

Brief biographies of each of the known volunteers with significant connections to Oxfordshire

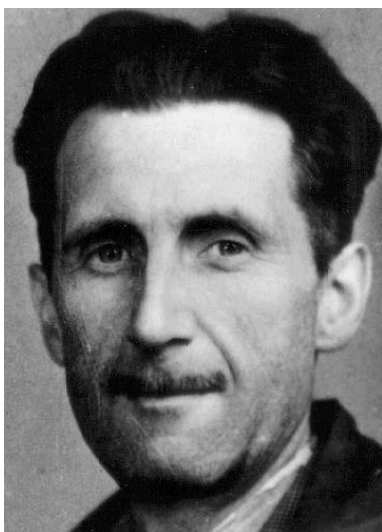
Note:

1. Volunteers are listed in alphabetical order.
2. Names shown in red refer to other Oxfordshire volunteers whose biographies also appear in this list
3. For more detailed biographies of each of the volunteers please see “No Other Way – Oxfordshire and the Spanish Civil War 1936-39” by Chis Farman, Valery Rose and Liz Woolley and from where much of the following brief biographies are taken. ISBN 9781 910448 052
4. Entries for Charlie Hutchinson and Liesel Carritt are additional biographies that have come to life subsequent to the book by Farman, Rose and Woolley and are accordingly covered in a little more detail.

John (Jock) F Birrell - 1890 to ?1959

Jock Birrell was born into a Scottish family in Newcastle on Tyne in 1890, the youngest of six siblings (a further child was born later). Jock’s dad worked in an iron foundry. By 1911 the family were living in Belvedere Kent (now part of London) and the men of the family probably worked at the Ordnance Factory at nearby Woolwich. John’s trade was that of “millwright”. In 1932, Jock joined the CPGB, was a member of the General and Municipal Workers Union and its delegate to the Oxford Trades Council. Sometime around 1933 he moved to Oxford and married. In 1936 he was living at 13 Paradise Square, a lively working class district full of pubs and boarding houses. Jock travelled to Spain in 1936 at the age of 46, much older than most Brigaders. Jock saw action first at Lopera, near Cordoba (where also Oxfordshire’s **Edward Cooper** and **Ralph Fox** also fought). In February 1937 he was at the battle for Jarama along with **Noel Carritt, Victor Claridge, John Montgomery, John Rickman Giles Romilly and Tom Wintringham**. Jock returned to Britain in June 1937 after which little is known of his later life but it is thought he died in Liverpool in 1959 aged 69.

Eric Arthur Blair (George Orwell) - 1903 to 1950



George Orwell was born in India, the son of a colonial civil servant. In 1904 he moved with his mother and an older sister, first to Henley and then to nearby Shiplake. He was educated, first at a convent school then at an Eastbourne boarding school and, following a scholarship, at Eton. After school he joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma but resigned in 1927 determined to follow his aspirations as a writer. His first book was published in 1933. He married in 1935 and the couple moved to Hertfordshire. Here he published his seminal work “The Road to Wigan Pier” that cemented his commitment to socialism. In 1936 he decided to travel to Spain to see for himself what the Civil War was all about. Orwell went to the offices of the CPGB believing

that this would help him secure access to papers to get him into the country but as he was not willing to join the International Brigades his requests were rebuffed. However, the International Labour Party (ILP) was more accommodating and George arrived in Barcelona on Boxing Day 1936, and he was immediately swept up in the revolutionary fervour of the City. Orwell joined the POUM, the Marxist militia to which the ILP was linked, and fought with them in the Aragon region with **Mike Wilton**. In May 1937 he was briefly on leave in Barcelona and witnessed the internecine struggles between the Spanish Republican government forces and the POUM. On his return to the front lines in Aragon he was hit by a sniper bullet which pierced his throat and he was lucky to survive, and following which he was discharged from active service. By then, the POUM had been outlawed and Orwell and his wife (who had been working at an ILP office in Barcelona) were on the run for some days before finally escaping to France. Orwell's experiences in Spain are graphically expressed in his subsequent book "Homage to Catalonia" much of the content hotly contested by historians of the conflict. Orwell died on tuberculosis in January 1950. He is buried in Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire.

James (Jim) Brewer - 1913 to 1993



(Left: Jim carrying the Brigade Banner in Spain)

Jim was born into a close-knit and politicised family in Rhymney, South Wales. He left school at 14 to go down the mines but left after a couple of years due to ill health and worked in a bakery. He attended Workers Education Assoc., classes in Cardiff and on the strength of his successes there was awarded trades union scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford to study economics and political science. His fellow student at Ruskin **Kathleen McColgan** also went to Spain with the International Brigade. Jim met Brasenose undergraduate **Chris Thorneycroft** with whom he undertook much voluntary work running summer camps for unemployed Welsh miners. Jim joined the Brigade in December 1936 and after a brief training period at Albacete, he saw active service at Jarama. Later he was posted to the anti-tank battery and was promoted to quartermaster. Jim saw further action at Brunete, Gandesa and Belchite and carried the Brigade banner at the farewell parade in Barcelona in October 1938. In September 1939 he signed up with the British Army becoming a commissioned officer in the Royal Artillery during WW2. Jim died in 1993 aged 80.

Anthony Carritt 1914 to 1937 (KIA)

Anthony was born into a well to do intellectual family living at Boars Hill, Oxford. His father was emeritus Professor of Philosophy at University College Oxford and he was the sixth of seven siblings. He was educated at Bradfield College in Berkshire before taking up a career in farming. The family were deeply involved in the politics of the 1930s, an older brother serving in the Indian civil service and clandestinely helping the Indian Independence



movement, and another brother campaigning with striking miners in Kentucky USA. At the outbreak of the civil war, Anthony's mother chaired the local Aid Spain Committee and later the Basque Children's Committee. The brother closest in age to Anthony was **Noel Carritt** who signed up and went to Spain in October 1936. Anthony was the least academic and the least politically conscious of the family but, nevertheless, he gave up his job as a trainee farm manager and went to Spain in April 1937 where he signed up as an ambulance driver. Ambulance driving and stretcher bearing was no sinecure as they were constantly in the front lines and often without the protection of trenches or other natural cover. Anthony first saw action at the battle for Brunete in July 1937. Anthony was caught up in an intense aerial bombardment by Nationalist aircraft and it seems that his ambulance must have received a direct hit as neither he, his crew or his passengers were ever found again. The probable date of his death was 10th July 1937.

