

LA REVISTA

ISSUE 263

THE BRITISHSPANISH SOCIETY MAGAZINE

SUMMER ISSUE 2024



A JOURNEY TOWARDS SINGULARITY

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WELCOME TO OUR SUMMER ISSUE!

By the time you read this, you may already be in warmer times, or at the very least looking forward to your holiday break-if not booking, so as not to miss out on the BritishSpanish Society's most popular of its London annual events, the summer party at the Spanish embassy in late June (see save the Date!).

If escaping soon to your favourite Spanish destination, spare a thought for the impact of climate change and the wellbeing of local inhabitants as they brace themselves for the annual high tourist season.

A record 85 million international tourists came to Spain in 2023 (17.3 million of them Brits), making it the second most visited country after France. This year's forecast is around 90 million, more than four times the number in 2020 when tourism was decimated by Covid. Back in 1954 when Spain began promoting package holidays, a mere one million tourists came.

Tourism is a major driver of the Spanish economy in GDP terms and seasonal job creation, but at what cost to civic society and the survival of our planet?

As journalist William Chislett sheds a Spotlight elsewhere in this issue, seeking the right balance in Spain between protecting heritage, the environment and local residents' wishes, on the one hand, and commerce and the hotel and restaurant trade, on the other is proving a challenge.



Jimmy Burns Marañón OBE
Executive Editor

An example of constructive ideas was in evidence at the Sustainability conference organised for the second year running earlier this Spring by our friends at the Spanish Tourist Office in London (see News & Events).

We are reminded of how important, as we try and build a better future, is care for our environment and nature, in Amy Bell's incisive portrait of Madrid's much loved park El Retiro.

The overriding aim of this magazine is to share the good news of our activities and members, and to raise the spirits. There is much to savour from the joys of Andalucian and Extremeño food, to walks across the Pyrenees and to the Gredos mountains, from artists and designers to flamenco festivals, the singular vision of the hispanist Gerald Brenan, and a celebration of Dénia's legendary *gamba roja*-and much more.

There is also a review of a fascinating new book on the Spanish exiles who fought for

the Allies in WW2, and, in a remarkable insight into how war can be graphically depicted by painters and photojournalists, Roger Golland takes a look at some of the more striking contrasting exhibits to be currently seen in London.

Elsewhere we report on some interesting personal and official encounters and departures including the chairman's meeting with an old family friend the Duke of Alba at his magnificent *Palacio de Liria*, a similarly genial breakfast with the outgoing British ambassador in Madrid Hugh Elliott, and news of his successor Alex Ellis.

As announced at the BritishSpanish Society's AGM in April and reported in the following pages, I will be handing over the baton of the chair of the charity to new hands before the end of the year, after more than eleven years of voluntary work at the helm. I do so confident that the BSS, with a good team and a loyal membership, will continue to build on its achievements, and contribute to its charitable mission of cultural and educational dialogue and exchange between the peoples of the UK and Spain. My commitment to my family and friends in both countries, writing, and the common good of British-Spanish relations remains undiminished .

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Honorary Vice-President: Hugh Elliott (British Ambassador to Spain)
Chairman: Jimmy Burns Marañón

Patrons: Duke of Wellington, Dame Denise Holt, Lady Maria-Belen Parker, Carmen Araoz de Urquijo, Lady Brennan, John Scanlan, Rt Hon Baroness Hooper, Randolph Churchill, Sir Stephen Wright

Trustees: Jimmy Burns Marañón OBE (Chairman), Dame Mary Marsh (Deputy Chair), Juan Reig Mascarell (Treasurer), Roger Golland OBE, Andrew Clark, Cristina Álvarez Campana, Dr Mike Short CBE, Brian Douglas (Madrid), Dr Marina Perez de Arcos, Amy Bell, Michael Morley (Deputy Chair), José Ivars and José Olivares

britishspanishsociety.org

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The opinions expressed throughout this issue represent those of the authors and contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the BritishSpanish Society or those of their supporters.

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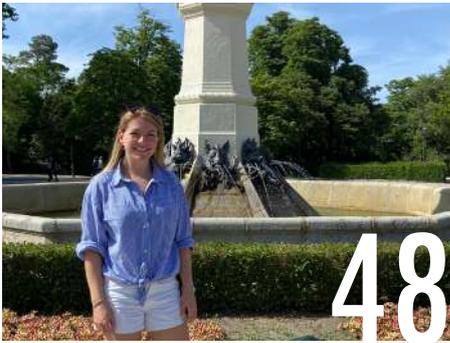
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Save *the* Date

June 2024



Dance: Ballet Nacional de España – Innovación
Wednesday 12th June
7.30pm, Sadler's Wells Theatre, London

Invocación features four works that cover the cornerstones of Spanish dance.



Social: "Celebrating Spain's Regional Business Diversity"
Tuesday 18th June
Hotel Vincci Soma, Calle Goya 79, Madrid



Guide tour at Kew Gardens with Carlos Magdalena
Date TBC, Kew Gardens



Social – 2024 Summer Reception
Tuesday 25th June
6.30pm, Spanish Embassy, London

The BritishSpanish Society summer reception will once again be held at the Spanish Embassy in London. Join us for a fabulous evening of BritishSpanish friendship, food and drink.

July 2024



Dance: Acosta Danza – Carlos Acosta's Carmen
Thursday 4th July
7.30pm, Sadler's Wells Theatre, London



Social: Dinner Club
Saturday 15th July
7.30pm, Broken Eggs, London

September 2024



Book Launch:
Churchill's Spaniards (Sean F Scullion) in collaboration with Spanish Embassy
Thursday 12th Sept
Spanish Embassy, London



Dance: Inmersive Flamenco Show -
Fin de Fiesta
Sunday 15th Sept
Venue: TBC



Social - Madrid Summer Reception
Thursday 26th Sept
Venue: UK Ambassador Residence Madrid



Sport: Padel Tournament
Friday 27th Sept
Venue: Regent's Park

November 2024



Scholarships Awards Ceremony
Tues 20th November
Spanish Embassy London



Music: Autumn Concert
Wed 20th November
Holy Trinity Sloane Square

October 2024



Wine Tasting with Richard Bigg
Monday 7th October
Venue: Bar Rioja



Dance: Viva!
Friday 18th October
Venue: Peacock Theatre

Dec 2024



Christmas Party
Wed 11th December
Venue: Hispania

Culture Events



Jaime Hayon – art’otel London Battersea Power Station

Ongoing

Award winner art’otel London Battersea Power Station has introduced Spanish Jaime Hayon as both, their own Signature Artist as well as their Interior Designer.

[spainculturescience.co.uk/
event/jaime-hayon-at-the-
artotel-london-battersea-
power-station-3](https://spainculturescience.co.uk/event/jaime-hayon-at-the-artotel-london-battersea-power-station-3)



Lucía Bayón – Gasworks Residency

8 Apr - 24 June

Spanish artist Lucía Bayón has been selected for a Residency at Gasworks (London). Aimed at artists in the early stages of their career who are based in London, the Residency lasts 11 weeks, from April 8 to June 24 – fully funded by Gasworks with the support of AC/E.

[spainculturescience.co.uk/
event/lucia-bayon-gasworks-
residency](https://spainculturescience.co.uk/event/lucia-bayon-gasworks-residency)



Call for Applicants – AC/E PICE 4 May - 31 Aug

With three different artists' programmes, AC/E's PIC residencies for the internationalisation of Spanish Culture are now open. The three different modalities – Visiting artists, Movility and Residencies respectively – seek to give impulse and facilitate the presence of Spain's creative and cultural sector internationally.

Deadline 31 August.

[spainculturescience.co.uk/
event/call-for-entries-ac-e-
pice/](https://spainculturescience.co.uk/event/call-for-entries-ac-e-pice/)



Spanish Writers @ Hay Festival 23 May - 12 June

Hay-on-Wye | Wales.
Jean-Baptiste del Amo, Munir Hachemi and Sara Mesa talk to Max Liu + Chris Bryant, Wendy Moore and Alana Portero talk to Kenny Ethan Jones.

[spainculturescience.co.uk/
event/spanish-writers-hay-
festival/](https://spainculturescience.co.uk/event/spanish-writers-hay-festival/)



Old Mistresses – Editing Gombrich

4 June 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm

María Gimeno presents
Old Mistresses (Queridas viejas)
– Editing Gombrich

04 June | Bloomsbury Theatre &
Studio | London

[spainculturescience.co.uk/
event/old-mistresses-editing-
gombrich/](https://spainculturescience.co.uk/event/old-mistresses-editing-gombrich/)



Sharing
the real taste
of Madrid
since 1890



Mahou
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SINCE 1890

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Past News & Events

With special thanks to Cristina Alvarez Campana, Brian Douglas, Lisa Chambers, Maria Soriano, Victoria Oakden, James Scanlan, and David Hurst

Social-Cheese & Wine tasting

18th March 2023, Unwined, London

A very convivial evening in an intimate setting, as the Unwined team took BSS members on an expert tasting of superb Spanish wines accompanied by similar excellent bites with our friends from Hamish Johnston, the finest cheese specialists in London, pairing up as the perfect cheese partner.



BritishSpanish Society Annual General Meeting 17th April, Aula Magna, London Jesuit Centre

Highlights

We celebrated another year of collaboration, friendship and culture in the magnificent conference hall which forms part

Chairman Jimmy Burns OBE welcomed Trustees, members and partners to the AGM who attended in person and connected from other parts of the UK and Spain by zoom. He reflected on the charity's successes and challenges in 2023. (see below) We said a fond farewell to Trustees Justin Ellis and Anna Swinfield and welcomed José Ivars and José Olivares to the Board.



After 11 years as Chairman, and previously three years as vice-chairman, Jimmy Burns made the announcement that he would be stepping down before the end of 2024 as Chair of the Society and that the process of identifying a new Chair had begun. Jimmy was thanked for his selfless dedication to the Society and its mission by Treasurer Juan Reig and received rapturous applause from the audience.

Following the conclusion of official business the Spanish ambassador to the UK José Pascual Marco Martinez addressed the audience noting the Society's importance and heritage and encouraging 'ambition' in the charity's plans for 2024 and beyond.



We were delighted to welcome back former scholarship winner Pablo Tejedor-Gutiérrez who gave a beautiful performance of *toccatas* by Scipiani, and *ricercadas* by Diego Ortiz.

The evening ended with social time to enjoy drinks, tortilla and cheese kindly sponsored by *Mini Lingos*.

Thank you to all those who attended and created another enjoyable and positive BritishSpanish evening.

The Chair's report is appended below. He thanked all those volunteers who oversaw the scholarship scheme, the events programme, production of '*La Revista*' and the administration. Our accounts and new impact report (available from our secretary Lisa Chambers info@britishspanishsociety.org) demonstrated our commitment to accountability and transparency. He paid tribute to HE Hugh Elliott as he approached the conclusion of his time as HM Ambassador in Madrid and looked forward to collaborating with his successor, Alex Ellis. He appealed for generous donations to our scholarship fund.

Jimmy Burns reported that he had informed the Board of his intention to stand down after 11 years as Executive Chair in the summer of 2024. He would stay on as a Trustee and continue to edit *La Revista*. Michael Morley vice-Chair, had launched a process to identify a successor and had made progress. The Board would meet in the summer to make an appointment.

Treasurer's report

Juan Reig, on behalf of Trustees and members, thanked Jimmy for his immense contribution to the Society.

The Treasurer referred members to the detailed accounts circulated with the AGM papers. A summary would be posted on the website. He emphasised the healthy state of reserves and the upward trend towards our target of £50k. Revenue growth was attributed to a steady increase in membership and satisfactory retention of existing members, profits from events and some generous donations. To ensure future viability we would aim to attract donations attached to specific activities and seek to expand corporate support. It was noteworthy that our scholarship programme had dispersed over £800k to more than 85 postgraduate students in ten years. Administrative overheads were kept in check as a proportion of turnover.

Membership of the Board

There were thanks for the contributions of the two Trustees standing down, Justin Ellis and Anna Swinfield. Both would continue to support the Society, including with legal advice, quizzes and contributions to *La Revista*. Andrew Clark stood down on rotation and was reelected to the Board by unanimous vote. Pepe Ivars was elected back to the Board by unanimous vote. Jose Olivares was elected to the Board by unanimous vote. Nicole Crespo and Marta Thomas Arguelles were elected to the Executive Committee by unanimous votes. They would deputise in the Events Team.

It was implicit that all other EC members would continue in place. There were no questions from the floor or online.

Pablo Tejedor-Gutierrez, a BSS musical scholar from 2022, played a selection of short works by Scipiani and Diego Ortiz.

The Ambassador of Spain, HE José Pascal Marco Martinez, who had arrived from another engagement, congratulated the Society on what it had accomplished in 2023 and encouraged it to be ambitious and reach out into the many networks of people with shared interests and values. Members enjoyed wine and tortilla.

Chairman Jimmy Burns' Speech

"A warm welcome to all those present today and those joining us by livestream in London and elsewhere in the UK and those in Madrid, Bilbao, Barcelona, Valencia and other parts of Spain. I am delighted we are gathering both in person and online, connecting our members and supporters in the UK and Spain.

