

## **Telling our stories - voices from the Basque child refugee oral histories: (6b) Life in the colonies**

### **Josefina Stubbs tells of her experience of the Salvation homes in London and Moor Hill House, Southampton**

#### **Clapton House, London**

“The Salvation Army said they would take 500 children, so my sister got in the queue and registered us. She put my brother’s name down but he wouldn’t come. We couldn’t find him so my sister and I went to London, firstly to Clapton House... They put on single-decker buses to take us there...”

“It was late afternoon and I saw these great big buildings. It seemed strange somehow. I was excited and then I wasn’t and I was wondering where I was going. I remember going into Clapton House. What a place that was. It was like a basement big room with wooden tables. We sat there and were given a drink and something to eat. They brought some bread and butter with some corned beef. I couldn’t eat it. I’d never seen or heard of corned beef before. Spam we were given as well. When they took us upstairs there was iron everywhere – just like a prison. Iron stairs that you could see through. Solid everywhere. There was wood in the dormitories, but the building seemed to be made of solid iron.”

#### **Brixton House, London**

“This was the one with the big dormitory. It was better than Clapton House because it had a great big space with trees where we could play. At the back was a big yard with washing facilities. My sister did the washing for both of us and she did it out there, by hand and then hung up to dry. It was under cover. There was a great big hall like a dance hall with a platform where the orchestra used to play with the Salvation Army at their meetings. Clapton House was the Headquarters of the Salvation Army to begin with but I think Brixton House was one of the houses that they could use. It was a big building with big dormitories. The main hall had a lot of wooden seats going up in tiers, higher and higher. Underneath these seats were cupboards with doors and those cupboards were full of clothes. The Salvation Army had all these clothes for people, we had some and we picked if we wanted a jumper or skirt and the Salvation Army lady would give it to us. That was Brixton House. It had a great big wall all the way around it and that’s where I lost my teddy... I never had him back. I was broken-hearted. He was my little pal.”

### **Moor Hill House, West End, Southampton**

“Carmen asked the Salvation Army lady if we would go to where our brother was and she said yes, but we didn’t. They took us to the station and put us on the train in the guard’s van. He was told that he had to put us off at Southampton Station and that a lady would be waiting for us. Eventually we arrived and when the train stopped the guard told us to get off and Miss Vessey was waiting for us. She was not from the Salvation Army, she was wonderful but so were the Salvation Army. She was the matron and took care of all the children at Moor Hill House...”

“It was lovely at Moor Hill House. We had lovely trees to climb and of course, I was a proper tomboy. We used to play cricket, football, all sorts and rounders, everything. Moor Hill House was a really happy house with all the children and Miss Vessey and Miss Lewis.”

Miss Lewis did the cooking and “it was better food and I could eat a little better... We had meat, different fish, rabbit, potatoes and vegetables, so it was much better”.

“Every Sunday we used to go to church with Miss Vessey.”

“Every Sunday we would go down to the docks. A little man [a volunteer Juanito Soli] would come and take us. We would go onto the beach at Southampton but we didn’t go into the water... We would go to see the *Queen Mary* and the *Queen Elizabeth* and all the big liners. Often we would see a Spanish boat in and we would go and talk to the Spanish men. One day we went inside the boat but I didn’t want to go because of going up the plank. I was frightened but one of the men came and got me and brought me down again.”

*It was during her stay at Moor Hill House that Josefina received some schooling for the first time and only time in the UK. There were two Spanish teachers at the House - Senorita Rita and Senorita Jesusa.*

“It was only like a bedroom they had as a classroom and there were so many girls and so many boys. Maybe there might have been fifteen to twenty of us [in each class]... We didn’t have any English at all. It was all in Spanish.”

*With the closure of Moor Hill House, and not able to return to Spain, Josefina and her sister lived with families, first in Bournemouth, then in Brighton and finally in North Staffordshire.*

“We stayed there until we were told that Moor Hill House was closing down. Most of the children then went back to Spain. There were one or two who had homes to go to. We went to Southbourne because a lady and her husband who came to see us were in the audience watching us dancing at Moor Hill House.”