Noel Carritt - 1910 to 1992



Noel Carritt was **Anthony Carritt's** older brother. Noel was educated at The Dragon School Oxford, then Sedburgh School in Cumbria and finally Oriel College Oxford where he took a degree in Zoology. At Oriel, he joined the October Club, the University's first communist society. After his degree he took up teaching at a school in Sheffield and was involved in the famous mass trespass on Kinder Scout in the nearby Peak District. He married in 1933 to **Liesel Mottek** a German Jewish Communist who had recently escaped from Nazi Germany but who risked being returned there under the Aliens Act of 1920. Noel married Liesel, at least in part to secure her a British passport and to circumvent her return to almost certain incarceration in Germany. Liesel went to Spain in the summer of 1936 but, as women at that time were not being accepted into the International Brigades, Liesel joined a militia fighting unit in the Aragon. In October 1936 Noel took the decision to follow Liesel and to go to Spain to join the International Brigade. After training at Albacete he saw his first action at Jarama along with **Jock Birrell, Victor Claridge, John Montgomery, John Rickman Giles Romilly and Tom Wintringham**. He suffered a hand injury from shrapnel and although it wasn't serious it prevented him firing a rifle so he was withdrawn to allow the wound to heal. Whilst convalescing, he heard that his brother Anthony had joined up and both decided to volunteer as ambulance drivers. Along with **Anthony** and many others he saw action at Brunete where he had to face the truth of his brother's death. After Brunete he was transferred to do mainly clerical and driving work for the Brigade until his

discharge and return to the UK in October 1937. His marriage to Liesel now over, Noel took work with the Trades Union Council. He applied for work with the Royal Navy during WW2 but his application was rejected on account of his political affiliations. After the war, Noel returned to teaching Biology at Dr Challenor's Grammar School in Amersham, Bucks where he remained until his retirement. He died in 1992.

Victor Reginal Claridge – 1903 to 1978

Victor was born in the small Oxfordshire village of South Leigh near Witney the thirteenth of fifteen children. It would appear that Victor travelled to Canada in 1928 then was deported from the US back to the UK in 1930. Whilst in the US he had trained with the National Guard which would have been good experience for an International Brigade volunteer. Whilst in the US he had joined the "wobblies", the International Workers of the World, a radical and revolutionary union founded in Chicago in 1905. When he volunteered to go to Spain he was back living in Oxford at James Street and working as a builder's labourer. He saw action at Jarama where he was wounded. Fellow volunteers at Jarama included **Tom Wintringham** (commander of the battalion), **Noel Carritt**, **Wogan Philips**, **John Montgomery** and **John Rickman**. After recovering, Victor went on to fight at Brunete but sometime after Brunete he developed what has been described as a "serious illness" and despite being a "good soldier" he was repatriated to Britain in October 1937. He died in Camden, London, in 1978 aged 74.

Nathan Clark -1916 to 2011



Nathan was born into the Clark's Shoes empire. He was born in 1916 in Street in Somerset, home of the Clark's shoes business. The Clark's were Quakers and Nathan had a Quaker education at Sidcot School and later at the progressive Odenwaldschule in Germany. In 1935 Nathan went to Queen's College Oxford to read Maths but he failed his first year exams. So he decided to volunteer as an ambulance driver in Spain that would accord with his Quaker pacifist principles.

He became head of transport based at the Huete hospital together with Archie Cochrane and **Peter Harrisson**. Nathan was also involved with the Relief Organisation of the Society of Friends that ran food canteens throughout Catalonia, helping to feed some 24,000 refugees from the civil war. He spoke fluent German and Spanish which made him a valuable team member. He returned to Britain in September 1937 but returned in July 1938 with a truck full of aid on behalf of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee. He wrote many informative articles in the Oxford University magazine, Oxford Forward that helped to promote the cause of Republican Spain in the civil war. Nathan went on to serve in the Royal Army Service Corp in Burma during WW2 with the rank of Major. After the war he returned to the family business where, amongst many other things he designed the Clark's Desert Boot, allegedly based on his experiences in Spain. Nathan dies in 2011 aged 95.

Lewis Clive – 1910 to 1938 KIA



Lewis was born in Herefordshire into the heart of the British establishment. One of his ancestors was “Clive of India”. His father was a Tory MP who was killed in WW1. His Godfather was Neville Chamberlain who, as Prime Minister between 1937 and 1940 was largely responsible for the Nazi appeasement strategy and for the British government’s Non-Intervention policy in Spain. Lewis was educated at Ascot and then Eton before going to Christchurch to read Law. He was an outstanding oarsman, a gold medallist in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. He was a member of the Labour Party and Fabian Society and a founder member of NCCL (now Liberty). He attended the notorious meeting in Oxford of Mosely’s British Union of Fascists and the violence strengthened his anti-fascist views. He stood as Labour candidate for

Kensington Council and was returned as its first Labour Councillor. Lewis went to Spain in early 1938, fighting with the Republican forces in the Aragon. At one point they were forced to retreat across the River Ebro with Lewis not only supporting a severely wounded comrade but also carrying a heavy machine gun. He got both safely across the icy waters. In the following battle at Gandesa on the banks of the Ebro the International Brigade was engaged with the fascists attempting to secure a vantage point known as Hill 481. The assault by the Republican forces lasted five days and failed to take the hill. On the final day, on 5th August 1938, Lewis was killed by a single bullet to the head.

(Francis) Claude Cockburn (Frank Pitcairn) - 1904 to 1981



Claud was born in Beijing, the son of the British Consul. He was educated at Berkhamstead and in 1922 went up to Keble College to read Classics. After graduating in 1926 he was working in Germany where he read Marx and became a Communist. As a journalist with The Times he filed reports on Germany and the US before deciding to found his own paper “The Week” that ran from 1933 until 1941 and focused on anti-fascism in Europe. In 1936 when the SCW broke out Claud was in Barcelona working for the Daily Worker newspaper and he was covering the forthcoming People’s Olympiad, an event held in protest to the “official” Olympic games being held in fascist Germany. Claud volunteered to fight with the Spanish communist militia, the so-called 5th

Regiment and saw action in the Sierras outside Madrid where he was promoted to the rank of corporal. In later life, Claud continued to work as a journalist contributing a weekly column to Private Eye. He is remembered, amongst other things for his dictum, “Believe nothing until it is officially denied!” He died in 1981 aged 77.