Thanks to our Jesuit Centre hosts

It is a balmy spring evening, and the tulips are flowering here in London. I would like to thank the Jesuit Community at Farm Street for allowing us to hold this AGM in their *Aula Magna* here at the Jesuit Centre in Mayfair - a place of huge spiritual and civic inspiration. In the very best Ignatian tradition of educational outreach across borders, the Jesuit Centre is dedicated to bringing faith to life by connecting it to some of the key issues facing our world and society, promoting positive collaboration, responsible leadership, and encouraging ecological conversion and care for our common home. These are all values I believe are close to the heart and head of the BritishSpanish Society, as it builds on the lessons of its more than one-hundred-year history, retaining its core values and mission, while adapting, with a spirit of generosity and creativity, to an evolving and challenging social and political landscape.

Along with the accounts for the year, shared with you prior to this AGM, we have innovated by distributing an annual *Impact Report* which sets out as clearly as possible who we are, what we are doing, and where we are going. We aim to be both accountable and transparent.

We are grateful to *Mini Lingos*, which educates young children through Spanish music, for their sponsorship and a big thank you to our Admin team, Lisa Chambers and Maria Soriano, and our head of events, Cristina Alvarez Campana, and Board secretary Roger Golland and our team of volunteers for all the arrangements.

Before handing over to our Treasurer, I would like to summarise the highlights of the year and say a few additional words looking forward.

Thanks to the support of our membership and corporate and institutional partners, we have continued to develop our charity's mission of building bridges of cultural and educational

dialogue and understanding between the peoples of the UK and Spain.

Scholarship scheme

A key beneficiary of our fundraising continues to be our scholarship programme, which since its launch in 2008 has provided around 100 scholarships to Spanish and British postgraduate students in innovative projects across the humanities and sciences. Last year's awards to talented students in leading universities were handed out at a ceremony hosted by our Honorary President the Spanish Ambassador, His Excellency José Pascual Marco Martínez, and covered studies in sustainable environment, music, medical research and comparative studies on education and labour market policies in the UK and Spain. I would like to thank our Trustee head of scholarships Dr Marina Perez de Arcos, and her team, for their diligent and incisive work in selecting the awardees in a very competitive field, and our Principal Supporters, Santander Universities, BBVA, Fundación Cañada-Blanch, Plastic Energy and Cuatrecasas, and those among you who helped with additional donations.

Events programme

In 2023, we also had a full calendar of events, in line with our cultural and educational mission, designed to appeal to varied tastes and interests; from expert wine tasting and art tours, concerts and lectures to book presentations, academic conferences and receptions hosted in the summer and autumn respectively by the Spanish ambassador to the UK, José Pascual Marco Martínez, and the British ambassador to Spain, Hugh Elliott.

I would like to thank our head of events Cristina Alvarez Campana and her team, and Brian Douglas and his team in Madrid, for their splendid organisation, ensuring that our events programme in both countries is inspirational and convivial, contributing to making our charity not just a growing network, but also a vibrant *punto de encuentro*, a meeting point where our members - old and new - regardless of age, profession, gender or race can feel welcome and included in an equally familial relationship with each other.

'La Revista'

It is in the spirit of engagement and inclusion that we continue to publish our quarterly magazine *La Revista*, edited and written by committed

volunteers who are also inspired writers. Its pages, beautifully designed, offer the charity's members and supporters content that is both informative and enjoyable. I like the idea of each issue being like a mosaic - original, varied and colourful - and in 2023 La Revista not only informed but also connected, sharing what the charity is up to, highlighting the good news of what our members and supporters are involved in, but also including incisive, engaging and illuminating articles on creative arts, new books, environmental issues, gastronomy, festivals, tourism, sport and scholarship research.

Celebrations

We ended the year in London with a wonderful Christmas party at *Iberica's* flagship London restaurant, with excellent *tapas, vino and cava, villancicos*, carols and a super spread of prizes kindly donated by our sponsors for our fundraising raffle. We also saw in the New Year in Madrid with a similarly vibrant and engaging evening of Scottish dance, haggis and whisky.

Looking forward

2024 is already proving to be another good year for the BSS, with a new round of scholarships to support youthful talent and innovation, and development of our presence in the UK and Spain through our magazine and events programme. Our evolving communications strategy will keep you up to date with detailed information through our emails, newsletters, social media and website.

- But let me just highlight some of the exciting upcoming events, so do book:
- in London, on the 27th April, the art historian Dido Powell will be giving the second talk in her series of exclusive guided tours at the National Gallery
- 25 June has been set for our summer party at the Spanish embassy.
- In Madrid on 14 May, Brian Douglas is following up his successful Scottish evening with whisky tasting held at our friends the British Council,
- In June he and our vice chair for Spain, Michael Morley, are planning an event celebrating business diversity in Spain, with a to be confirmed historic walk in the Sierra in the steps of Hemingway by the expert guide and hispanist Professor Ramon Buckley,

whose father Henry covered the Spanish Civil War and WW2 as a journalist.

- In late September we are looking forward to marking the arrival of Alex Ellis, nominated as the next British Ambassador to Spain, with our popular annual reception in the grounds of the official residence.

Thank you

Ahead of his departure, I would like to pay special tribute to our Honorary President in Madrid, Hugh Elliott, for his invaluable support and encouragement as Ambassador to Spain over the past five years. All the charity does would not be possible without the support of the respective Spanish and British Ambassadors, our members and other institutional and corporate partners.

Appeal for donations to our development funds

Last month we circulated an appeal for donations to our development fund and I very much hope we can count on your generosity in support of our scholarship programme. Each scholarship has the potential to make a real difference; helping a medical student to create a ground-breaking medicine or treatment, an engineer to devise cutting-edge sustainable power for our cars, houses and industries, a law student to fight inequalities, or an art or music student to unearth and share forgotten pieces of cultural importance or interest. The scholarship programme sits at the beating heart of our charity so please follow up the appeal with a donation of whatever size you can afford by contacting our secretary Lisa Chambers on info@britishspanishsociety.org

Governance

Which leads me finally to our governance.

Our charity is led by a dedicated corps of volunteers at Board and committee level, and a small administrative staff, all of whom go the extra mile in helping deliver our mission.

The Board has been reinforced with the appointment of two highly qualified vice-chairs, Dame Mary Marsh in London and Michael Morley who is moving to Madrid to help develop our presence in Spain.

Juan Reig as Treasurer has kept our finances on an even keel in challenging circumstances, Cristina Alvarez Campana has pursued her role in events with energy and enthusiasm, as has Amy Bell in charge of communications, Brian

Douglas in Madrid, and Roger Golland driving the management of the organisation. Both Andrew Clark and Michael Short have provided an invaluable service with their professional experience and advice. And of course a huge vote of thanks to our hard working secretaries Lisa Chambers and Maria Soriano for running the machinery of administration so efficiently, and with such patience and good humour.

I would also like to thank my colleagues Anna Swinfield and Justin Ellis, who are stepping down from the Board after providing hugely helpful input and advice in support of our activities. I know they will continue to be enthusiastic and very valued members of the BSS, with Anna contributing to *La Revista* and Justin offering legal advice when needed, and hopefully the occasional pub quiz evening, so popular with some of our members.

I am confident that the candidates up for elections this evening will further reinforce the Board (José Ivars and José Olivares) and our Executive Committee (Nicole Crespo and Marta Thomas Arguelles), building on experience and bringing in fresh ideas.

It is in this spirit of renewal and of awakening new capacities, connections and purpose, that I have asked the Board to find a new Chair to succeed me before the end of the year. It is with a heavy

heart but, I hope, a clear head that I have initiated an orderly transition period, with a consultation process, headed by vice-chair Michael Morley, to identify a preferred candidate. Meetings with trustees are ongoing, with a view to a target election date at an extraordinary board meeting in the summer. I hope you will appreciate that the need for a well-managed transition will mean confidentiality is preserved until the process concludes.

It has not been an easy decision. But after three years as executive Vice Chair and eleven years as Executive Chair, steering the ship through occasional stormy waters, and seeing the charity grow its membership and impact in both countries, I thought the time had come to pass the baton on to help bring in fresh light and ideas, that can build on our charity's strengths, as well as innovate and grow further.

For now, rest assured that my committed membership of the British Spanish Society and enduring commitment to the mission of engagement between the people of the UK and Spain remains and will continue into the future.

Thank you.

Jimmy Burns Marañón OBE

Delivered at the AGM, 17 April 2024



Spain Sustainability Day

18th April 2024, The Conduit, London

The Spanish and British travel industries were united in the second edition of 'Spain Sustainability Day' which took place both in person at The Conduit, London, on 18 April 2024 and via live streaming.

The BritishSpanish Society's friend and supporter Manuel Butler, director of the Spanish Tourist Office in London, officially opened the event, outlining the special relationship between the United Kingdom and Spain and the objective of creating dialogue between the two countries to transfer knowledge in the field of travel and sustainability. He outlined Spain's tourism ambitions of season extension; with peak season visits dropping 1% year-on-year from 45% to 44%, and geographical diversification, with Spain's Northern regions driving a larger tourism share in 2023 (up 23% year-on-year).

The dual language conference, moderated by Richard Hammond, director of Green Traveller productions and sustainable travel writer, included speakers from across Spain and the UK's travel and transportation industries with panel sessions on circular economy, biodiversity and accessibility. There were also two keynote speeches delivered by Nejc Jus, Director of Research at the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and Charlie Cotton, Founder of Ecollective Carbon

The event was sponsored by Visit Benidorm, part of the Region of Valencia, and the Balearic Island of Mallorca. Leire Bilbao, director of Visit Benidorm outlined the city's 18% reduction in water-usage over the last 25 years, despite a 40% population growth, whilst Susana Sciacovelli, director of tourism (demand and hospitality) at Mallorca Council showcased the island's responsible tourism pledge and roadmap towards transformation.

The first panel (Circular Economy) featured Gabriel Llobera Ramis, marketing and communications manager at Garden Hotels, Nadine Pinto, global sustainability manager at The Travel Corporation (TTC), Carol Rose, head of sustainability at ABTA, and Coralía Pino, head of Sustainability at ITH (Instituto Tecnológico Hotelero). The session stressed how now is the time to adjust our mindsets and employ constructive thinking. Carol Rose reiterated the need to keep products in the industry for longer and touched on the impact of the hotel industry contributing not just to food and

energy waste but also to textile landfill which accounts for a total of 92 million tons of waste per year. Coralía Pino discussed Spain's initiatives within the hotel industry outlining how the 2008 crisis forced hotels to look at energy efficiencies. She reminded delegates that food and energy expenditure are the second and third largest cost areas of all hotel operations, therefore emphasising how circular economy is vital, both for business and the environment. Likewise, Nadine Pinto discussed the impact of hotel merchandise and making bolder choices around in-room amenities. Gabriel Llobera Ramis from the Balearic-based Garden Hotels showcased the group's pioneering organic waste management and compost production, as well as the need for public policy with the Balearic Island archipelago recently initiating its 'law of circularity' for all hotels across the islands.

The second panel (Biodiversity - impacts and Interventions) featured Terry Brown, destinations programme manager at The Travel Foundation, Dylan Walker, wildlife tourism expert at Wildlife Heritage Areas, Blanca Pérez Sauquillo, SG marketing at Turespaña, José Marí Olano, Councillor for large projects, Valencia Green Capital and Zina Bencheikh, managing director at Intrepid. The panel discussed biodiversity in tourism and how tourism is critical in terms of connectivity and education. The emphasis was on community in wildlife tourism and creating respectful bonds between wildlife and visitors with valuable initiatives, such as MEET (Mediterranean Experience

of EcoTourism), creating a network of protected areas that are collaborating to engage communities locally in nature conservation. Blanca Pérez Sauquillo discussed the need to also educate the conscious consumer with digestible and effective messaging, while Zina Bencheikh, Managing Director of Intrepid said "it's about doing the right thing and educating our customers. They don't always know the right choice until we offer it." From a more urban context, José Mari Olano discussed Valencia's status as Green Capital 2024 and how cities can adapt their tourism proposition and urban planning to benefit both residents and visitors.

The third and final panel (Accessibility & Inclusivity) was moderated by Meera Dattani, senior editor at **adventure.com** and travel and culture writer and included Angus Drummond, CEO at Limitless Travel, Alberto Gutiérrez Alberca, Valladolid traffic and mobility executive, Miguel Carrasco, director of tourism at Impulsa Igualdad and Susan Deer, director of industry relations at ABTA. The session started with an inspiring Spanish welcome from Spain's 'Spain for All' ambassador and special guest, Ade Adepitan, who has lived, worked and travelled throughout Spain. Quoting the World Health Organisation figures, Adepitan highlighted how 1.3 billion people worldwide (or 16% of the global population) have some kind of disability. He said, "whilst not all of these people want or have the means to travel to Spain, even if we're only talking about a small percentage, this is still a vast number of people that should be given the opportunity to enjoy

what millions of non-disabled people enjoy every year, the beauty of taking a holiday."

Angus Drummond, CEO of Limitless Travel, talked eloquently about his own personal travel experiences which inspired him to subsequently set up Limitless Travel. He said, "ultimately people with disabilities are the same as other consumers, whilst yes, they may need an adapted bathroom, they also want a great travel experience, a great bar and essentially the same as every other customer." Alberto Gutierrez from Valladolid

talked about the progress being made within urban transportation, and the need for digital accessibility, whilst both Miguel Carrasco from Impulsa Igualdad and Tur4All, and Susan Deer, head of Industry Relations at ABTA stressed the importance of information, transparency, and training.

