby Hall (now a National Trust property). The appeal was successful and after some new refurbishment works were carried out the first intake of twenty children arrived at the Hall on 3 July 1937. Two accounts of life at Hutton Hall appear in *Recuerdos*, the collection of reminiscences written by the *niños* themselves and edited by Natalia Benjamin. Also a recent single colony study of Hutton Hall by Peter O'Brien, the local historian who lives in nearby Middlesborough sets out the history of the Hall with particular emphasis on the period it was used to accommodate the children and the part played by Ruth Pennyman in making the colony such a success. The number of children staying at Hutton Hall fluctuated as several were repatriated during 1938 and 1939 and new children arrived as other Basque children's homes were closed. The Hall was home to around fifty children at various times during the 26 months it was used for this purpose although the number at any one time never exceeded 40. The Hall was commandeered by the Army at the beginning of the Second World War and some of the children living there at the time went to live with the Pennymans at Ormesby Hall.



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Recently Cliff Kilpatrick made a visit to Middlesborough. Peter O'Brien had previously arranged for us all to visit Hutton Hall with the present owner and we could not have been made more welcome. The visit was extremely enjoyable and we made several new friends. The photograph used on the Smilers sheet was one of several taken by me on 13th October and permission was given to use any of them to promote awareness of the story of the Basque refugee children who came to this country and of the Basque Children's of '37 Association UK. Ten numbered sheets were issued c. end October 2010.