Dorothy Josephine Collier – 1894 to 1972

Dorothy was born to a well-to-do Liverpool family. Her father ran a successful timber business. She was the fourth of five sisters and educated first at a Catholic convent school and then at a boarding school in Stockport. She won a place at St Anne's College Oxford in 1912 and completed her Honours Degree in Physiology in 1916 (although in those days, women were not actually awarded with degrees regardless of their examination successes!) In 1917 she was one of the first women to be awarded a Bachelor of Medicine degree. Dorothy then worked at the King Edward VII hospital in Windsor, the Central London Throat Hospital and at a practice in Harley St. She became a FRCS in 1932 and in 1933 travelled to New York. Although a Catholic she was sympathetic to the Republican cause and in particular the Basque and Catalan people. In 1938 aged 44 she went to Spain with the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief where she worked at the Sao Pablo Hospital. At times under the leadership of Josep Trueta. When Trueta fled for his life at the collapse of the Republican government in 1939, Dorothy met him at the border in France and assisted his passage to Britain and to Oxford, where he worked with Florey on penicillin and later became Nuffield Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery. In WW2 Dorothy was a specialist otologist with the Royal Army Medical Corp in North Africa and Italy. She died in 1972 aged 78.

Edward Henry Burke Cooper – 1912 to 1937 – KIA

Edward Cooper was an actor whose stage name was Edward Burke. His father was a civil engineer and he had an older sister and they were comfortably well-off. Although Edward was not a member of a trade Union he joined the CPGB in 1935 and a year later in October 1936 volunteered to go to Spain. This being the very early stages of the civil war the British Battalion was not yet fully formed so Edward fought, initially, with the French Commune de Paris Battalion in the University Campus area of Madrid alongside the Cambridge scientist John Cornford. Cornford wrote to his girlfriend Margot Heinemann that, "A very good guy is Edward Burke of the Daily Worker. Ex-actor, looks like a sap, always loses everything, but has a queer gift for understanding machinery, became a good machine gunner in no time, was pro tem on a trench gun, promoted to section leader. He did really well on a nasty bit of the front line." Later, both men, and **Ralph Fox** amongst others, saw action at Lopera where both Cornford and Fox were killed. Edward was wounded but died of his injuries on 12th February 1937 aged 25. Tragically, due to administrative confusions, his parents were not informed of his death until May of that year, by which time his father had died on cancer.

Peter Robert Roy Alexander Ferguson – 1916 to 1999

Peter was born into a military family. He was educated at the exclusive Stowe School in Buckinghamshire, later Clayesmore School in Dorset and finally in 1935 at Pembroke College Oxford. He joined the Communist Party the same year. He was a bitter opponent of Oswald



Mosley and when the fascist leader came to speak at Oxford, Peter was one of the students arrested for attempting to disrupt the meeting. He was fined £5. Peter joined the International Brigade in January 1938. The record of his time in Spain are confused. It seems he saw action at Belchite where he was wounded. He was then sent back to Britain for treatment but he is also recorded as deserting and, indeed, he was reported killed on the Aragon retreat in April 1938. He later turned up in London claiming to have lost his memory and was diagnosed as suffering from Typhoid. He died in 1999 aged 83.

Herbert John Douglas Fisher – 1910 to 1938 KIA



Herbert was educated at The Dragon School Oxford and King William College on the Isle of Man. His father was a noted architect and Herbert had many influential friends and family. After leaving school Herbert worked as a manager at a Stoke on Trent pottery works. It was here that Herbert developed a profound sense that society should be more equal. He moved to a smaller firm but his attempts to introduce reforms led to his sacking. He travelled to Spain in late 1937 from where he wrote many articles for the Dragon School magazine *The Draconian*. He was impressed with the way the International Brigade and the Spanish Republican military was run on equitable and fair grounds. He saw action at Belchite in the Aragon in March 1938. When the action ceased, Herbert was unaccounted for and he was reported as missing presumed killed. But this was not reported to his family and there was immense confusion due to a mix up with two other Brigade members, a John Herbert who suffered a shrapnel wound at the Ebro in July 38, and US volunteer Harry Fisher who was with the Lincoln Battalion. Herbert was an inveterate letter writer to his family and the cessation of letters after March suggests that the original report of “missing presumed killed” in the Aragon retreat must be the correct version of events.

Ralph Winston Fox – 1900 to 1936 KIA

Ralph was born into a middle class family in Halifax, Yorkshire. In 1918 he went to Magdalen College Oxford to read Modern Languages and he joined the University Labour Club. He became good friends with **Tom Wintringham**. In 1922 he graduated with a first class honours degree and for the next nine years he divided his time between the UK and



the Soviet Union where he met his future wife Madge Palmer. In 1929 he was librarian at the Marx Engels Institute in Moscow. In 1932 he returned to the UK and was a columnist for the Daily Worker. He published his first book People of the Steppes in 1925. With Tom Wintringham and politician John Strachey they launched the British Section of the Writers International. Ralph joined the International Brigade in late 1936 and he wrote, "Our little army is of every nation, French, Germans and Poles predominating. I have talked to Ukrainians from Poland, fellows who have been soldiers all their lives, happy at last to be fighting for something worthwhile. [we] have created the first International Army to fight for Peace and Freedom." At the turn of the year, both Ralph and John Cornford amongst

many others, were engaging the enemy at Lopera near Cordoba. Both Ralph and John Cornford were killed.

Murray Furman – 1911 to 1994



Murray was an American, born in New York. He went to New York University and gained a BSc in 1931. He then crossed the Atlantic to attend St Andrews University in Scotland to study medicine and he qualified as a doctor in 1936. He was reported as an outstanding medical graduate as well as achieving a "full blue" in boxing. He was working at Oxford's Radcliffe Infirmary hospital when he enlisted with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee early in 1937. Within a week of leaving England Murray was working with Reggie Saxton who had set up a field hospital at Villarejo de Salvanas, near Madrid. Murray wasn't political. He was not a member of a trade union or a political party and his purpose in Spain was

entirely professional. By December 1937 Murray was working flat out at a small front line hospital coping with casualties from the Teruel offensive. Murray operated on casualties by night and his colleague, the Spanish surgeon Luis Quemada operated by day. They had many cases of severe frostbite due to the exceptionally cold weather. He returned to the US in January 1938 and completed a distinguished medical career dying aged 82 in 1994.

Peter Damer Harrisson – 1912 to 2004

Peter was the son of a surgeon. He was educated at The Dragon School Oxford and King William's College on the isle of Man. Before gaining a degree in Forestry at Trinity College Oxford. By then his widowed mother lived in Boars Hill Oxford where the Carritts were friends and near neighbours. After graduation in 1934 he worked at a teak logging camp in Chiang Mai in Thailand but on hearing that Noel Carritt had joined the International brigade he decided to return to England and to volunteer. He arrived in Spain in late April 1937. He was briefly caught up in the conflicts in Barcelona before moving to a front line hospital at



Guadalajara to the north west of Madrid. When the battle for Brunete was at its peak the hospital handled more than 130 severely wounded men in one day. He then helped to set up the hospital at Huete, 100 miles east of Madrid where he was later promoted to the role of hospital administrator. He returned to the UK in 1938 and was commissioned into the Royal Engineers and lectured on chemical warfare at Porton Down. Later he was a member of the SOE (Special Operations Executive) and was parachuted into Yugoslavia to fight with Tito's partisans in WW2 (his near neighbour in Boars Hill, Frank Thompson, brother of the renowned historian E P Thompson was also a member of the SOE and was parachuted into Bulgaria where he was eventually captured by fascists and executed). Peter later became British Consul in Zagreb and after the war took up a farming tenancy in Essex. He died in 2004 aged 92.