Thank you and kind regards to Jesús Ruiz, Head of Sustainability and Impact, Spanish Tourist Office / Oficina Española de Turismo in London



**Paco Peña Flamenco Dance Company: Solera
18th April, 2024, Sadler's Wells**

A living legend of the flamenco world, with an enduring following in the UK and Spain, was back in his beloved London presenting his stunning new show over two nights. BSS members led by chairman Jimmy Burns were privileged to be there, and among them was our dance critic Graham Watts whose review can be read in the Culture section of this issue of La Revista.

Whiskey Tasting

14th May, 2024,

Venue: The British Council, Madrid

Despite it being the eve of a *día festivo* – San Isidro, the Patron Saint of Madrid – the BritishSpanish Society managed to attract a full house. Our whiskey tasting evening was celebrated in the wonderful *Edificio Palacete*, courtesy of our partner and host the British Council.

The evening started with a short introduction about the BritishSpanish Society's charitable mission from Trustee Brian Douglas, and attracted a wonderful mix of regular members and a number of people new to the Charity.

We soon dived straight into understanding more about this wonderful golden spirit, known as "the water of life". We were fortunate to have two experts, Abel Luna, a distributor for Basque Moonshiners, and Michael Thompson, from Gravitas Drinks, who gave us a description about their processes as we launched into sampling 4 different whiskies from each of their distilleries.

We were privileged to have Glencairn crystal glasses, allowing for the fullest appreciation of the whisky's colour and aroma. Useful tips for



tasting Whisky included: as suggested by Michael, briefly blowing into the glass before sniffing & drinking, and as suggested by Abel, drinking a sip of ice chilled water between sips, in both cases to manage the impact of the alcohol.

From Basque Moonshiners we tasted two peaty versions of Bikkun Vatted Malt, both blends of their own single malt whisky Agot (using Navarran Pils & Munich malted barley varieties) with a Highland malt with sherry characteristics, and while both benefitted from the use of ex-Rioja Alavesa barriques, the New Path Edition includes a 6 month period in stout beer barriques to smoothen the finish.

We also had the Bikkun American Edition a malt blend including the use of ex-Bourbon Barriques, as well as their Agot whisky; and finally their Agot New Path malt whisky which unusually passed through barrels that previously held Palo Cortado (a complex sherry combining the delicate bouquet of an Amontillado with the body and palate of an Oloroso) and which as could be expected went rather well with the Jamón Ibérico. On the Scotch whisky side we tasted the oily and citrusy Northland (matured in 50L American oak quarter casks), Aurora (sherried whisky matured in American oak and Spanish Oloroso casks), Morven (with a delicate touch of peat - matured in ex-bourbon barrels) and ending with the 10 year old whisky, (their first permanent age-statement with 100% sherry cask matured).

The food on the evening was made up of one of the best *tortillas* in Madrid, *Jamón Ibérico de bellota*, English Cheddar cheese, *picos*, cashews and peanuts, and Organic 70% cocoa dark chocolate which accompanied the last whiskies. Thanks to our artisan Whisky distillery sponsors

of the evening, Basque Moonshiners and Gravitass Drinks, Glencairn Crystal, and of course the British Council for allowing us to use their splendid venue.

Feedback from the evening included the following comments:

"Thank you once again, for organising yesterday's event. Very enjoyable."

"We had a lovely time, thanks Brian"

"Thanks so much for hosting! Always enjoyable..."

"It was a most enjoyable evening with much laughter and fine whiskies. We learnt a lot of the heritage and craft which is wonderful from true connoisseurs."

"Ayer todo genial!! Me lo pasé muy bien y la organización estuvo perfecta"

"Muchas gracias por la organización!! Se ve que os dio mucho trabajo pero lo disfrutamos, estuvo genial"

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The people and stories of the BritishSpanish Society

Change of British Ambassador to Spain

The announcement earlier this Spring of Alex Ellis CMG as the new ambassador to Spain from autumn 2024 marks not just a change at a senior British diplomatic level but also a new incoming Honorary President of the BritishSpanishSociety in Spain with, as we go to press, the current Spanish ambassador José Pascual Marco Martínez continuing as the BSS's Honorary President in the UK.

The outgoing ambassador to Spain, Hugh Elliott (see our thanks in the spotlight section of this issue) generously welcomed the news in March of his succession on social media 'After five wonderful years, this summer my term as Ambassador to Spain ends. Although there are still many months (and work!) left, I am delighted to congratulate my great friend and colleague @ Alexwellis, who will take over as of September. An experienced diplomat and great lover of Spain, he will be a magnificent successor.'

Alex Ellis arrives in Madrid with a broad and experienced track record in international affairs, including a developing knowledge of the Iberian peninsula.

Married to a Portuguese Teresa Adegas, his diplomatic career includes a former embassy posting in Madrid and Brazil, and being UK ambassador to Spain's neighbour, Portugal.

Ellis's last posting was as British High Commissioner in New Delhi where much of his time during the last three years was taken up by high level visits by British government officials and ministers, as well as businessmen.

Prior to India, Ellis served from 2017-2019 in the British Department for Exiting the European Union, as Director General and in 2020 in the Cabinet Office in London, as Deputy National Security Adviser.

His UK government posts and overseas postings



since joining the Foreign Office in the early 1990s, included the South African team and as the desk officer for Zambia and Malawi (1990-1992); Lisbon, Third later Second Secretary EU/ economic (1992-1996); UKREP on negotiating teams for the euro, budget, institutional reform and enlargement of the EU (1996-2003); UK embassy in Madrid, Counsellor EU and Global Issues (2003-2005); Adviser to the President of the European Commission (2005-2007); UK ambassador, Lisbon (2007-2020); Foreign Office Director of Strategy (2011-2013); and UK ambassador, Brasilia (2013-2017).

We look forward to developing a positive cooperation with Alex Ellis as we have done with his predecessors over many years. Chairman Jimmy Burns and vice-chairman Michael Morley had a very cordial lunch with Mr Ellis in London early in the Spring. Members and supporters of the British Society will have an opportunity to meet Alex Ellis at the BSS's annual autumn reception which the new ambassador plans to host in his residence in late September.



BSS Chairman visit to the Palacio de Liria

Author and journalist Jimmy Burns Marañón, who is researching a new book on Churchill & Spain, was very kindly received in person by an old family friend Carlos Fitz James-Stuart, the Duque de Alba at his home in the stunning Palacio de Liria during a private visit to the archives and tour of the historic palace in Madrid .

The meeting built on friendship between the Alba family and Jimmy's Spanish family going back several decades. The current Duke's late grandfather Jacobo, who served as Spanish ambassador in London during World War Two while Jimmy's late father Tom Burns served in the British embassy in Madrid,, was a close friend of Jimmy's late maternal grandfather the doctor and writer Dr Gregorio Marañón. During his childhood in Madrid, Jimmy's birthday party friends were led by Jacobo, the current Duke's second youngest brother named after his grandfather.

The neoclassical Palacio de Liria,

the official Madrid residence of the House of Alba, dates back to the late 18th century. All but the facades were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War but the palace was subsequently rebuilt with designs provided by the British architect Edwin Lutyens.

As well as conversing in fluent English and Spanish with the Duke and spending time researching some documents, assisted by the chief librarian José Manuel Calderón, Jimmy's morning visit to the Palacio de Liria, on a glorious Spring day, took in over a dozen magnificent rooms on the ground and first floor of the palace.

The House of Alba's extraordinary cultural heritage is very much in evidence along with its important and ancient lineage which is entwined with Spanish and British history.

The private art collection includes works by Goya, Titian, Velázquez, Murillo, Zurbarán, El Greco, Ribera, and Rubens, while the library, home to thousands of books and prints, includes a first edition of Don Quixote and the largest collection of handwritten

manuscripts from Christopher Columbus.

The rooms also contain contemporary family portraits including fotos of the Duque de Alba's son and heir Fernando, Duque de Huéscar and his wife Sofia Duquesa de Huéscar whose grandmother Dolores is Jimmy's cousin and godmother.

With warm thanks to the very personable and anglophile Carlos Fitz James-Stuart, the Duque de Alba for his generous reception.

A visit to the Palacio de Liria by BSS members in the charity's future events programme surely beckons.



Laura Peribáñez Concert news

On Wednesday, June 19th seize the opportunity to indulge in an enchanting evening of classical music at London's intimate 1901 Arts Club. Join BSS member and much loved performer Spanish cellist Laura Peribáñez, and her musical colleague Chinese pianist Siqian Li as they unveil a curated programme featuring masterpieces by Rachmaninov, Beethoven, and Villa-Lobos, each intricately linked by the theme of the voice. The entrance ticket includes a complimentary drink and there will be an opportunity to converse with the artists at the closing of the event. For further details, please visit the venue's website.

1901artsclub.com/19-jun-2024-the-romanticism-of-the-voice.html



Ben Irurzun, advocate of historical design styles interviewed by Lisa Chambers.

We love nothing more than celebrating the success of the BritishSpanish community so have eagerly followed the progress of Ben Irurzun on hit BBC programme Interior Design Masters. We caught up with Ben following the semi-final of the show, a Great British Bake Off for the interior design world, which sees up-and-coming interior designers compete for the illustrious prize of a collaboration contract with homeware retailer La Redoute.

History enthusiast Ben, who was born in San Sebastián, confesses that it was the living history of London's buildings that drew him to the capital before love took him to Wolverhampton where he now lives with his partner Daniel, a university professor in Byzantine history.

Where are you today Ben?

'I'm back in beautiful London, soaking up Soho's sunshine. I'm enjoying a coffee with my dad before going to 'Sketch in Bloom,' part of the National Gallery's 200-year anniversary celebrations. London is so special. Look at the buildings, everywhere feels like a living history book. I adore being immersed in history and imagining what it would have felt like to be here in these streets at different points in time. My favourite thing about the UK is the active preservation of history. I would love to live in a bygone era, so as that's not entirely possible this is the next best thing!'

What was it like growing up in San Sebastián?

'When I was younger my mum used to take me into the old town in San Sebastián. I was always fascinated by the beautifully preserved buildings, the art nouveau façades and manor house entrances. I particularly loved the little old shops where I could watch the lady knitting socks or the shoe shop where they made espadrilles in front of you. I went to a Jesuit school in San Sebastián, my parents had worked hard to send me to the best school they could afford. The school was like

Hogwarts, a really old building with parts of it falling apart. I remember watching with shock one day as my teacher fell through a rotten floor! That school gave me grandiose ideas of life and I am lucky that my parents supported me and nurtured my crazy ideas.

Tell us about your journey to Interior Design Masters?

'I left home to study at university in Madrid. Living in my own home gave me a huge opportunity to really express myself and explore my design style, both in fashion and interiors. I went crazy and turned that flat into a 19th century time capsule! My dad had taken me travelling across Europe when I was younger, and I fell in love with London and its history, so I contacted Central St Martin's and begged them to let me finish my Masters with them, that got me to London, and I stayed. I moved to Soho and ran a vintage boutique on Portobello Road, under the arches where Bedknobs and Broomsticks was filmed. It was like working on the set of the movies I had watched as a child. I then worked in costume design on amazing films like Star Wars, The Hobbit, Snow White and the Huntsman. Being part of those productions was amazing. I love knowing that the leather I fixed or buttons I sewed are in those films, you won't spot them, but I know my work is hidden in there. So I guess it was always there, the

history, fashion, interior design, all mixed together. My friends then encouraged me to apply for Interior Design Masters, which I did for season 4. I did the application in a hurry so not surprisingly I didn't get on. For my season 5 application I went to town. I staged the house, cooked victorian and regency cakes, I basically turned my house into a film set, and it worked!

Who has most influenced you?

The women in my family. I come from a long line of matriarchs and strong women. The biggest influence has to be my nanna. She was born in Galicia. Her family were republicans living in Franco's Spain. They had to leave Galicia as they were dying of hunger. They came to San Sebastián bought a small inn and worked incredibly hard. Nanna worked from the age of 5 sewing in an umbrella factory. She taught all of us to sew. Nanna believed that sewing saved her family from dying of hunger. It is thanks to her that I have made a living using the skills she taught me. My nanna would be so proud of me, she'd be cross with my attention-grabbing dress sense, but definitely proud!

Could Spain entice you back?

'Definitely. My dad's family have owned a farmhouse in the Basque Country since 1450. I know all of the stories, our family connection to the building goes back generations. I know who

lost their money, who went to war. It is so interesting from both a historical perspective and as a design project. I have plans to restore the farmhouse. I would love to do the restoration as a TV programme, as a love letter to the Basque country. TV programmes always go to the south of Spain, to southern Italy or France. No one ever comes to see the north of Spain, I want to show how wonderful it is. We have a farmhouse and forty hectares to work on, it is a big job but I'm so excited about what we could achieve.'

Plans for the future

'I'm already writing a book. I want to demonstrate that with clever sourcing everyone can make their homes beautiful on a budget. I have also been approached by hotels (including a dog hotel!), lawyers and restaurants so I am hoping you will see my designs in lots of new places. There will be no minimalism, the main thing I learned on Interior Design Masters is never alter your style for someone else. I am not the designer for you if you have a minimalist brief. I am theatrical, my designs are based on drama and theatre, of course I will bring your personality into the designs, but done my way.

