

**By Lynda Walker**

THE placing of a stained glass window in the Belfast City Hall to the International Brigaders who fought fascism in Spain, marks a milestone in Belfast politics. It took place on Tuesday the 24th of November 2015.

It was a memorial event, with the unveiling of the window being done by the Lord Mayor Cllr Arder Carson of Belfast and Liz Shaw the daughter of a Belfast Brigader.

Many memorials to the Brigaders have been put into place throughout the world but this is probably one of the few if not the only stained glass window. The window was initiated by the International Brigade Commemoration Committee who asked the council to place a permanent memorial in the City Hall.

In 2014 Councillors Pat McCarthy and Andrew Webb moved the following motion “This Council agrees to the installation of a stained glass window in the City Hall to commemorate the sons of our City who fought in support of the democratically elected Government of Spain against the forces of Fascism.”

This is in line with the City Hall policy to “make the environment within the City Hall balanced and inclusive and to reflect the cultural backgrounds of all of the citizens of the City of Belfast”

The window is dedicated to those Belfast men and women who supported democracy in Spain and to those men from Belfast who went to fight Franco and subsequently Hitler and Mussolini.

It is estimated that somewhere in the region of 40,000 women and men went from all over the world.

In Belfast these men came from communist, labour and trade union backgrounds.

They were from the Protestant and Catholic sections of the working class and they understood the nature of fascism and the threat

## Commemorating the son's and daughter's of our city

it made to humanity.

### **Women played an active role**

Though there is no evidence of Belfast women going to Spain they were to feel the brunt of the situation at home.

As mothers, wives, and daughters they would be left to pick up the pieces when their loved ones were killed or returned wounded.

Women however did play a very active role in public meetings, collections and so on, active in several support groups, like the International Brigade Dependents' Committee.

Irish men were immortalised in Christy Moore's song Viva la Quinta Brigada, with the details regarding the names and their deaths coming from Brigader Micheal O'Riordan's book. Connolly Column.

Christy Moore thanked Micheal by performing a special show in 2002 in the New Theatre in Connolly Bookshop, in East Essex Street Dublin, the money went to medical aid for Cuba.

Micheal O'Riordan, originally from Cork but living in Dublin, was present ten years ago when the International Brigade Commemoration Committee (IBCC) was formed by local activists and the Belfast and District Trades Union Council.

This first meeting was facilitated by the Linen Hall Library.

The IBCC is a unique local group, with links in the social, community and trade union movements, that seeks to educate the public regarding the sacrifice of local volunteers in the fight against fascism in Spain between 1936 and 1938, as well as to organise and commemorate their memories and the ideals that

caused them to fight in Spain.

Over the past ten years the IBCC have held many meeting and commemorative events, putting plaques in the John Hewitt Bar in 2006, and the Shankill Library in 2014, and a memorial in Writers Square in 2007.



**The Memorial in Writers' Square**

The activities have brought together many artists, musicians, historians and 'ordinary' people in order to remember and reaffirm the principles of the International Brigaders. ..Continued page 3

The following inscription is on the plaque next to the window.

“With the agreement of all the political parties, this window was commissioned to reflect the contribution of citizens from Belfast to the fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939.....

About 320 Irish volunteers fought against Franco’s forces as members of the XV International Brigade.

Of these, forty-eight were born in Belfast. Twelve died in Spain.

The Spanish Civil War became for many an opportunity to stand against the growth of fascism.

Men and women from all over the world answered the call to defend democracy and their working class counterparts.

Northern Ireland, already impacted by political and religious divisions, was deeply affected by these events and many local people took part in the Spanish Aid Campaign, including Belfast activists Alderman Harry Midgley, Betty Sinclair, Sam Haslett and Sadie Menzies.

They played a significant role at home, raising awareness to support the democratic cause abroad.”

*The Dead Have No Regrets*

*Having given all they had to give*

*To save from blood and fire and*

*dust*

*At least a hope that we can trust.*

*We must remember them – and live.*

*No Pasarán.*

*Aileen Palmer 1939*

This window was designed, manufactured and installed by Alpha Stained Glass.

The design incorporates a poem written specially by Sam Burnside MBE.

## Greeting from the AMIGOS Isabel Pinar

Thank you for inviting the Spanish Association of Friends of the International Brigades to be present here today. It is an honour to take part in this historic event, which recognises the sacrifice of the International Brigade volunteers from this great city.

These Brigadistas gave everything in the fight against fascism and in defence of the Spanish people. They gave us all they had – their youth or their maturity, their hopes and their experience, their blood and their lives. They asked us for nothing in return.

In October 1938, when the remaining 12 thousand International Brigade volunteers began their return home or their journey into exile, La Pasionaria, Dolores Ibárruri, addressed them in Barcelona and said:

“Come back to be with us again. Here you will find a homeland if you have none. Here you will find friends if you have none. Here in Spain you will find the warmth and gratitude of all the Spanish people.”