(Alexander) Gavin Henderson (Lord Faringdon) – 1902 to 1977



Gavin was born on the Buscot Estate (then in Berkshire but now Oxfordshire) the son of Lieutenant Colonel Harold Henderson, the Tory MP for Abingdon. He was educated at Eton and McGill University in Montreal and at Christchurch, Oxford. Although he married in 1927 it was not a success, perhaps because Gavin was gay. He succeeded to the title of the 2nd Baron Faringdon in 1934 and inherited the mansion and estate that is now a National Trust property. He joined the Labour Party and sat in the House of Lords as a Labour peer and belonged the Parliamentary Pacifist Group that was founded in 1936. He joined the Spanish Medical Aid Committee (SMAC) in August 1936 in a non-combatant role. Dr Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit the administrator for SMAC described Gavin as “quick at seizing the nuances of field situations and eminently helpful in solving practical problems.” Later on, Gavin famously converted his Rolls Royce into an ambulance and drove it Spain where it was used to evacuate men with bad abdominal wounds from the fighting at Teruel. Gavin himself acted as a stretcher bearer. When the Republic finally collapsed in March 1939 Gavin assisted in the evacuation of 400 men from Alicante to Oran, in France. They then returned to evacuate further personnel on the HMS Galatea. In 1938 he gave over a lodge in the grounds of Buscot Park to house 40 refugee boys from the Basque region as well as helping a number of other emigres from Spain including the writer Arturo Barea. Gavin died in 1977 aged 74.

Carl Aldo Marzani – 1912 to 1994

Carl was an Italian from Rome but his family emigrated to the US in 1924 to escape Mussolini's regime and in 1936 he came to Exeter College, Oxford to read politics, philosophy and economics. He married a noted American actress in 1937. Carl was deeply



interested in the theatre. He was also a committed communist and treasurer of the South Midlands CP group. In Oxford he worked closely with the agitator Abe Lazarus. In 1936, Carl went to Spain to join the Durruti Column of the anarchist militia later transferring to the Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigade. He returned to Exeter College to complete his degree in 1937. After graduating, Carl and his wife Edith hitch-hiked back to the US via India, South-East Asia, China and Japan. In WW2, Carl worked for the US Office of Strategic Services (precursor to the CIA) despite his political affiliations and membership of the American Communist Party. Later he was caught, prosecuted and sentenced to three years for concealing his membership of the Communist Party. On his release he became a film maker, writer and environmentalist and he died aged 82 in 1994.

Kathleen Mary Belinda McColgan – 1914 to 1971



Kathleen was born in Bradford, the youngest of five. She studied Philosophy at Ruskin College Oxford, the trade union and labour movement higher education institute. So Kathleen would have been very aware of events in Spain. Kathleen was a member of the International Association of the Friends of the Soviet Union as well as the University Labour Federation. She was also secretary to Liberal MP Wilfred Roberts himself a member of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief. Kathleen went to Spain early in 1937 and joined the London Ambulance Unit. She drove ambulances to Murcia where she helped set up a feeding station for displaced refugees where up to a thousand could be fed. Kathleen spoke Spanish and German so she was particularly useful in this humanitarian field. Later she helped at a refugee colony in Valencia where she asked to be transferred to the International Brigades rather than the politically less partial Quakers of the Ambulance Unit. On her return to the UK in 1938 she continued to raise funds and campaign for support for Spain. Later she became a journalist, writer and broadcaster. Although she never married she was reputed to be the long term girlfriend of Oxford philosopher A J Ayer. In 1952 she emigrated to Jamaica where she continued as a journalist. At some time she returned to the UK because she dies in Hampstead, London in 1971 aged just 57.

John Montgomery – 1915 to ????

Very little is known about John Montgomery. He was born in Glasgow in about 1915 but was living in Oxford when he joined the International Brigades in Spain in January 1937. He saw action at Jarama along with **Jock Birrell, Noel Carritt, Victor Claridge, Alfred Smith, John Rickman, Giles Romilly and Tom Wintringham**. John was a member of the machine gun

company and, once the wrong ammunition had been changed for the proper calibre, they fought bravely and well. Later, however, they were left exposed due to the retreat of other forces and about 30 of the company were captured. They expected to be executed but the intervention of a Spanish officer saved them and they were held as prisoners at San Martin de la Vega. They were moved several times, underwent hard labour, and were judged guilty of "aiding a rebellion". However, not long after, they were exchanged for Italian prisoners being held by the Republic, and taken to the French border from where they returned to England, arriving home at the end of May 1937.

Philip Patrick P Norman – 1912 to 1960

Philip was born in Bampton, a small market town not far from Witney. His father had been a merchant seaman and later was publican at Bampton's Talbot Hotel. However, in 1916 Philip's father died and in 1921 his mother took the family to Seattle in the US. Quite when Philip returned to the UK is not known but we do know that he was living in Clapham in 1936. He was not a member of a trade union or a political party so his motives for going to Spain are unclear. He served with the Ernst Thalmann Battalion in Spain in the defence of Madrid in late 1936. He then fought at the battle of Cerro de los Angeles just to the south of Madrid but returned to England on 28th November 1936, having spent three months in Spain. He served in the Royal Artillery in WW2 and later in the Intelligence Corp. Philip died in 1960 in Sturminster Dorset at the young age of 48.

Wogan Philipps (Lord Milford) – 1902 to 1993



Wogan Philipps was born in Brentwood in Essex into a wealthy ship owning family. He was educated at Eton and Magdalen College Oxford but left without taking his degree. In 1928 he married the novelist Rosamund Lehmann and they lived at Ipsden House, a few miles to the south of Wallingford. Lehmann later left Wogan to live with the poet Cecil Day Lewis. Wogan happened to be in Spain in February 1936 and witnessed the celebrations following the election victory of the Popular Front. He was impressed by the joy of the Spanish people and their hopes for the future. Wogan had no political affiliations at the time but he was anti-fascist and was appalled at the military rebellion in July 1936. After returning briefly to England he joined the British Medical Aid Unit and drove a van to Spain laden with assorted supplies that he had paid for himself. Although he had no medical

skills he worked tirelessly for the medical unit driving from the Brigades base at Albacete to Chinchon near the Jarama front and including many front line duties there and elsewhere. In May 1937 he was at Guadarrama where he worked day and night ferrying the dead and injured. The ambulance he was driving took a direct hit and Wogan was injured but insisted on walking to the hospital so as not to take up a stretcher in the available ambulances.