Ben can be contacted via his website benatirurzun.co.uk

BSS member Guillermo Gilabert
Quantitative Surveillance Analyst Developer
at London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG)
In his own words...

I discovered, almost by chance, the existence of the British-Spanish Society, and I can't deny that it has been a turning point in my life. I love being able to connect with people who share an interest in my culture, my experiences between our two countries, and to collaborate on projects that I find of great importance. I feel that being a member gives me the opportunity to enjoy the cosmopolitan and cultured society that I love while contributing to a good cause.

My life in the United Kingdom has been an unexpected journey full of surprises that has led me down paths I never imagined traversing. When I arrived twenty-four years ago, my plan was simple: to finish my studies in physics and spend one or two years in this land. But as often happens, things didn't go as initially planned.

My early years were spent in Scotland, between Edinburgh and Glasgow. They were four intense years, filled with anecdotes and discoveries where I felt especially welcomed as a Spaniard. I remember the cobblestone streets, the welcoming pubs, and the vibrant Scottish culture that enveloped me at every turn.

After Scotland, I arrived in Kent to pursue a Ph.D. in electronic engineering in Canterbury. What I thought would be a few years turned into two decades of my life. Between laboratory work and lecturing, I found myself building a life in this traditional, historic, and charming city.

Although I started in research and teaching, I eventually decided to change careers and immerse myself in the world of quantitative analysis in the financial sector. For the past four years, I have been working in the market quantitative surveillance team at the London Stock Exchange. It's a challenging job that keeps me constantly moving and learning.



What I've always liked about living in the UK is the feeling of being in a cosmopolitan, multicultural, and open society. That's why the outcome of the Brexit referendum was a tough blow for me. I've always valued the diversity and openness of British society, and seeing these principles waver was hard to digest.

As a native of Cadiz, I have to admit that the grey weather and lack of sun sometimes weigh on me. And although I enjoy a good "fish and chips" from start to finish, I can't deny that I miss the '*pescaito frito*' and '*tortillitas de camarones*' from my homeland.

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Is Spain's tourism a victim of its own success?

William Chislett



As the tourism season hots up, angry Spaniards in Malaga, priced out of the housing market, have taken to daubing streets and doors with slogans and stickers ranging from the mild *Antes este era mi casa* ('This used to be my home') to the more brutal *A tu puta casa* (F*ck off home'), the writer, a BSS member who lives in Spain reports.

In Tenerife, the most popular of the Canary Islands, thousands of protestors holding placards reading 'We don't want to see our island die' called for a freeze on tourists and a more sustainable tourism model. Six members of *Canarias Se Agota* (Canaries Sold Out) staged a hunger strike in protest at what they see as uncontrolled tourism.

More and more flats are being turned into holiday accommodation, enabling landlords to earn more, and there is a growing trend of converting small shops and bars into tiny flats for tourists. The cake shop and bakery *Feni*, founded in 1945, very near my home in Barrio Salamanca, Madrid, closed in April. My post on X (formerly known as Twitter) garnered 27,000 views and led a two-page article in *El Mundo* on how such closures (a total of 8,320 as of February in Madrid alone) point to the dire lack of affordable housing.

On average, 100 people apply for each home available to rent in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Bilbao and Santa Cruz de Tenerife, according to *Alquiler Seguro*, a property company. While in the Balearic Islands, an average of 142 people apply for every rental property.

A record 85 million international tourists came to Spain in 2023 (17.3 million of them Brits), making it

the second most visited country after France. This year's forecast is around 90 million, more than four times the number in 2020 when tourism was decimated by Covid. Back in 1954 when Spain began promoting package holidays, a mere one million tourists came.

This key industry generated close to 13% of GDP last year, was the main driver of the 2.5% growth in the economy and helped lower the jobless rate to under 12%. One in every four new jobs created in 2023 was in labour-intensive tourism. A bad tourism season spells trouble for growth and employment. (The 11.2% decline in economic output in 2020, the EU's biggest fall, was largely due to the massive drop in tourists).

Is Spain becoming a victim of its own success? The number of tourists last year was 1.75 times more than Spain's population (1.47 in France), but this was nothing compared to the overtourism in the Canary Islands (population 2.2 million and 14 million visitors, 5.7 million of them Brits). Tourism produces a whopping 35% of the islands' GDP.

Spain is not alone in having this problem. Venice and Amsterdam, for example, are controlling tourism numbers with various measures and charges. Seeking the right balance in Spain between protecting heritage, the environment

and local residents' wishes, on the one hand, and commerce and the hotel and restaurant trade, on the other, is complex.

The Canary Islands plans to toughen the laws on short lets, and in the case of new-build properties bar them from the short-let market. Madrid has similar laws in place but enforcement leaves a lot to be desired. Of 17,000 short-term rental apartments in Madrid, only 600 were inspected between January and November 2023 and just one was sanctioned, according to a report.

As for the affordable housing problem, it has been ignored for too long by the two main parties, the conservative Popular Party (PP) and the Socialists. Again this is not just a Spanish problem, but it is particularly acute here.

Spain's stock of social rental dwellings (a paltry 1% of the total housing stock) is the lowest among the 38 OECD countries. In the Netherlands, it is 35%. The number of this type of home built dropped from around 90,000 in 1997 to 10,000 in 2021.

The Bank of Spain estimates 600,000 more new homes are needed by 2025 for young adults in order to narrow the vast gap between the supply of all types of homes on the market each year (90,000) and the demand (270,000). Spain is very much a property-owning society (75%) and often of more than one home, but while 70% of those under 35 owned their home in 2011 only around one-third do today

Lastly, as if Spain did not already have enough tourism-derived grievances, the drought-stricken region of Catalonia is going to have to install a floating desalination plant in Barcelona (host to more than 12 million tourists in 2023) to help the city guarantee its drinking water supply.

Note on the author:

William Chislett is a journalist and author.



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Breakfast with the British Ambassador



Jimmy Burns catches up with Hugh Elliott who is leaving Madrid after five years in post, savouring the senior diplomat's delicious home-made marmalade and sipping similarly restorative café.

The *'man a mano'* meeting is in the official residence, discreet and elegant, in the leafy residential neighbourhood of Puerta Hierro.

The residence has served as a welcoming location to many Brits and Spanish friends over the years, not least members of the BritishSpanish Society who each September celebrate their autumn reception there generously hosted by the ambassador as honorary president in Spain of our charity.

Our breakfast by mutual agreement is not a cooked English. Whenever I am back in Madrid, the city where I was born, my mornings are normally taken up recovering from generous lunches and dinners the evening before, so I am more than happy to follow Hugh's healthy diet and go for a strong café, orange juice, croissant and toast.

The culinary *pièce de résistance* is the home-made marmalade, lovingly processed by Hugh

himself with Seville oranges and a secret British recipe which the ambassador inherited from his late grandmother.

I recall that it was some five years ago when Hugh had just been posted as ambassador to Spain that we had an earlier conversation for *La Revista*. It was during the first year of the pandemic. Travel and most forms of direct human contact were restricted, so I contacted him from London via the internet and zoomed.

The world was in uncharted waters, with no one really knowing how impactful the pandemic would be or how long it would last. Then it was Brexit with successive British Conservative governments proceeding in ways many would find difficult to understand let alone justify.

As an Anglo-Spaniard, I felt bereft, much as the child must feel when his parents go into a messy divorce and the links to a familiar comfort zone of mutual

respect and belonging are cut asunder.

In Hugh however I found elements of a kindred spirit—he having married a Spaniard Antonia he had first met when first discovering Spain in his youth while riding a bicycle. He spoke good Spanish. His ambassadorial posting to Madrid, followed good preparation in the private and voluntary sector, and at the Foreign Office, which still produces some of the best diplomats in the world.

Hugh has had to navigate stormy waters, more challenging than any faced by his recent predecessors: the pandemic, Brexit, not to mention complex negotiations on the future of Gibraltar, that thorny competing sovereignty issue that is the historic elephant in the room when it comes to Anglo-Spanish relations.

He has done so extremely well, keeping a cool head, with precise thinking and retaining,

when appropriate, a good dose of that diplomatic palliative which is the English sense of humour, and the support of friends and his family, not least his wife, familiarly known as *Toni*, who, coming from Salamanca, has her feet firmly grounded while open to human compassion and dialogue.

We wish Hugh all the best on his next posting to London knowing that he will remain a much respected and honorary member of the BSS.

But first here were the questions I put to him, and his answers.

What is your proudest achievement during your time as ambassador to Spain?

Achievements in jobs like this are not personal: they are team achievements. I am very proud of the way the whole team in the British Embassy, and our 8 Consulates around Spain, responded to the double challenge of Brexit and the Covid Pandemic, supporting British residents and visitors alike, helping businesses navigate ever-changing rules, often under considerable pressure. That was a real once-in-a-generation crisis which I will always remember. However, there are also lots of other achievements that have made a big difference to our relationship, such as the recent education agreement and moments where British and Spanish law enforcement have worked together to achieve big operational successes. I've also been very proud to see record numbers of English language students come to Spain and huge investments between our two countries, which my team have helped to support, during my time here.

What has been your greatest challenge ?

Communicating and explaining all of these changes, over a period of several years, has not been entirely straightforward. And like everyone else, moving all our people to nearly 100% remote working practically overnight, while maintaining all our services and keeping our staff safe was a huge challenge. Finally, there is the ever present "not enough hours in the day" challenge which, given the breadth and diversity of the bilateral relationship and Spain as a country, I have thought of most days!

What will you miss most of your time in Spain?

I have been coming to Spain nearly every year for 40 years now, and with so many friends and family here will continue to do so. So some of the things I might miss, I will have the chance to return to. But I will miss the sheer variety and responsibility of the job, and the opportunity it has given to my wife and I to meet so many wonderful people from such different walks of life, in Spanish and British communities.

Your favourite Spanish dish?

5 years on, I am still looking for the perfect croqueta. Having tried many, including the paella-chorizo version.

Your favourite Spanish holiday?

An impossible question, because there are so many beautiful parts of this country. But I do particularly remember a tour in the 1990s of the full length of the North of Spain, ending at the Costa de la Muerte, including a memorably atmospheric visit to the Cementerio de los Ingleses, where those who

died in the Iris Hull and HMS Serpent are buried, so close to the coast, as dusk fell and the mist rose. There is a reason so many millions of Britons visit Spain every year and, in doing so, they make a significant 1.5% contribution to Spain's GDP.

What have you missed most about life in the UK?

A decent pint of bitter is hard to come by in Madrid. Or pretty much anywhere else in Spain for that matter.

Your hopes for the future of Anglo-Spanish relations?

Those relations are, and will remain warm, close and productive: there is so much that binds us together, including our common values and shared outlook as maritime, free-trading nations. The 800,000 plus total Spaniards and Brits who live in each others' countries, and the 20 million or so total visitors to each other's country a year are testament to this, and to a truly enduring friendship. We have a bit of work to do to get Spanish visitors to the UK up towards the extraordinary numbers that travel the other way - more than to any country in the world. A deal on Gibraltar would also be great!

Any comments on the work of the BritishSpanish Society?

I am hardly the most impartial commentator, as I was already an active supporter before this job was even on the horizon. I think you do a wonderful job bringing together the peoples of our two countries, celebrating all that unites us, and investing through your charitable work in education so that these links will continue to strengthen over time. I look forward to continuing to support all that you do in the future.

“I like to say life-ing, instead of age-ing”

Laura Obiols

La Revista's arts editor interviews Valentina Aristizábal about her Conscious radical art

In the heart of Madrid, Valentina opens her home and studio doors to La Revista. The emotional journey through her impressive work makes these lines a privileged story; full of truth, radicalism and humanity. Ten minutes with the laid back genius Colombian artist and you realize that her smile is as contagious as her powerful and revolutionary ideas, all of them thoroughly examined with no fear, saying out loud what needs saying, with no censure and with nothing in there that is not purely essential and meaningful.

Valentina, thank you so much for this adventure. I have to confess that since I started to know you, my wow inside keeps growing at all levels. I have been immersed in your art pieces. I guess we should start from the beginning... that difficult question... What is the beginning of your story?

“Well, first of all, I am really excited to be here too, so thank you so much for that”, Valentina warmly smiles. *“I have always found in painting and arts, a way of connecting to my inner self, with no anesthesia, it goes directly there, and then it goes outside, to the world. I remember myself painting since I was little, but if you ask me for my professional beginning, a love breakage and its grief brought me back into my brushes, and I have not stopped since. I could not cry. I was not able to cry for months, I just could not, I was so blocked; and I started crying through my paintings, grieving through my paintings”* -the artist gets emotional at this point of the interview and she creates a nice moment of honesty and deeply sharing- *“An unfortunate event also took place in Colombia, which is now fortunately a happy ending anecdote.”*, she shares. *“A girl from Cali,*



who was close to a friend, was kidnapped by a prostitution mafia. At that time, I was working in a set of pieces that had strong messages on it, so I did one that said 'DON'T TOUCH!' I was making the point that you can not touch a human body the same way you are not supposed to touch an art piece in a museum. In this case, it was a homage to the women body, and in particular, to the girl that was going to be exploited. I used my art platform to bring awareness, she was missing at that time. Suddenly, it became a huge movement, many people in Colombia, artists, singers, big blogs, etc. started sharing the post, offering for help. I never thought this could happen, we were overwhelmed by the support we received. They found her!”, the artist explains. *“I have never used my platform for anything like this. It became massive. And I saw the strong power of activist art. That moment of realization, started everything for me.”*, she says.