These words were carried in the hearts of the Brigadistas. They went on to continue the fight against fascism and to continue the fight for social justice in their own lands. But they always carried a piece of Spain in their hearts.

In Spain we have not forgotten what these men and women did. So we are deeply grateful to Belfast City Council for this public recognition of the courage, determination and idealism of these young men of Belfast and all those families, friends and communities who supported them at home.

No pasarán.

## From Anne O’Hara Gerry Abraham daughters of Brigader Gerry Doran

My sister Anne and I are so sorry we cannot be with you all tonight for the unveiling of the memorial window dedicated to the Belfast International Brigaders who fought in Spain, and to those men and women who supported the cause at home. Congratulations to the joint cross-party committee of councillors and the IBCC whose efforts have been rewarded by this poignant tribute. Our sincere thanks for including us in your ceremony.

Please know that we are with you in spirit and can’t wait to cross the Irish Sea to see the window for ourselves. It is a such a wonderful testament to the courage and bravery of those who sacrificed so much.’

## From the Abraham Lincoln Brigade

Dear friends and comrades, On behalf of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives we express our deepest appreciation to all those involved in making this event possible. The stained glass window in Belfast City Hall represents a fitting homage to the courageous and selfless people of your city who along with almost forty thousand men and women from fifty-two countries--including 2,800 from the United States--joined the struggle in defense of democracy during the Spanish Civil War. While this beautiful tribute continues to cast light on these brave antifascists may their example continue to inspire present and future generations to meet the challenges ahead as they work to build a better and more just world.

Salud! Marina Garde Executive Director and Fraser Ottanelli, Chair of the Board of Governors.

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A booklet has been produced for the unveiling of the window, it contains details of IBCC activities and also facts about the Brigaders.

Brigaders like Hughie Hunter who was wounded three times in Spain.

He lived in North Belfast and worked in Shorts on his return from Spain, he was a member of the Communist Party of Ireland until his death in 1972.

And Fred McMahon, 30 Ravenhill Street, Belfast, was in the NI Labour Party; his interests included the Clarion Club, socialist cyclists whose members would travel and then hold open-air propaganda meetings.

There are some 50 short biographies in the booklet.

A large number of Belfast men and indeed Irish men emigrated to Canada, Scotland, England and Australia, a common feature in the 1930's at the time of the depression.

Large gathering of local relatives

At the unveiling of the window there was probably the largest gathering of local relatives of Brigaders that there has ever been in Belfast, with over 30 in attendance.

The Lord Mayor, Cllr Arder Carson spoke as did Ciaran Crossey chairperson of the IBCC, who said:

“The IBCC is proud to say that this window marks a landmark in our campaign to ensure the memories of those who mobilised against fascism are not forgotten. Their struggle must be linked to the continued struggles for equality and justice.”

In addition Ernest Walker secretary of the IBCC welcomed people to the reception in the City Hall and read greetings from people and organisations.

These included, Anne O'Hara, and Gerry Abraham, daughters of Belfast born Brigader, Gerry Doran.

Messages from the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives, and the KFSR - the German International Brigade organisation were read.

Marlene Sidaway, President of IBMT spoke and read Aileen Palmer's the Dead have No Regrets poem.

Isabel Pinar brought greetings from Spain

Freddie McGrath, nephew of Brigader Henry McGrath said a few words noting that an end to wars is long overdue.

International Brigade songs were sung by Andy Irvine and Mel Corry.

The committee who oversaw the work in the council comprised of the councillors from the Ulster Unionist Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Progressive Unionist Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, the Alliance Party and Sinn Fein.

Secretary Ernest Walker gave recognition to this all party group as a tribute to the values and principle that the Brigaders stood for.