After convalescence in England Wogan returned to Spain on further driving duties. After his eventual return to England he was involved in local politics in Oxford, campaigning on the poor quality of housing in the Florence Park estates. He later stood, unsuccessfully, as communist candidate in the local elections there. In WW2 he was refused permission to join the Home Guard, presumably because of his time in Spain with the International Brigades, but he challenged the decision and he was vindicated and received a written apology.

After the war he settled as an artist and farmer in Gloucestershire and in 1962 he inherited the title Lord Milford and took his seat in the House of Lords, being the only Communist Party member ever to do so. He used his maiden speech to call for the abolition of the Lords. Wogan died in London on 30 November 1993 aged 91.

John Pascal Rickman – 1910 to 1937 – KIA



John was born in Powerstock in Dorset, the son of a vicar. He went up to Lincoln College, Oxford in 1929 to read Politics, Philosophy and Economics but left without completing his degree. On returning to Dorset he settled to life working amongst the poor and unemployed. The Western Gazette described him as “spending his days visiting the poor and lonely to whom his deep sense of humour and cheery conversation must have been an eternal source of pleasure.” By 1936 MI5 already had a file on John as he was a member of the Communist Party and in October 1936 he fought alongside other anti-fascists at the Battle of Cable Street in London. Claiming to go to Paris to work for the Spanish Youth Foodship Committee he, in fact, was on his way to join the International brigades in Spain arriving in December 1936.

In February. Alongside **Giles Rommilly** he saw action at Jarama where he was an early casualty. He was taken to Colmenar de Orejo Hospital near Madrid but died of his injuries. His memorial at Powerstock Parish Church reads, “He gave his life in the cause of freedom.”

Giles Samuel Bertram Romilly – 1916 to 1967



Giles (on right in picture with brother Esmond) was born in 1916 the older brother of Esmond (b. 1918), both nephews of Winston Churchill and known as “Winston’s Red Nephews”. They were expected to join the Brigade of Guards and were educated at Wellington College with a long tradition of military service. However, both Giles and Esmond became pacifists and actively campaigned by launching a school pacifist magazine called “Out of Bounds”. Giles

went to Lincoln College Oxford in 1934 to read Classics where he befriended Philip Toynbee with whom he was politically active. However, in 1936, in Toynbee’s words, “he just slipped

away to Spain without saying a word to anyone.” His younger brother was already on his way to Spain by bicycle through France.

Giles saw action at Jarama and at Brunete, where he took part in the assault on Mosquito Ridge. Records suggest that he deserted while in Spain but it was probably due to shellshock from his experiences at Brunete. In WW2 he worked as a war correspondent and in May 1940 was captured at Narvik while working for the Daily Express and held prisoner at Colditz Castle. He was later moved, but escaped by abseiling down the walls and he made his way back to allied lines. After the war Giles returned to journalism and wrote his memoirs but died of a drugs overdose in California in 1967 aged 50.

Thora Silverthorne – 1910 to 1999



Thora was born in Abertillery in 1910 one of eight children of Sarah and George Silverthorne. George was a miner and an early recruit to the Communist Party and a great influence on the young Thora. When her mother died when Thora was just 15 the family moved to Reading and Thora became active in the Young Communist League, the Labour Party, and later the CPGB. Initially she worked as a nanny for Somerville Hastings, Labour MP for Reading who encouraged her to train as a nurse and in March 1931 she came to the Radcliffe Infirmary where her older sister was already a nurse. In 1932 she provided medical help to the Lancashire hunger marchers as they passed through Oxford. In 1934 she went to London to complete her training where she met Dr Charles Brook a founder member of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee. Thora was one of the very first nurses to go to Spain in August 1936 along with ambulance driver **Alec Wainman**.

Thora was appointed Chief Nurse of the operating theatre at Huesca just 11 miles from the front line of the war in the Aragon. On the first day they dealt with 30 cases. In the first month they dealt with 811 cases (on one occasion 200 casualties in three days, working more than 14 hour days). Thora was particularly noted for her bravery and level headedness under enemy fire and faced with insurmountable casualties. In January 1937 the Medical Unit joined forces with the mainly French 14th International brigade at Albacete. And there she worked with hospital administrator Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit who she later married. Together they acted as “pathfinders” on the occasions when field hospitals had to be moved at short notice to wherever the fighting was fiercest.

Surgeon Archie Cochrane recalled his great respect for Thora, for her professionalism, her kind demeanour and her sense of humour. Sinclair-Loutit said, “Thora was outstandingly competent and had a social ease for her neighbours that put her above fault”. They married at a civil ceremony in Spain where they were pronounced “*companera and companero*.”

Thora went on to a distinguished career on her return to the UK and had a significant impact on the changing profession of nursing through her editorship of “Nursing Illustrated” and as

Assistant Secretary of the Socialist Medical Association. She later became a full time union official with the Civil Service Clerical Association until her retirement in 1970.

In May 1990 she unveiled the International brigade Memorial in Reading and she died in London in January 1999 aged 89.

Alfred James Smith – 1890 to ?

Alfred was born in Norwich in 1890 and was a member of the local Primitive Methodist Church. In 1911 in WW1 he was a stoker in the Royal Navy then as an infantryman and later described as an “army pensioner”. By 1936 Alfred was living in Oxford, in St Thomas’s Street and his landlords were Alice and William Cox, parents of Olive Gibbs, a famously radical Labour City Councillor, Lord Mayor and Chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Small wonder then, that Alfred joined the Labour Party although, despite working at the Morris Motors Cowley works he was not a trade union member. Nevertheless he volunteered for Spain. He was 47 and few of that age were accepted by the International Brigades. He was at Tarazona, near Albacete in August 1937 and saw action with the rank of sergeant at Quinto in Aragon and worked with **Tom Wintringham**. But he was repatriated to the UK in less than two months on account of his age and lack of fitness (he had received a head injury during WW1 and had occasional fits as a consequence. Back in the UK he fell upon hard times and was referred to Dependants Aid Fund. Nevertheless he spoke about his experiences at public meetings including in Oxford.