I can not imagine what you felt when they found her. *“Yes, I still can not believe that we did it as a community, and it all started with two words. I felt the power of it and I thought I had the responsibility to continue. The message was written in red, because it was made by a woman trying to help another woman, the red was to*



honour the blood flow that we have each month that allows us to create life. Red shows power and danger. Many pieces in the series came, 'GOD IS A WOMAN' is another one; to me God is like the creative energy, and my creative energy lives in a woman body," the artist shares. 'KILL THEM WITH KINDNESS' is about putting boundaries, I felt strong at that time, and I thought this was a way to say 'I put limits, but with love, love is the way', say it, stop it, with kindness, with love; I did more of these pieces and my work started developing into inspiring messages, with a dark yet playful sense humor as well, 'ESTADO CIVIL: INGOBERNABLE (in red letters); 'DIVORCED WOMEN VIBES' (in super colourful letters)'. I started to question many things about masculine and feminine energy, about how we live, and I realized that 'LIVE-GING' was a nicer word than 'AGE-ING'; so I did that art piece with that idea, using crayons, talking about age but using the colours I used in my childhood, it was all colourful and fun-loving, free. I feel we all need to connect more with our inner child more often, and play, that is our pure essence, that is who we all are deep down," she shares.

I have seen that one, it's really cool. The way you turn stories into powerful messages amazes me. "And if I tell you where this idea came from, you will not believe it," Valentina shares. I would love to hear. "It came from Pamela Anderson. Someone I would never relate to in the past. She showed up on the red carpet without wearing any make up, she decided in the make up room she was fed up with it. And she made a statement that shocked me. We have always seen her with her surgeries and exuberant, all of her like a made up fake character... and suddenly, at her age, she felt powerful enough to just don't give a damn. I do not wear make up normally, I feel okay being laid back, and I found that Pamela appearing as the real Pamela, at her age, was really telling something to the society we live in. It's okay to age, but what we are really doing is living, being wiser. Wearing make up, or not, having your boobs done, or not, heels, or not, do what you feel, and just have fun live-ging," she laughs.

And then you have your minimal painting in block colours, can you explain more about these ones? "Yes, I now have 3 major lines of work, the messages,

the minimal pieces and another one I am working on that has to do a lot with nature and earth, accessing the vibration of love, which is not easy, it's been a long process for me, confronting yet beautiful. The most beautiful I did in my life, but it came through tears. With the minimal pieces I want to talk about our purest form as humans: energy. They are minimal pieces (sculptures and paintings) that you can see and feel. The materia is there but behind that materia, it's only energy, that is what I am trying to portray," the artist explains.

"My art has always had a big profound meaning to me. It's the place where my conscious and my spiritual life meet. What I give to the world. And what I give to myself. If that touches someone, or makes anyone laugh, it's a bonus. I like well understood feminism. To balance both the feminine and masculine energy that we have. The new line of work that I am starting has to do with mother nature. I was amazed with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft (London 1759-1797), an English writer and passionate advocate of educational and social equality for women. She outlined her beliefs in 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' (1792), considered a classic of feminism, the concept did not even exist, she was the first women in the world that made really strong points about a topic that was not even under debate, and it made me think. She talks about nature being mother nature, with feminine and masculine energy. I am making pieces to make the point that when both energies are balanced, I feel connected to nature, which is where I come from, and when my feminine energy is back to nature, I

become kind of genderless, I stop being a body, it's energy flowing, bigger than anything, it becomes everything (but in terms of materia, is nothing, as you can not touch it, but it is everything), it is pure energy, it is very strong.," she shares.

Where do you see your art taking you? *"Yes, that is what happens, and hopefully that is what will keep happening, I do not have control over my pieces, my art takes me in, always, always, always. It is a huge mirror."*

You can see more of her work at:

valentinaaristizabal.com

@punt0cero

Valentina González Aristizábal (Cali Colombia 1987) is a multidisciplinary artist based in between Spain and Colombia. Was part of the private collector works at ArsCoco from 2017-2019 and she has not stopped showing her radical and activist work at international galleries since, including a solo show for Fundación Formemos at El Nogal private club (Bogotá 2017), White Lab (Madrid 2018), Casa Sorella (Cali 2022) and No Somos Galería (Cali 2024) amongst others. She is a pioneer in social actions and interventions as well as cultural development activities in her country.

Bruce Springsteen: miracles happen

Laura Obiols



Our arts editor catches up with the legendary rock star in London on his latest multi-national tour, which takes in Spain this June.

This interview is a blessing of a fan meeting her favorite singer, having the chance to explain what the British Society was about, and finding out that the singer was not only genuinely interested in what the BSS is doing but also turned out to be a really nice down to earth guy.

After fifty years of touring and watering his rock-and-roll legend status -20 Grammys, two Golden Globes, a Tony Award and an Oscar- Springsteen is hitting the road again this year all over US, Canada and Europe: Sunderland (UK) in May and both Madrid and Barcelona in June. "I could not believe the gig in Madrid sold out in six seconds," he shares - "I'm

surprised it was six and not two," I reply, getting a 'hmm' and a smile back from the star.

When asked about how he feels about having come up with songs that are considered THE music masterpieces in history, he says "I can sing but I'm not the greatest singer in the world. I can play guitar very well but I'm not the greatest guitar player in the world, so I said, well, if I'm going to project an individuality, it's going to have to be in my writing. I feel miracles happen. I am quite dry most of the time... but I keep trying... I go for long periods without picking up anything significant. Suddenly the opposite happens - I pick up different things all at the

same time. It's like you're in a mine and one vein has gone dry, so you tap into another. A pop vein or a folk vein, and so you start working there... but because I am primarily a rock 'n' roll musician when I'm operating sort of at my peak—I like to... every once in a while, come up with some rock songs. I believe in God -he explains he still is connected to his Catholic upbringing- and I realized that this is like a therapy to me, it's my therapy; but I also see a therapist, maybe he should get some credit too, or a huge one actually, I don't know, I guess I love my job - it's like a magic trick, because you take something out of the air that isn't there, and when this

happens and I realize it is good, I feel full, very full, utterly full, because I have the privilege of sharing it." "So having a gift that you keep on giving is your engine...Yes, it is always this that keeps you going, realizing something is good and sharing it. When we recorded 'Letter To You' we spent one week in the studio—five days—and cut the entire record. It was all live, no overdub vocals and just a few overdub instruments. It's the first truly live, in-the-studio record of the band we've ever made, and when we started sharing it, those first moments... were so comforting... and it kept increasing, it is the best feeling ever."

The conversation led us to talk about age and death. "You don't lose everything when

someone dies. You do lose their physical presence, but their physical presence is not all of them, and it never was all of them, even when they were alive. Spirit is very strong. Emotion is very strong. Their energy is very strong. And a lot of this, particularly for people who are very powerful, really carries over after death. It's like my friend George passes away and leaves me with all of these songs. Clarence passes away and leaves me with these songs. Danny passes away, leaves me with these songs. And what are songs but dreams, at the end of the day? It really is all my dreams that I put down on paper and on tape," he explains.

"Thanks for sharing so much. I can not believe I am talking about death and dreams and

life and therapists, with the biggest rock star in the world, I am not able to ask anything that I have quickly prepared before seeing you because after a while here with you, I realize they are completely irrelevant," I confess. The Boss cuts my apologies, "I am enjoying this talk (me: please, someone pinch me), I recently changed the way I see life and death, and therapists - the talking cure—it works. You've got to commit yourself to a process. And I am pretty good at doing that. I enjoy the investigative examination of issues in my life that I do not understand. I am learning a lot and also learning how to turn it into a real life, it's very similar to the magic of writing music," the rock-star concludes .

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Paco Peña Flamenco Dance Company

Graham Watts

Our flamenco expert, dance critic and BSS member reviews *Solera* as performed at London's Sadler's Wells on the 17th April 2024

Paco Peña may be a quiet and unassuming showman, but he is also one of the foremost traditional flamenco guitarists alive today. His unique upright posture, guitar resting on top of his thigh and proudly pointing upwards at 45 degrees, contrasts the norm, which is to caress the instrument, holding the guitar horizontally while crouching over it. This performance was given just a month short of Peña's 82nd birthday and although his musicianship is undiminished by time, one supposes that his stamina may not be what it once was, so it was a clever touch for him to be backed by two other outstanding guitarists (Dani de Morón and Rafael Montilla).

The *tablaó* was completed by three excellent dancers: the

lion-hearted Angel Muñoz, supported by Gabriel Matias and Adriana Bilbao, with the hint of romantic frisson between this latter pair; two passionate singers (Iván Carpio and Inmaculada Rivero); and Julio Alcocer, a multifaceted percussionist.

Theatrical flair came via a continuation of Peña's 20-year association with Jude Kelly, the former artistic director of the Southbank Centre. *Solera* is their seventh collaboration and Kelly has again brought a vivid sense of theatre to create a proscenium-based presentation of traditional flamenco that is second-to-none.

Their structure for *Solera* is unusual since it features an interval. Usually, flamenco

producers shy away from a break in the action because it disturbs the *duende* but here it worked perfectly as a bridge from mimicking the rehearsal process in Act 1, across to the *tablaó* performance itself (Act 2). One supposes that the interval also gave the octogenarian star time to relax those fingers and get his breath back!

Solera is a process for storing younger wines at height, gradually transferring the liquid - over many years - to older casks in order to produce a consistently aged blend; the oak barrels at the bottom being those of the greatest vintage. *Solera* also provides a subtle title for this production, since that process of making wine is replicated by blending the performances of younger

flamenco artists with those of greater maturity.

A highlight towards the end of the rehearsal phase came when Peña's mastery of the guitar was entwined with the expressive playing of a guitarist half his age (de Morón) in a duet that reinterpreted a haunting Farruca, originally composed by the legendary Romani guitarist, Sabica. The fluid interplay between these two extraordinary guitarists was mesmerising.

The three dancers also embodied that process of Solera, notably in the dance reciprocity between Muñoz and Matias, a young bailaor from Brazil. Now approaching 50, Muñoz – like Peña, a native of Córdoba - retains dynamic speed in his zapateado and the fluid sinuousness of his upper body, all deliciously combined in an expressive soleá (the quintessence of flamenco

expression) and an ebullient alegrías.

The same mix of experience and youth was evident in the singing duo. Carpio was born in 1988, by which time Rivero was already an experienced performer. Her anguished vocal twists possessed arresting passion, which was passed onto Carpio – who hails from a distinguished dynasty of cantaores – like a vocal relay baton. The ensemble was well supported by the percussionist, Julio Alcocer - another Peña regular (since 2012) - who opened the second act with a penetrating and rhythmic solo.

In 2022, Peña won the UK National Dance Award for Outstanding Creative Contribution for this same show at Sadler's Wells. Two years on and, if anything, Solera - in keeping with a term that describes the process for

maturing wine – has evolved into an even better show.

*Graham Watts is dance writer and critic writing regularly for Shinshokan Dance magazine (Japan), Tanz (Germany), The Spectator (UK), Bachtrack.com and Gramilano.com. He has written the biography of Daria Klimentová (The Agony and the Ecstasy) and chapters about the work of Akram Khan for the Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary Ballet and on the work of Shobana Jeyasingh in Routledge's Fifty Contemporary Choreographers. He is Chairman of the Dance Section of The Critics' Circle and of the UK National Dance Awards and regularly lectures on dance writing and criticism at The Royal Academy of Dance and The Place. He was nominated for the Dance Writing Award in the 2018 One Dance UK Awards and was appointed OBE in 2008.



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London's Flamenco Festival 2024 Previewed

Graham Watts OBE



The *Flamenco Festival* returns to Sadler's Wells for its nineteenth iteration from 4-15 June. This year's festival will showcase ten UK premieres amongst a host of thrilling performances from some of the greatest exponents of the flamenco arts in a varied programme of dance performances and concerts in both Sadler's Wells Theatre and the Lilian Baylis Studio.

The festival will be opened for one-night only by Rocío Molina, bringing her unique subversion of flamenco traditions in *Al Fondo Riela* (*Shimmering in the Background*). This work premiered at the XXI Bienal De Flamenco in Sevilla in 2020 and is the second part of a trilogy about dancing to the guitar. *Al Fondo Riela* will provide a series of flamenco dialogues between

Molina and two outstanding guitarists: the traditional, technical skills of Oscar Lago contrasting with the innovative flair of Yerai Cortés.

Molina returns to London after her appearance at the Flamenco Festival in 2019, the same year that she won the UK National Dance Award for outstanding female performance in *Caída del Cielo* (*Fallen from Heaven*).

In 2022, she became the first flamenco dancer to win the Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale.

Vicente Amigo is regarded as one of the most accomplished flamenco guitarists of his generation, a Latin Grammy Award-winner who is seen to be a successor to the late, great Paco de Lucía. He will present a concert on 5 June, fusing jazz,

folk and South American rhythms wrapped in the essence of flamenco.