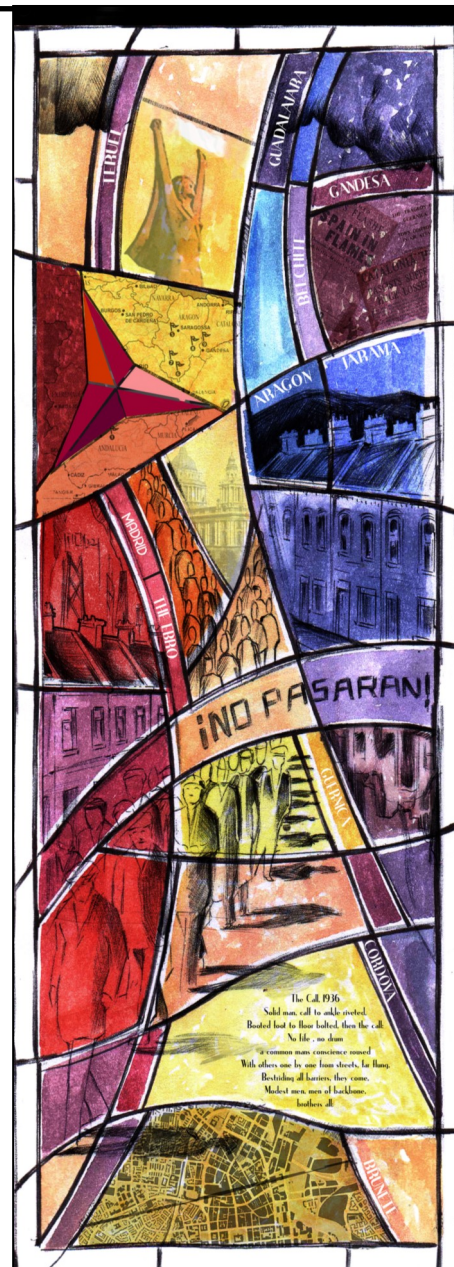
He also welcomed working with the City Council noting that this is the third Lord Mayor (Jim Rogers OBE, Niall Ó Donnghaile and now Cllr Arder Carson) who has participated with the International Brigade Commemoration Committee.

What of the window? Standing proudly alongside the window that commemorates James Larkin and 1907 Dockers Strike, it contains the colours of the Spanish Republican flag, red, yellow and purple and the three pointed star of the International Brigaders.

It also contains the names of battles like The Ebro, Cordoba, Brunete.

Also there is an image representing women - La Pasionaria, and the slogan No Pasaran.

The wonderful artwork was produced by Alpha Stained Glass a small company in Derry



A poem written especially for the occasion by Sam Burnside MBE is etched on the glass:

**The Call, 1936**

Solid man, calf to ankle riveted,  
 Booted foot to floor bolted, then  
 the call  
 No fife, no drum  
 A common man's conscience roused  
 With others one by one from streets, far flung.  
 Bestriding all barriers, they come.  
 Modest men, men of backbone.  
 Brothers all.

## Kämpfer und Freunde Spanischen Republik 1936-1939 e. V.“

Greetings to the participants of the inauguration of the glass window in remembrance of the International brigade members from Belfast on 24 November 2015, Belfast City Hall

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Dear Belfast members of the International Brigade Commemoration Committee (IBCC)!

The members of the association „Kämpfer und Freunde der Spanischen Republik 1936-1939 e. V.“

("Fighters and friends of the Spanish Republic 1936-1939 e. V.") send you militant and solidarity greetings on the occasion of the inauguration of the glass window in remembrance of the International Brigades members from Belfast. Thus their fight for the Spanish Republic will never be forgotten.

Next year, in 2016, democratic people of all over the world will remember the coup of the fascist generals that took place 80 years before. As a result of this coup the second Spanish Republic was defeated nearly three years after.

"Spain in the heart" – this is the title of a poem by Pablo Neruda. "España en el corazón" was also the title of an exhibition shown in Berlin in 2008, which was opened by the Spanish writer Jorge Semprun with the following words: "The Spanish Civil War remains [...] utmost topical. [...] It is at the center of one of the most important and most dramatic moments of the 20th century. "

In October 2016 will be the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the International Brigades, in which volunteers from more than fifty countries, including the Welsh miners, rushed to help the beleaguered Spanish Republic. "Viva la República! No pasarán!" – that was the call. The objectives of the volunteers of that time are still also ours: freedom, peace, human rights and human dignity, social justice, anti-fascism and international solidarity.

Let us take the solidarity of the fighters into the struggles of the present, wherever we are, beyond national borders! That is, their historical experience bring to our current common internationalist work.

That also includes that we stand in solidarity today on the side of the Spanish people, in supporting their work of memory, as well as in their social struggles.

The mission also of us, the German relatives and friends of the fighters of the Spanish Republic, is to pass the memories of the struggle of the International Brigades in Spain and the following struggle until the end of World War II to the next generations.

Today's memorial service at Belfast City Hall is an outstanding contribution for this mission.



And we thank all who take part. Let us work together to convey the knowledge about the struggle of the International Brigades and maintain its spirit, its memories and its memorial places.

We see ourselves as part of global internationalist, anti-fascist movements – and so

honouring the fighters of yesterday, to bear their objectives into the public. Only together will we be able to change social conditions so that all people could live in dignity.

**The fight goes on! La lucha continua – until we can say: "Pasaremos!"**

Kerstin Hommel  
(chairwoman of KFSR 1936 - 1939 e.V.) Berlin,



**Left to Right: Isabel Pinar AMIGOS Spain, Lynda Walker IBCC, Lord Mayor, Cllr Arder Carson and Marline Sidaway President IBMT (photo by Kevin Cooper)**