Christopher Hamo Thorneycroft – 1915 to 2001



Chris was born in Hampstead, London into the wealthy Thorneycroft engineering family. Chris was educated at Bedales in Hampshire and then in 1935, Brasenose College Oxford, where he read engineering. He had a strong left-wing background and was horrified by the rise of Hitler and Fascism. In Oxford he was an active member of the university Labour Club and joined the Communist Party publicly stating that “this was the time to stand up and be counted.” He spent his vacations running holiday camps in Wallingford and Boars Hill for unemployed workers. He joined the university Air Squadron believing that learning to fly would enhance his understanding of aero-engineering design.

Chris travelled to Spain in October 1936 together with John Cornford. Chris was recognised early for his engineering skills and was employed repairing weapons, trucks and ambulances. Nevertheless, he saw much action at Madrid in December 1936, at Jarama and Brunete. He was also used to fabricate makeshift operating theatres complete with much needed electricity generators.

Chris returned to the UK at the end of 1937 suffering from Typhoid and later worked for Napier Power Engineering where he developed the 24 cylinder 3000 bhp Sabre engine for the Hawker Typhoon fighter bombers used extensively during WW2.

Alexander (Alec) Wheeler Wainman – 1913 to 1989



Alec was born in 1913 at Otterington Hall Northallerton Yorkshire. His father was an army officer who was killed in 1915 during WW1. Alec's mother took the children to Canada in 1920 but returned in 1933 the family lived at The Old Prebendal in Shipton under Wychwood.

Alec was a Quaker and volunteered for the Spanish Medical Aid Committee in August 1936 travelling to Spain with Thora Silverthorne. On their arrival in Spain a hospital was hastily set up at Granen, eleven miles from the Aragon front lines. Alec and his fellow ambulance drivers and stretcher bearers rescued 30 casualties on the very first day. In the first month they dealt with 800 casualties and it was dangerous work as

ambulances were often targeted by enemy airplanes.

Alec was not a member of a political party but he was sympathetic to the communist cause and was a member of the International Association of Friends of the Soviet Union. He spoke at least seven languages, English, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Italian, German and Russian and was therefore much in demand as a translator. This and his gift as a talented photographer brought him to the attention of the Republic's Ministry for Propaganda and Alec was made head of the British Section there. Alec travelled back and forth between England and Spain during the civil war finally returning to Shipton under Wychwood in the autumn of 1938. However, he continued to volunteer to help the Republican cause in Spain and secured safe passage for some 14 young Republicans who had been interned at Barcares in France following the collapse of the Republic despite considerable difficulties encountered from the British authorities. In early 1939 Alec and his mother Christine managed to secure Saint Michaels House, an empty building owned by the Anglican Church in Shipton, in order to accommodate about 30 refugee boys from the Basque region of Spain.

During WW2 Alec worked for the Special Operations Executive and after the war returned to Canada where he worked as a Slavonic scholar at the University of Columbia. His wonderful book of photographs of his time in Spain "Live Souls" was published posthumously in 2015.

Robert Edward Drew Wheeler – 1907 to 1981

Robert was born in High Wycombe but his father died when Robert was an infant. And his mother brought him up with the help of his older sister and five servants. On completing his education he went into farming and in 1935 was living and farming at Manor Farm Swinbrook near Burford in West Oxfordshire. He was a member of the Workers Educational Association and a friend of Sir Richard Rees one of its lecturers and its treasurer. It may have been through Rees that Robert decided to volunteer to go to Spain.

Robert joined the Ambulance Unit of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee and he and Richard Rees were posted to an American hospital about 50 miles from Madrid. Very shortly, Rees and Robert were sent to Cordoba in Andalucia but it was a quiet time for them there. Back in the UK he bought a truck for £300 and converted it to an ambulance which he then took back to Spain. Where he spent a considerable time helping to feed refugees at a canteen in Barcelona. Robert remained in Barcelona even after the collapse of the Republic in the hope of being able to assist with refugee aid and support. He continued to work with refugees and to support Quaker relief in Spain (including gifts totalling £2000) and organising transport for onward travel in France and to North Africa and Mexico. He returned to Swinbrook and was living at Pebble Court but died at nearby Witney in 1981 aged 74.

Michael (Mike) Stanley James Wilton – 1917 to 1988

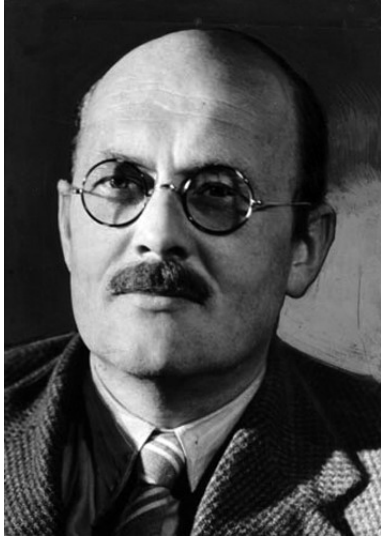
Mike was born in Devon but by his late teens he was living in Kensington, London and in 1934 he and a friend travelled to Algiers. On his return his address was Little Stoke House, North Stoke a small village mid-way between Wallingford and Goring on Thames.

Mike went to Spain early in the civil war and served with the Catalan militia forces in their unsuccessful attempt to recapture the rebel held island of Majorca in August 1936. After that he travelled to Morocco where he worked for the British Embassy before returning to Spain and joining the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Marxist Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista (POUM) militia along with **Eric Blair** (George Orwell). Fellow fighters in the POUM described Mike as “an intellectual from Oxford who disdained politics and perhaps had anarchist leanings.”

Mike saw action in the Aragon with the POUM and took part in the attack near Huesca where they successfully captured the enemy trenches. Orwell was injured and Mike had a “close shave.” Later, along with Orwell Mike tried to leave the POUM and join the International Brigades but after the May Day fighting in Barcelona between the POUM and the International Brigade that became untenable. Mike left Spain in September 1937 and continued his support for the Spanish Republican cause through the ILP and the POUM. He died in Oxford in 1988 aged 71.

Thomas (Tom) Henry Wintringham – 1898 to 1949

Tom was born in Grimsby into a prosperous and political family. His grandfather was a Liberal party agent and an uncle was elected as an Independent (anti Lloyd George) MP for Louth. He was educated at Greshams, a small progressive school in Norfolk and did well enough to be awarded a prestigious scholarship to Balliol College Oxford. However, Tom deferred entry when WW1 began and he chose to join the Royal Flying Corp. His poor eyesight stopped him from flying but he served as a mechanic and dispatch rider. In 1919



when he did go to Balliol he joined the University Labour Club and formed a close friendship with **Ralph Fox** who was at Magdalen College.