Virtuoso performers Patricia Guerrero and Alfonso Losa will strip flamenco bare and explore personal connections in *Alter Ego* on 6 June. Developed from a series of studio improvisations, *Alter Ego* is an intense duet that combines conventional flamenco with spontaneous and unbridled movement. Guerrero draws geometric figures with her dance, dismantling her movements and recreating them anew.

Another great bailaora, Eva Yerbabuena, will reflect on her 20-year career in *Yerbagüena (bright dark)*, which will be performed over two nights (7 and 8 June) alongside her husband, Paco Jarana, also her musical director and guitarist, accompanied by two singers and a pair of percussionists.

Yerbabuena is known for exploring the tension between flamenco puro and nuevo, and most famously for her interpretations of the *soleá* - the dance of solitude. Her extensive career has included an invitation from Pina Bausch to perform at Tanztheater Wuppertal's 25th anniversary festival, choreographing *Mi Niña Manuela* for the Ballet Nacional de España, and working with film director Mike Figgis, for the documentary *Flamenco Women*.

Celebrated flamenco musician, Israel Fernández presents his latest album *Pura Sangre* on 9 June in collaboration with renowned Jerez guitarist, Diego del Morao. *Pura Sangre* is an intimate look at Fernández's surroundings and his way of interacting with the outside world. Fernández's album *Amor* won the *Premio Odeón* and he has also been nominated for Best Flamenco Album in the Latin Grammy Awards.

On 10 June, choreographer David Coria and singer David Lagos will converge in a contemporary interpretation of the *fandango*, the festive musical style from Andalusia with a history dating back more than 500 years. From flamenco to contemporary movement, traditional song to electronic music, *¡Fandango!* draws on Iberian folk culture to celebrate Spanish history and tradition. Lagos won four awards at the Biennial De Flamenco in 2020 including the award for best performance.

The festival will conclude on 12-15 June with Ballet Nacional de España's *Invocación*, an extravaganza



of music, movement and colour. Artistic Director, Rubén Olmo has curated this evening for 38 dancers in four works that cover the cornerstones of Spanish dance, from traditional *bolero* to contemporary dance and classical ballet.

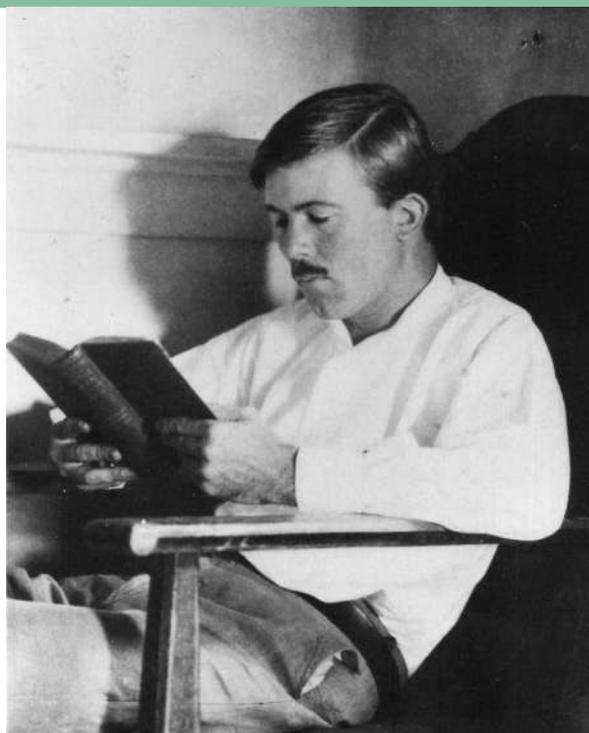
Olmo has choreographed two of the works; *Jauleña*, performed by a different soloist from the company each night, and the ensemble piece, *Invocación Bolera*. *De lo Flamenco* is a tribute to the legendary dancer and choreographer Mario Maya. And finally, Antonio Najarro's *Eterna Iberia* features the signature elements of Spanish dance, including castanets, the cape and the Cordobes hat. The National Ballet, founded by the Ministry of Culture in 1978, continues to set the standard for Spanish dance.

In the Lilian Baylis Studio, alongside the Sadler's Wells Theatre, Sara Jiménez will present a one woman show *Ave de Plata* on 14 June. On 15 June, following a week-long residency, award-winning Florencia Oz and her sister Isidora O'Ryain will present *En este día en este mundo (In this day, in this world)*, and singer María José Llergo will perform her new album *ULTRABELLEZA* live, fusing flamenco with electronica and R&B.

There should be something for every taste in this veritable feast of the flamenco arts.

The singular vision of a great hispanist

Charles Morgan



Among the graves in the English cemetery in Malaga are those of Gerald Brenan and his wife Gamel Woolsey. The inscription on Brenan's headstone reads, simply: *'R.I.P. Gerald Brenan Escritor Inglés Amigo de España'*

Brenan's name may be familiar to some readers through his part in certain goings-on of the Bloomsbury group, laid bare in the 1995 film *Carrington*, where he has an affair with Dora Carrington. At the time of the events in which he figures in the film, Brenan had already de-camped to Spain and was living in the Alpujarras. It was only decades later that he forged another claim to be recognised by later generations - as one of the foremost hispanists of the 20th century.

Apart from the years 1936 to 1950 (spent in England after fleeing the Civil War with his wife Gamel Woolsey), he lived nearly all his adult life in Andalusia - first in Yegen, then in Churriana, a suburb of Malaga, and finally in Alhaurin El Grande. It was in Churriana, after

his return with Woolsey in 1953, that Brenan spent his golden years in Spain.

He had already leapt to prominence with the publication of *The Spanish Labyrinth* in 1943, a social, economic and political history leading up to the Spanish Civil War, becoming in the process, in the eminent Oxford historian Sir Raymond Carr's words, a 'cultural hero.' That reputation was consolidated by the publication of *The Face of Spain* (1950) and *The Literature of the Spanish People* (1951). This period coincided with some of the more storied years of the Costa del Sol, in which the house at Churriana played its part, a focal point for gatherings of local expatriates and hosting visits from celebrated literary and cultural figures, such as Ernest Hemingway, the Oliviers

and Bruce Chatwin.

Ironically, whilst Brenan's works were written in English his fame in the UK has receded over the years. The flame burns brightly, however, on the Costa del Sol. In 1984, the *Fundación Gerald Brenan* was set up in Alhaurin El Grande to preserve and promote his work. The foundation has care of Brenan's legacy of his documentary archive and library of 5,600 books. It also organises an annual short story competition, the *Certamen de Relato Breve Gerald Brenan*.

Meanwhile, Brenan's house in Churriana was restored and re-opened in 2014 as a cultural centre to foster Anglo-Spanish cultural relations, the *Casa Gerald Brenan*. It mounts exhibitions, hosts literary events and, consciously inspired by the Bloomsbury group, aspires

to be a focus for discussions of new ideas. Alongside this broader cultural remit, the centre continues to promote Brenan's work through diverse activities. Of particular note is the creation of the *Biblioteca Brenan* Project, a collaboration between the centre and Carlos Pranger, writer and Brenan's literary executor.

As described by Alfredo Taján, writer and director of the Casa Gerald Brenan, the project has two strands: the publication of new Spanish-language editions of Brenan's writings, and the re-issue of literary works by contemporaries who have some connection with him. The first strand led to the publication of a new Spanish edition of *The Face of Spain*, to be followed this year by a re-interpretation in a new edition

of *The Literature of the Spanish People*. The second strand has centred so far on re-establishing the literary reputation of Gamel Woolsey (known for her Civil War account, *Death's Other Kingdom*), including the publication of a poetry anthology in translation.

As long as the Bloomsbury group holds a fascination for the British public, and the glamour of the Costa del Sol of the '50s and '60s exerts a similar spell, Gerald Brenan will continue to be remembered. But what of Brenan, the hispanist? For those interested in the corresponding period of Spanish history, Brenan's accounts will continue to be of value; their appeal enhanced by the lived experience that informed them. Of value too his innovative and lively commentary on Spanish

literature, including his study of the Spanish mystic, St John of the Cross. More generally, his claim on our attention lies in his distinctiveness. Less a historian, says Taján, than an unorthodox and meticulous anthropologist, deploying in his work observations on art, history, literature, geology and architecture that were derived from a singular vision of Spain; a vision, born of a restless intellectual curiosity, that is difficult to compare with that of other British hispanists. An original way of seeing of someone who lived in, and loved, Spain. 'Vivió' writes Pranger *'de manera vicaria, con comodidad en España, pero siendo muy inglés, en esa línea de tensión y encuentro entre España e Inglaterra.'*



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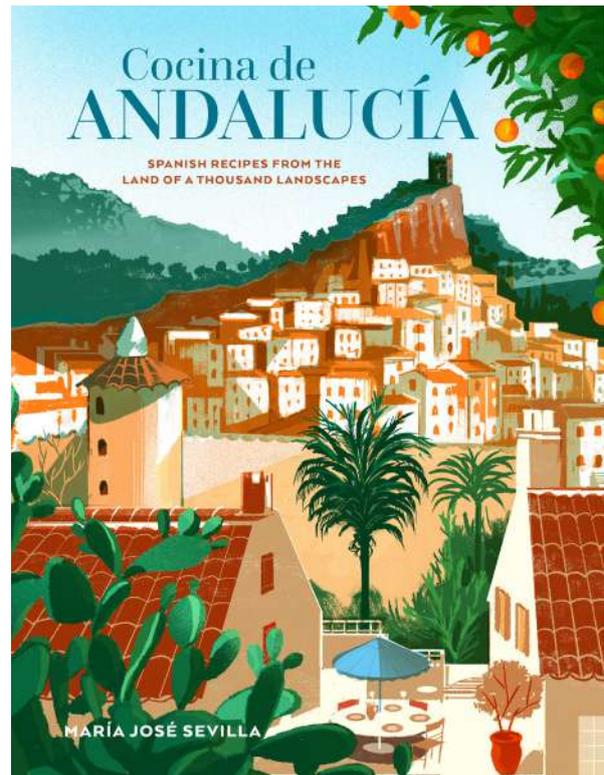
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The joy and intricacy of Andalusian gastronomy

María José Sevilla



The writer, an expert cook and BSS member, shares an exclusive taste of her eagerly awaited new book *La Cocina de Andalucía*

When I think of Andalucía, I do not think only in El Zauzal our small property in the magnificent Sierra de Aracena. I am equally attracted by the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coastal world, the small towns and beautiful cities dotted all along the largest region of Spain.

I also think of wheat fields, sunflower plantations, vineyards and olive groves, exuberant patios bursting with green plants and balconies laden with many coloured geraniums, all made especially beautiful with light, that special light that is an inspiration to me.

Add to this scene, succulent prawns from Huelva, fried fish wrapped in paper cones in Seville, fresh tuna fish from Cádiz, cold almond soup

from Córdoba and Málaga, sweet things from Antequera, aubergines with molasses from Granada, vegetable salads from Almería also the amazing breads from Jaén and the varied and unique map of foods in Andalucía will begin to emerge.

To understand the complexity of the *Cocina de Andalucía*, we need to go back in time to understand the importance of the legacy left by the different cultures who came and went, who's food has layered and is still present in the Andalusian cooking pot: Roman, Jewish and especially Moorish from North Africa and Middle East, *Cocina Mozarabe* or *Andalusi*, a term still used today to name dishes that were prepared by the Christian population living under Al-Andalus, the name given to Spain by the Moors.

From the end of 15th century, the arrival of ingredients from the Americas enriched the Andalusian food culture, developed further by the imagination and creativity of the modern chef.

The climate has always played a key role in southern cooking. Moderate autumn and winter temperatures, a beautiful springtime and a very hot summer have always dictated the mood of the Andalusian kitchen, totally dependent on the season and the locality, seductive and joyfully resourceful, as are the people of the towns and villages of Andalucía. A cold glass full of *gazpacho Andaluz* or *salmorejo Cordobés*, a plate of pan fried wild red tuna served with a delicate orange sauce, a salad of just ripe tomatoes dressed with

a local olive oil, a few drops of Sherry vinegar, sprinkled with oregano, all dishes to taste while touring this amazing land.

I truly believe that delicious food should be enjoyed with delicious wine and in Andalucía we will find ourselves spoiled by choice. In a land where the vine has been successfully grown since the beginning of time or even before, it would not be difficult to find excellent wines to accompany food and to celebrate the many festive days and celebrations always present in the Andalusian calendar. I cannot imagine a table full of tapas without a *fino* or manzanilla Sherry or a *copita* of Montilla.

Málaga wine is a sweet fortified wine that is not only wonderful to drink especially with the rich

desserts found everywhere in the region but also to give an extra layer of flavour to sauces served with meats such as pork and with venison but also with duck. To complete the Andalusian wine picture there are also quality white and red wines I discover in the Denomination *Sierras de Málaga* popularly known as Ronda Wines. It is worth visiting not only the town of Ronda itself but also arranging a wine tour of the area.

** María José Sevilla is a Spanish cook and writer who is expert in Hispanic gastronomy and viticulture. She has developed her professional career in the United Kingdom where she has written a number of books as well as writing and presenting a television series.*

Cocina de Andalucía by María José Sevilla, is published by Ryland Peters & Small (£20)

Photography by Nassima Rothacker © Ryland Peters & Small

Readers can buy a copy for the special price of £15 (RRP £20).

