

Telling our stories - voices from the Basque child refugee oral histories: (2) the arrival at Southampton



Although the *Habana* arrived in Southampton on the 22 May it was not until the following morning that the children disembarked. The city was festooned with flags and bunting which had been put up to mark the coronation of George VI and which the Mayor of Southampton allowed to remain up for the children. They were met by crowds and by member of the Salvation Army.

The arrival left a strong imprint on the children.

Josefina Stubbs of her first sight of Southampton:

“My sister did take me up to the deck because people shouted ‘Land, Land.’ Of course, we got all excited.... They must have mistaken a cloud for land. But anyway, the second time when they did shout ‘Land’ it was the Isle of Wight... We didn’t go straight into Southampton Docks but stayed outside Fawley in the late evening. The next morning on the 23 May we went into the Docks at Southampton. The Salvation Army was waiting for us there. We thought they looked funny and wondered what they had on their heads, especially the Salvation Army ladies... The band was playing and people were giving us sweets and throwing ice creams. My sister managed to catch one.”

For **Josefina Savery** the memory was of Southampton covered in flags:

“I really thought we were given the royal reception... And then of course the Salvation Army, everybody will remember that because we wondered if everybody dressed like that.”

Rafael Leandro Flores:

“Well, I’ll never forget that sight because it was reddish sands and small flying boats parked along the shore, until the boat very slowly arrived in Southampton harbour. That is where we heard the Salvation Army Band playing... and when we looked over, we saw a very strange people to us, women in funny hats and ribbons hanging down and all that. To us it was very strange. And flags everywhere... Flags and gold wands and decorations everywhere and we thought it was for us... Southampton was full of decorations – every lamp post, every balcony, everywhere there were flags and golden wands and posters and all sorts hanging and it was quite a sight... The change that took place in our lives was very sudden from Bilbao bombing and scarcity of food and all the rest of things... and suddenly we are in Southampton, full of flags and a band playing on deck and with uniforms which we had never seen before...”

Josefina Stubbs:

“I was excited... Of course, seeing these funny ladies we thought, ‘Oh dear, where have we come?’ We thought it was funny. Also, the policemen. We had never seen hats like they used to wear... Also, the double-decker buses. We’d never seen them before...”