After graduating in 1920 Tom spent a long visit in the Soviet Union. On his return he decided to study for the bar but spent much of his time on left wing journalism and in 1923 joined the Communist Party (CPGB). Two years later, along with eleven others, he was arrested and charged with inciting mutiny in the armed forces. All were found guilty and Tom served six months imprisonment.

On his release he established himself as a leading left wing journalist and became editor of the "Left Review". In 1936 the general secretary of the CPGB, Harry Pollitt arranged for Tom to go to Barcelona to represent the Party there and to report for the Daily Worker. It was in Barcelona that Tom became convinced that an International force would be needed to support the fledgling Republic and to help defeat the fascist incursion. With Moscow's support the International Brigades were formed in September 1936.

By February 1937 Tom was appointed Commander of the British Battalion based at Madrigueras, near Albacete and within a week Tom took control of the 600 man battalion at the Brigade's first taste of action at Jarama. In the first three days of savage fighting casualties were high, including Tom who received a bullet wound in the thigh.

In August Tom was wounded a second time, this time in the shoulder, whilst fighting at Quinto in the Aragon and was later repatriated. In March 1938, Tom's girlfriend in Spain, Kitty Bowler, was denounced by Moscow as a Trotskyite spy and the CPGB demanded that he break off the relationship. Tom refused and was duly expelled from the Party, although remaining a loyal supporter of the movement in general.

In WW2 in 1940, Tom became Director of the Home Guard Training School at Osterley Park in West London where he trained 500 men in the rudiments of guerrilla warfare but his continued commitment to Socialism irked the military top brass and in 1941 he resigned the Home Guard School. He continued to be actively involved in left wing politics including much journalism and writing, including his autobiography "English Captain"

Tom died in 1949 suffering a heart attack whilst helping with the harvest at his sister's farm in Lincolnshire.

THE BIOGRAPHIES OF THE FOLLOWING ARE NOT INCLUDED IN "NO OTHER WAY" BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT IDENTIFIED AS OXFORDSHIRE VOLUNTEERS WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN. AS A RESULT WE ARE PLEASED TO INCLUDE THEIR STORIES HERE AND, AS THEY ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE BOOK, WE GIVE THEM A LITTLE MORE SPACE AND DETAIL.

Charles William R Hutchinson – 1918 to 1993

(Abridged from a biography published by Richard Baxell of the IBMT)



CHARLIE HUTCHINSON: Served two years in Spain from December 1936.

Charlie was born in Eynsham near Witney, on 10 May 1918. His mother was presumably not in a position to raise him, and Charlie grew up in the National Children's Home and Orphanage in London. In the spring of 1936, Charlie, who had just turned 18 years of age, was living in Fulham and working as a lorry driver. He was also Branch Chair of the local Young Communist League and it seems clear, from remarks he made later, that he had become personally involved in the battle against Mosley's Blackshirts.

In the late summer of 1936 this led him, like nearly 2500 from Britain and Ireland, to volunteer to go to Spain and personally take the fight to Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. As he explained: "I am half black. I grew up in the National Children's Home and Orphanage. Fascism meant hunger and war.' For Charlie, as for the numerous Jewish volunteers, fascism was a real and personal threat, beyond any theoretical abstraction.

He left Britain in either late November or early December 1936 and was recorded by Special Branch as having 'left for Spain to serve as machine gunner with Govt. Forces.' At this time the British Battalion had not yet been formed, so once in Spain he joined the British and Irish dominated Number One Company of the Marseillaise Battalion of the 14th International Brigade. He was with the unit when it was sent to contain a Rebel breakthrough at Lopera, on the Córdoba front in southern Spain. There, outnumbered and at the mercy of the Rebels' overwhelming air dominance, the British and Irish company was cut to pieces. Charlie Hutchinson was wounded and a great number of his comrades – including John Cornford – were killed. Having recuperated from his wounds, Charlie was informed that he was going to be sent home due to his age, but he refused to leave. So, rather than being sent to join his compatriots in the British Battalion then fighting on the Jarama front, he was transferred away from the line, assigned to be an ambulance driver with the 5th Republican Army Corps. However, while Charlie seemingly wanted to remain in Spain, his mother (from whom it seems he was no longer estranged) was of a different mind and she wrote in April 1937, citing his young age and pleading that he be sent home. This seem to have rather changed Charlies' feelings about leaving, partly because he was becoming worried about his step-father, who had been hospitalised with serious gastric problems.

Over the next few months, Charlie made a number of appeals to his superiors, garnering much support, but little success. The following June, he wrote a worried note explaining that he hadn't received a letter from his parents for ten months, leading him to assume that they must be facing dire circumstances. Yet, rather than asking to be permanently repatriated, Hutchinson asked only that he might be granted a temporary leave of absence to deal with his family problems. 'I have been in Spain since Nov 25th 1936', he pleaded, 'When I came to Spain I was 18½ yrs and not on one occasion have I use[d] my age for an excuse.' Furthermore, Charlie was himself now suffering from health problems, so was

becoming increasingly desperate. Assessments by his superiors make it manifestly clear that the lack of progress was not as a result of any failure on Charlie's part. Jim Ruskin, a Captain in Brigade Transmissions, recounted that both Hutchinson's political views and his work were 'Good [and] for his age quite developed.' Likewise, Charlie's senior officer in the Motorised Company of the 15th Army Corps, Harry Evans, described Hutchinson as 'a hard and capable worker'. Finally, in August 1938, an order was given that Hutchinson should be repatriated due to his young age and exemplary period of service. On the 27th of that month the Italian Communist, Luigi Longo, one of the most senior and powerful commanders of the International Brigades (known in Spain as 'Gallo'), wrote to a Comrade Fusimaña, the Commissar of the XV Army Corps, on Hutchinson's behalf:

Te ruego intervengas para que este Camarada obtenga un permiso de acuerdo con las ultimas disposiciones del Excmo. Senor Presidente del Consejo Ministros, Dr. NEGRIN.)

[I ask you to intervene so that this Comrade obtains a permit in accordance with the last dispositions of the Hon. Mr. President of the Ministers Council, Dr. Negrín.]

Despite this, nothing seems to have happened, for on 2 September 1938, Charlie sent another personal appeal, complaining that 'I was 18 when I came to Spain and I feel it is just to[o] bad if the I.B. can't release a kid of 20 y[ea]rs after nearly two years of good service.'