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Fried Aubergines with Molasses Berenjenas con Sirope de Azucar de Caña

Serves 2

- 1 large aubergine, cut into very thin slices
- Sparkling water for soaking
- Spanish flour for frying or all-purpose flour for coating
- Spanish olive oil for frying
- 2 tablespoons molasses
- Sea salt to season

1. Steep the sliced aubergines in a bowl of sparkling water and a little salt for about 15 minutes. Remove from the water and pat dry with kitchen paper.
2. Heat plenty of olive oil in a large frying pan or even better in an electric deep fat fryer. Coat the aubergines slices with flour and fry them in the hot oil, just enough to take colour. Turn once. Pat dry gently.
3. Serve piping hot, lightly drizzled with molasses and a cold glass of Manzanilla from Sanlúcar de Barrameda.

The simplicity and quality of Extremadura

Francisco Garrido



A BSS member, living in London, shares his love of his roots, a land of shepherds and farmers, still anchored in the past, and with a diverse gastronomy based on its long history of farming and livestock production.

Extremaduran cuisine is simple and with a marked rural character, and, thanks to the multiple generations of country people who have transmitted their knowledge over the centuries, it has been possible to produce excellent quality raw materials (tomatoes, rice, Iberian meat, cheese, honey, etc.) that make up its main dishes:

Migas Exemeñas

A simple dish to prepare, it is eaten in many parts of Spain such as La Mancha and Andalusia and it is a very typical dish in Extremadura. This dish is prepared so as not to waste the bread when it becomes stale. The bread, cut into small crumbs, (hence the nickname "migas") is sautéed in a frying pan and the custom is to eat them freshly cooked, adding chorizo, bacon, sardines, melon, etc.

Chanfaina Extremeña

A traditional dish, it dates back to the ancient Lordships times, when the lords asked the shepherds to sacrifice a lamb to roast it in the traditional way. The shepherds kept the

less noble parts of the animal with which they prepared the *chanfainas*. They are mainly made with lamb meat, cooked blood, lamb legs, onion, garlic, chilli and bay leaf. It is undoubtedly a very typical and traditional dish of this land, it can be eaten throughout Extremadura but it is in Fuente de Cantos where the *Chanfaina* Festival is celebrated on the last Sunday in April, a festival with a marked regional tourist character.

Gazpacho

Gazpacho is a typically Andalusian dish, but in Extremadura it is prepared differently, since it includes bread crumbs and egg yolk. It can also be made with *La Vera* paprika to give it that red touch, pepper and onion.

Cojondongo

It is a very typical cold soup from Extremadura, often drunk by the farmers and shepherds in the mid-morning, as it is quite hot after March and until October, being very refreshing. It is made with bread, vinegar, oil, garlic, water and salt, and

you can add grapes or olives. Subsequently, other ingredients such as chopped tomato, peppers and onion have been added.

Ajoblanco

Another very typical cold soup, it is made with bread, ground almonds, water, olive oil, garlic, vinegar and salt. The colour is white and it is taken cold, very refreshing in hot weather.

In the cuisine of Extremadura, meat has a special relevance, and the fact is that the beef, goat, lamb and Ibérico pork are found in the Extremaduran pastures. These animals can graze in complete freedom in the middle of nature, and in the particular case of the pigs, they are fed with incredible acorns (and only acorns for the purest *ibérico* meat) and makes their meats excellent. A typical meat product is the '*morcilla patatera*'. It is a sausage made with a combination of pork meat, fat, and mashed potatoes. The ingredients are flavoured with paprika and seasoned with salt and pepper before being stuffed into a pig intestine casing.



Hooked on Extremadura:

What does this Spanish region taste like?

your fingers to the tip to remove the leaves, which were usually reserved for feeding animals. Once peeled, the *cardillos* are chopped and cooked for 30 minutes and they are ready for any preparation. They can be eaten in a salad or stir-fried with egg and onion.

We hope you have taken good note of all these dishes.

BSS members will be able to enjoy the best of Extremaduran food products, courtesy of the Junta de Extremadura and Alimentos de Extremadura, sponsors of this year's BritishSpanish Society's summer party at the Spanish embassy in London on the 25th June (see Save the Date section in this issue). Book early contact: BSS events secretary Lisa Chambers on info@britishspanishsociety.org

If you are thinking of going to Extremadura, we suggest some excellent getaways and places to visit such as Merida, Caceres, Badajoz, Plasencia and the majestic monastery of Guadalupe.

Note on the author:

Francisco Garrido is an operational due diligence expert. He lives and works in London and regularly visits his native Extremadura.

Morcilla patatera is best when served with bread and a glass of local wine on the side as it is a fantastic aperitif. Even though *morcilla* is often called blood sausage, *morcilla patatera* doesn't contain blood.

There are also some aquatic vegetables, rich in flavour, that can be found especially in rainy seasons. These plants, known as *cardillos* and *berros* (watercress) are hard to find these days but in the past they were a source of meals for the locals. *Cardillos*, a creeping plant that grows close to the ground, are usually abundant in fields or on the edges of roads during the first months of spring, especially in March and April. Despite its humble origins, it is a true delicacy. The part that is eaten is the main nerve or "*penca*". To get to it, you have to "peel it", holding the plant by the root with one hand and with the other dragging

The special energy of natural Spain

María Pérez de Arenaza

In the always connected, always online modern world the simplicity of switching off and reacquainting ourselves with the natural world often feels like too big a challenge. The vast openness and enormity that mountain ranges provide makes that connection feel possible, they seem to hold a special energy.

The south face of the Gredos mountain range near Madrid has a particular magnetism. Is it the beauty of the mountain and its mild climate? Or the abundance and variety of plants that coexist so beautifully, or even the pink quartz that lies underground? The mountains always provide a deep feeling of well-being.

Singular Spain, a travel company which focusses on proving small group trips designed to truly explore the uniqueness of the places they visit shares some of the secrets of one of their most loved tours.

Our day usually commences in the Tiétar Valley (Ávila). We are

immediately welcomed by the peacefulness and wildness of orchards and forests, striking gorges and the natural pools that flow into the Tiétar River. There are man-made delights along the way; Arenas de San Pedro with its gothic fortress encased in the center of the village, the medieval village of Candeleda and, up on the hill, the Celtic castro of El Raso, but nature always steals the show with delights such as the million-year-old karstic cave.

We don't just visit places. We like to discover the people who live and work in the locations we visit. This tour includes time

with Raúl, who still follows the traditional processes, dating back to the 16th century, in the production of paprika, the gastronomic star of this land. The connection with the past and its relevance in Raúl's methods of producing paprika is a unique experience.

Leaving the Tiétar Valley cross a slender Roman bridge before reaching the entrance to La Vera (Cáceres). A series of charming villages are located along the foothills of the mountain, each with their own enchanting stories, festivals and folklore. We follow dirt roads which lead to sustainable farms focused

on producing quality food. We visit creative hubs dedicated to art, such as Ras de Terra, reached through a fascinating landscape of abandoned tobacco and paprika drying sheds, and La Nave Va, an old sheepfold next to a spectacular reservoir which has been converted into a space to promote contemporary art, landscape and culture.

We meet Gema, an iron welder and a ceramist, and Sena who illustrates precious botanic and bugs filigrees. When they met, they forged a friendship that led them to work together. Sena decorates Gema's porcelain, and they hold inspiring workshops. Other ceramists who have settled in the area are Emma and César. Chatting

with them in their workshop over a glass of wine, surrounded by a beautiful oak forest, is pure pleasure.

We end our tour with a walk to the historical Monastery of San Jerónimo de Yuste, known as the final resting place of Emperor Charles V and where we can reflect on the people, conversations, villages, cuisine and landscapes we have encountered along the way.

If you would like to take time out to immerse in the roots of Spain then take a look at the handcrafted routes on offer from Singular Spain:

singularspain.es or contact the BritishSpanish Secretary Lisa Chambers on **info@britishspanishsociety.org**

Note on the author:

María Pérez de Arenaza is the great Granddaughter of anthropologist and founder of the Museo del Pueblo Español, Luis de Hoyos Sainz, and great niece of folklorist Nieves de Hoyos y Sancho, Maria's childhood was heavily influenced by their interests and areas of study. Maria enjoyed regular excursions exploring with her family and learning about the history and people of the places they discovered. Maria's own journalistic career and subsequent launch of travel company Singular Spain is her own continuation of her family's legacy to celebrate Spain's rich rural cultural heritage and share it with new people. She is the founder of Singular Spain

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The story of war



Roger Golland OBE, a BSS trustee, explores contrasting images of war at London's Guildhall Art Gallery and the Imperial War Museum, a tale of two artists.

Part 1: Rule Britannia

Dominating the Guildhall Art Gallery in the heart of the City of London is a painting twice the size of a roadside hoarding. On one side, red-coated soldiers cluster around a General on a handsome white horse, bathed in the glare of white smoke. He points to the other, darker, distant, half of the scene, where flames billow and sailors cling to wreckage and toppled masts. It is 13 September 1782. Our heroic General on the battlements is George Augustus Elliot, governor of Gibraltar, and the sailors being rescued by plucky British marines in smart uniforms are Spanish and their French allies. Subtle propaganda it isn't.

The painting, *'The Defeat of the Floating Batteries at Gibraltar'*, celebrates a decisive action towards the end of the long siege of the Rock during the War of American Independence. Three years

into the siege, a French military engineer, Chevalier d'Arcon, had persuaded his leaders that a new wonder weapon, ten unsinkable barges made of heavy timber sandwiching layers of wet sand, would be able to line up off Gibraltar's harbour walls and blast the defenders to smithereens at short range. It was shock and awe before the term was invented. Supported by echelons of cannon arrayed to the north and a sizable fleet with plenty of Admirals, the predicted crushing defeat of the garrison attracted crowds of excitable onlookers on the hills.

But the ruse didn't work. Disciplined British artillery fired red hot shot, cooked in portable furnaces and nicknamed *hot potatoes*, at the attacking forces all day, eventually setting fire to the fleet and bringing about an ignominious withdrawal. Contemporary reports claimed only a few dozen British casualties against twenty times that many on the other side.

Losses would have been higher still were it not for the gallantry of the British officer, Roger Curtis, who boated out to pick up some 350 survivors, as ships' magazines exploded all around. The General was subsequently created the first Lord Heathfield; the Colonel got a Knighthood.

It might seem ironic that the artist recording this British triumph was an American portraitist, born in Boston, called John Singleton Copley. He was commissioned by the City of London and the finished work hung in the Common Council Chamber and, from 1886, in the original Guildhall Gallery. It was removed for safety during the Blitz in 1941, three weeks before the Gallery was destroyed. It remained hidden away in warehouses for almost sixty years. It was only when the modern Gallery was rebuilt in 1999 (on top of the remains of London's Roman amphitheatre), with a two storey rear wall and viewing balconies to match the

heights over Gibraltar, that the picture returned to its present location in London.

Once hostilities ceased King George III warned that Gibraltar could be the source of another war, or at least of a constant lurking enmity. He did not think peace would be complete until Britain got rid of it. But, as the painting shows, it had become an emotional symbol of British resolve and no British

Part 2: They are human after all

A weary boy props his head with his left arm. There are rings on his fingers. A single grenade is perched on the bench beside him. The bench is mottled green, like his military fatigues. He looks at and beyond the viewer. Where is he? Why is he there? Where did the grenade come from? Whose agenda is he serving? What happened to him? Where is he now? Who captured the moment? Why does the picture stir sensations of sorrow and guilt?

In the vernacular of gallery curators nowadays art challenges us to pause, it interrogates our prejudices, invites us to see the humanity in a stranger. A picture provokes. This is what Tim Hetherington's 2003 photograph of a young rebel in Liberia magnificently does. The questions are partly resolved by other images nearby: the leader of the rebel movement, handsomely groomed in a shiny grey suit, serene in a chair the size of a throne, swags of gold curtain behind; a crowd of gesticulating youngsters in t-shirts and flip-flops brandishing Kalashnikovs, setting off on a long walk to the capital; looters fleeing an emptied container dumped incongruously in front of a Toyota showroom.

Storyteller: Photography by Tim Hetherington is a posthumous exhibition on the third floor gallery of the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth. He was killed, aged 41, while filming in Misurata during the uprising against Gaddafi in 2011. Already acknowledged by his peers as an innovator in his craft, someone who went to war zones not so much to document the fighting as to portray the emotions of those caught up in it, he was increasingly turning his camera on those wielding the camera, wondering whether the loop of protagonist and observer was itself shaping the truth. Did photo-journalism for Vanity Fair have

government since then has thought it politically feasible to give up sovereignty. Sieges haven't worked. It remains a hot potato.

The Guildhall Art Gallery is free to visit cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/attractions-museums-entertainment/guildhall-art-gallery



less integrity than plastering his pictures onto corrugated iron fences for local students to view? Or teaching warriors to film themselves?

Hetherington is perhaps best known for his award-winning video *Restrepo*, filmed when he was embedded for weeks with a platoon of young US Army soldiers high in the Korengal Valley in eastern Afghanistan in 2007. In one short clip displayed at the exhibition a soldier has just discovered his sergeant disembowelled by a stray mortar from across the hills. The raw inarticulate grief at the sudden loss of his comrade, the futility of it all, has a universal resonance. Back with the platoon at their hilltop outpost in 2008, Hetherington took a series of photos of them asleep on their camp-beds, curled up bodies as vulnerable as baby seals. How many mothers never saw their sons again?