His appeal was answered personally by Alonso 'Lon' Elliot, a former Cambridge University languages student, who worked under Luigi Longo in the Political Commissars' headquarters in Madrid and in the Foreign Cadres Commission of the Spanish Communist Party in Barcelona. Elliott assured Charlie that he was taking a personal interest in his case and apologised that it still hadn't been resolved. 'For my part', he wrote, 'I will see that comrade Gallo is reminded of your case, and can assure you that everything that can be done from the Barcelona end will be done to help you. Best of luck, yours fraternally, AME.' However, somewhat unhelpfully, he suggested that Charlie should raise the matter once again with his immediate superiors.

After all these efforts on Charlie's behalf, one might assume that he would have been repatriated with the other British volunteers, following their withdrawal from the front in September. However, when the survivors of the British Battalion crossed the border into France on 6 December 1938, the unfortunate Charlie was not among them. Only on 19 December, nearly two weeks later, was he finally released from service and repatriated.

As yet, little evidence can be found of Charlie's later life. We do know that he was one of the first of the Spanish veterans to volunteer for service in the British Army in the Second World War. He served for a time in Iran, before being transferred to France in 1944, just after D-Day.¹⁴ And in early 1947, a Charles W. Hutchinson was married to a Patricia L. Holloway and the same individual reappears in the electoral register of 1958, living at 11 Argyll Mansions, Fulham, London. Records suggest that he later moved to Bournemouth, where he died in March 1993, aged 74.

Charlie Hutchinson occupies a unique position as the only mixed-race volunteer among the British volunteers in Spain, so it would be fitting if more details could be found about his life.

However, there is one small detail that remains to tell: in 1985, while helping M.J. Hynes with his research for an undergraduate dissertation, Charlie Hutchinson (along with 65 other British International Brigaders) completed a questionnaire on his experiences as a volunteer in Spain. Whether the questionnaires themselves survived is unknown, but one snippet remains, allowing Charlie to have the last word on why he believed so many people from around the world joined him in choosing to risk their lives on behalf of the Spanish Republic:

The Brigaders came out of the working class; they came out of the battle of Cable Street, they came out of the struggles on the side turnings ... they weren't Communist, they weren't Socialists, but they were anti-fascist.

Liesel Carritt (nee Mottek) 1913 to 1982

(from a text by Colin Carritt Chair Oxford International Brigade Memorial Committee)



Liesel came to Oxford, England with her family in 1932 to escape persecution in her home country of Germany. Her father Heinrich (Heinz) Mottek was a journalist. He was Jewish and an anti-fascist and the family would undoubtedly have been persecuted under the Nazis had they not escaped to the UK. He arrived in England with his daughter Liesel and his wife Wilhelmina (Mia). Liesel was not Mia's daughter but the result of a liaison between Heinz and an opera singer who was subsequently involved in a shooting scandal the details of which are sketchy. Under the Aliens Act refugees were only admitted to the UK if they could ensure that they would not be a burden on the state. In the case of the Motteks, a Quaker doctor in North Oxford, Dr H T Gillett of 111, Banbury Road, Summertown, provided the required

financial surety. Later this financial support passed to Prof. Edgar Frederick Carritt who was a close friend of one of Gillett's medical partners, Dr G J W McMichael.

Heinz Mottek's arrival in the UK with Mia did not mark the end of his persecution. He suffered anti-Semitic abuse with swastikas daubed on the door of his lodgings in Oxford and he was clearly very unhappy. Eventually, after the war, he made several unsuccessful suicide attempts and was finally admitted to a private clinic paid for by a group of Oxford academics. From there he was transferred to a hospital in Dovercourt, Essex under a Doctor Levy (or Levi). Finally he was certified as mentally ill and transferred to the residential Severalls Hospital near Colchester where he lived until his death on 31st December 1957 from a coronary thrombosis. His wife, Mia, had long since been taken in by a local Essex family with whom she lived as a family friend until her death in about 1961. Mia was not Jewish. In fact, her Polish, gentile family disowned her on learning of her marriage to the Jewish Heinz. When WW2 broke out she was in danger of being classified by the British authorities as an enemy alien and this was not helped by Liesel's openly radical left-wing politics and membership of the German Communist Party. The Essex family's daughter,

Irene Mulley, (a journalist herself) remembers Mia with affection. Irene remembers Heinz as “brilliant, kind and gentle.”

Liesel too would have been forcibly returned to Nazi Germany under the Aliens Act once she reached the age of maturity and it is possible that her marriage to Prof. Carritt’s son, **Noel Carritt**, was arranged at least in part as a means to access the British passport that would protect her from becoming a victim of the holocaust. Nevertheless, it seems likely that at least in the early days of the marriage, it was not just a marriage of convenience. Liesel and Noel were both committed communists, Noel one of the earliest members of Oxford University’s communist societies, the October Club.

They married in March 1933. Liesel was nineteen and Noel twenty one. In the summer of 1934 they joined a party of left wing students on a trip to the Soviet Union, departing from London docks on August 11th aboard the Russian ship “Smolny,” bound for Leningrad. The copy of the passenger list was filed by MI5 on the 13th August, so clearly they were monitoring the movements of Communist sympathisers at this stage.

Back in the UK Noel Carritt took up a teaching post in Sheffield and it is thought that Liesel went with him. However, in the summer of 1936 Liesel decided to go to Spain to fight fascism there. At that early stage of the civil war the International Brigades had not been fully formed, so Liesel became a member of the Centuria Thaelmann. In August of that year she was on the Huesca front near Tardienta as a fighter and interpreter. Liesel was one of the few women who were able to fight armed at the front. Later, when the Brigades had become established Liesel worked in various administration roles and as an interpreter (she was fluent in German, English and with some Spanish). However, Noel’s and Liesel’s paths did not much cross in Spain and their relationship slowly drifted apart. Liesel was a volatile personality and soon began an affair with an IB commander Dave Springhall. Years later, Springhall was prosecuted by the UK government for espionage and served a prison term. Despite their separation, Noel still cared for Liesel and on one occasion when she had taken leave to Barcelona without permission, Noel wrote to the Brigade authorities, an appeal for leniency on her behalf. It seems to have worked. Liesel escaped punishment. In 1938 she went back to England and from there to the GDR in 1954.

Information about Liesel after the Civil War in Spain is sketchy. Her relationship with Noel had come to an end although they remained on friendly terms. Liesel married an Essex educationalist and writer Norman Hidden but, once again, the relationship didn’t last. After the end of WW2, Liesel returned to the GDR (East Germany), first for occasional visits and then permanently. Although she appears to have been able to earn a living in the GDR as an English teacher and interpreter, she seems not to have been fulfilled in those roles. She was prohibited from joining (or being active in) the GDR Communist Party despite her clear commitment during her time in Spain, and this disappointed her. There is some suggestion she suffered from one or more episodes of mental illness during her later life but such reports are not fully authenticated. Liesel died in Leipzig in 1982.