The visitor to the exhibition is bound to wonder where Hetherington got the urge to head towards danger and bear witness. We are not given the full biography but it must be relevant that he was schooled at Stonyhurst in Catholic social teaching. He studied English Literature at Oxford, before deciding that modern media offered new avenues to tell complex stories. He started out

doing commissions for the Big Issue, London's campaigning magazine for the homeless. He mastered digital photography and film cameras, but often preferred to use rolls of film, which required him to take his time with composition and win the trust of his subjects. He frequently went back. His extensive diaries show he was constantly questioning his own motivations and the message he wanted to convey.

There isn't an answer of course to the question about what happened to the West African boy with the grenade. If he's still alive, he'll be in his thirties. But the thought can't be suppressed - is he on a rubber dinghy near you, seeking a

lasting escape from conflict? Was it just fate that delivered him a uniform and grenade, while you enjoyed free access to a gallery?

The exhibition is at the Imperial War Museum until the end of September 2024.

iwm.org.uk/events/storyteller-photography-by-tim-hetherington

Note on the reviewer:

Roger Golland served for 32 years in the British Diplomatic Service.



A historic Pyrenean walk

Geoff Cowling

A former British Consul General in Barcelona follows the footsteps of Lluís Companys and the Retirada on a trek into the past.

On 10 February I joined a group of enthusiastic hikers based in Catalunya Witty Walks, founded by long term Barcelona resident Michael Witty, for their latest exploration.

It began in the village of La Vajol in the Catalan Lower Pyrenees to mark the route into exile 85

years ago taken by the Catalan President Lluís Companys. He was accompanied by Jose Aguirre, the Basque President and Manuel Azana the President of the Spanish Republic.

Together with up to half a million civilians and the remnants of the Spanish Republican Army,

the three Presidents and their entourage were fleeing General Franco's forces advancing towards the French frontier after the collapse of the Spanish Republic - an event known as the Retirada.

Our two-hour trek took us over the wooded Coll de Lli to the

French village of Les Illes. We first gathered just outside La Vajol by the impressive statue of a refugee and his small daughter with an amputated leg and supporting crutch, depicted in an iconic photo taken at the time.

Passing a larger monument to Luis Companys, we trekked through woods and through a small gate marking the French frontier, eventually arriving at the charming Hostal dels Trabucayres in Les Illes where the Presidents stayed before journeying further into exile.

The refugees who fled over the Pyrenees in the Retirada endured climate conditions far worse than the benign weather on our short venture. It would have been worse still at higher crossing points at the Coll d'Ares and Puigcerda during the severe winter of early 1939. Some later returned to an uncertain fate in Spain. Many were initially penned in huge camps concentrated on the French beaches such as Argeles.

The weak perished from exposure. Most survivors found their way into exile, some as far away as Mexico. On the fall of France to Hitler's forces in 1940, about 10,000 were sent to Mauthausen, the Jews to Auschwitz.

Others went to ground and served as Pyrenean guides for the British MI9 WW2 prisoner of war escape lines. Stuck between a German brick and Franco's hard place, remnants of the Spanish Republican Army formed the backbone of the French Resistance in the Pyrenees and as far north as Central France. Valued as hardened fighters, units were supplied by Britain's SOE. Professor Sir Paul Preston has described their contribution to the Allied effort as "the Spanish Republican Army on tour". All this is described in the impressive Museu Memorial de l'Exili in nearby La Jonquera.

If you plan to drive from La Vajol to Les Illes, forget it. The French authorities have blocked the road with massive boulders to prevent clandestine traffic – not exactly demonstrating the spirit of EU free movement. Bullet holes in frontier road signs bear witness to local feeling.

President Lluís Companys did not live long in exile. With the fall of France, he was arrested by the Gestapo and French Vichy police and extradited to Franco's Spain. He was executed by a Civil Guard firing squad in the dry moat of Montjuïc Castle overlooking Barcelona on 15 October 1940, reputedly refusing a blindfold or shoes, wanting

to see Catalunya's sky and to feel its soil beneath his feet as he died. His last words – "Visca Catalunya".

For information about further walks organised by WittyWalkers contact wittywalkers@gmail.com

Note on the author:

Geoff Cowling was HM Consul General Barcelona 2002/5. He is a member of the BritishSpanish Society.

Madrid's El Retiro

Amy Bell



A grand sweep of gardens, palaces and monuments, this Unesco World Heritage site is also a retreat from the summer heat. But its vast arboreal canopy might be under threat.

There are several parks in Madrid, but *El Retiro* is its best known and most central. As politicians fight over whether to expand green spaces in the capital to help manage the effects of ever more extreme heat (or backtrack by cutting down trees), this historic park is at least partly protected, having been granted Unesco World Heritage status in 2021. This is good news for local residents and visitors, for whom *El Retiro* offers an escape to nature right in the city centre. During the hottest months, when temperatures regularly reach upwards of 35C, the park's 300 acres provide respite under the shade of the trees. Come autumn, the leaves of the park's many horse chestnut trees turn yellow and red, covering the paths in a russet carpet. In late spring, they burst into white flowers.

On any day of the week, rollerbladers, runners, cyclists and dogwalkers can be seen along its wide sandy paths, while in the many grassy enclaves you might stumble across a tai chi or yoga class, balloons tied to trees for a child's birthday party or resident birds such as blackbirds, blue tits and greenfinches.

El Retiro has various distinct areas, such as the boating lake, the *Parterre*, the *Reservado*, the *Rosaleda* rose garden and the Campo Grande, where you'll find the Palacio de Cristal and Palacio de Velázquez — all features that have been added or shaped over the centuries by Spain's kings and queens.

Entering from the west side through Puerta de Felipe IV, the first thing you see are the pristine, geometrically ordered

gardens known as the *Parterre*, its bright flowerbeds and box hedges inspired by Versailles. A very old, giant tree sits just inside, its hefty trunk protected by railings. A Mexican conifer (*ahuehuete*), thought to have been planted around 1633, is one of the city's oldest trees and is believed to have been used by French soldiers as a cannon mount during the Napoleonic invasion in 1808, which left the park and the royal palace largely destroyed.

It is one of around 17,000 trees in the park that boasts 163 species, from cypresses to the strawberry tree (*madroño*), which features on Madrid's coat of arms — plus willows, sycamores, poplars, eucalyptus, cedars, olives and plenty of horse chestnuts. Despite the park's Unesco status, there are ongoing tensions regarding the



park's future and how it should be looked after.

"When they made us a World Heritage site, we felt very proud," says Javier de la Puente Vinuesa, a retired forestry engineer who set up the Amigos del Retiro association, which lobbies for better management of the park. But lack of government funding is a problem, he says, as is poor co-ordination between different departments.

One point of contention is how much grass has been prioritised by administrators in recent decades over the protection of the park's oldest trees. "They have converted what used to be wooded areas into grassy meadow," says María Medina Muro, a landscape architect who has worked on other historic parks in Spain. This affects the remaining trees, she says, interfering with their natural processes of restoration, leaving them weaker and more likely

to fall: "In the woods the trees would always renew themselves, but now, nothing regenerates."

Part of the problem is the watering system, she says, which sprays the grass at surface level but does not nourish the deeper roots of the trees. In recent years, the park has been shut on days when there is too much wind or heat, because of the risk of trees and branches falling down. "It's all related," says Medina Muro: if the stability of their deepest roots is affected, the trees are more vulnerable to extreme weather.

The local government department for urban planning, environment and mobility says that all the trees in the Retiro are regularly monitored and inspected, that various factors can contribute to trees falling. But others say the diminished tree cover is a particular problem as Madrid faces record

heat levels. "Trees are so important because they lower the temperature so much," says Medina Muro.

All around the park there are statues of various kings, academics and mythological figures. One of the grandest is a 30-metre monument to Alfonso XII on horseback, looking out over the lake. Further south is my favourite: the Fuente del Ángel Caído. Here, the angel Lucifer has just fallen to earth, rendered on one knee with an arched back, crying out to the heavens in anguish as snakes wrap themselves around his ankles. Created in 1877 by Ricardo Bellver, who was inspired by John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, it also happens to stand at 666 metres above sea level — although whether that was intentional or not is unknown...

One of the park's most majestic structures, however, is the



Palacio de Cristal. Inspired by London's Crystal Palace, this large glass building was built in 1887 to house tropical plants imported from the Philippines, then part of the Spanish empire.

To the east are the remains of the Casa de Fieras, a zoo created in 1774 at King Carlos III's request, which once housed exotic animals, including lions, tigers and an elephant. "There used to be a bear kept in a cage, as if it were a parrot," says Manuel Butler Halter, head of the Spanish tourist office in London, who remembers visiting the zoo as a child in the 1960s.

Growing up right next to the Retiro, in Calle de Lagasca, he would visit the park aged eight with friends, picking leaves from the mulberry trees to line a box to keep silkworms in or eating barquillos, a kind of waffle bought from the kiosks. He recalls how, playing under the trees, they would challenge the gardeners to splash them with water. "We would call out to them, 'La manga riega y aquí no llega!' [The hose waters but doesn't reach us]"

Near the old Casa de Fieras is a garden with resident peacocks wandering around, being fed crackers or bits of lettuce by families visiting with small children. It is dedicated to Cecilio Rodríguez, a chief gardener who spent his entire life working

in the Retiro since joining as an apprentice aged eight.

Every year from May to June, the Retiro hosts a popular book fair, the Feria del Libro. "At the weekends [during the fair] there are hundreds of authors in booths, from the really famous to the less well known — it's very democratic, very lively," says Montero.

Look out for some of the hidden quirks as well, such as those you will find in the Reservado, a special Romantic-style garden in the north-east area, created by Fernando VII in 1830. The garden has whimsical features, or "caprichos," such as the Casita del Pescador (Fisherman's Cottage) and the Montaña de los Gatos (Cat Mountain), once home to the park's stray cats. The cats are now looked after by a non-profit organisation and volunteers.

This is an abridged version of an article originally published by Financial Times in April 22 as part of FT Globetrotter's guide to Madrid, and is reproduced here with their kind permission.

Note on the author:

Amy Bell is the BSS's head of communications and an FT journalist.



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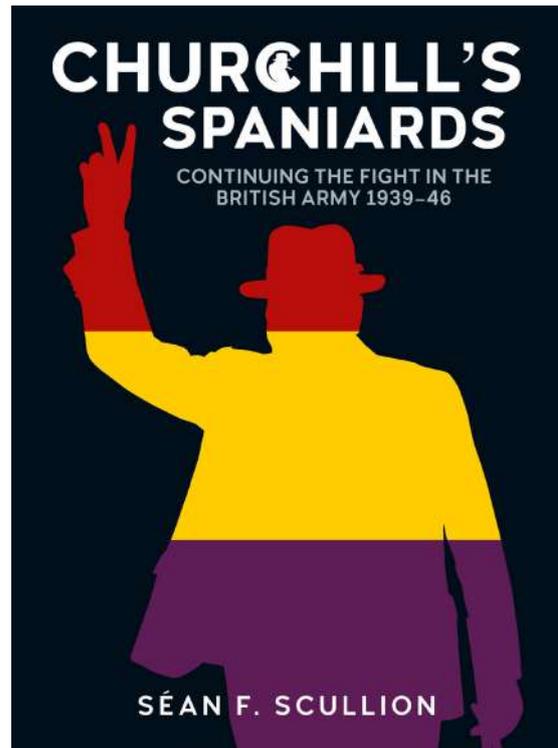
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Image by Chris Nash

The Spaniards who fought in WW2

Geoff Cowling reviews Churchill's Spaniards - Continuing the fight in the British Army 1939-46, by Séan Scullion



"Churchill's Spaniards" is a ground-breaking book by Séan Scullion, currently serving as a Royal Engineers officer with NATO in the Netherlands. Brought up as a child in Spain, Séan is a bi-lingual Spanish-English speaker and fluent in French.

Fascinated by the Spanish Civil War, Séan has delved deep into British Army records to find some 1,200 Spanish who served in the British Army during WWII. They were mainly drawn from the ranks of the defeated Spanish Republican Army, driven across the Pyrenees into Southern France early in 1939 (along with about 500,000 civilians), an episode known as *La Retirada*. (See my article in *Pursuits* section in this issue of *La Revista*).

Séan has backed up his 8-year research by contacting the soldiers' families in Spain and France. Many knew little of the service rendered to the Allied cause by their forbears but dug out contemporary photos,

which Séan has used liberally to illustrate his book.

How the Spaniards reached the ranks of the British Army is complex. Before the fall of France, many were recruited from the Spanish refugee camps in France to join the French Army's Foreign Legion. Others were recruited by the British Army directly from Gurs camp to form 185 Spanish Labour Company. With the outbreak of the war in Europe the Spanish *Legionnaires* were sent to Norway with a British Army force where their battle-hardened experience and aggressive fighting ability came as a surprise to their French, and to British officers.

Following the collapse of the Norwegian campaign, they were withdrawn to the UK and on the defeat of France were to be returned to France with the French Foreign Legion. However, they rebelled, laying down their arms during an inspection at Trentham Park by General de Gaulle,

expressing a wish to continue the fight and join the British Army.

The French Military Mission on London ordered that one in three should be shot *pour encourager les autres*. At that stage, the British authorities stepped in and relieved their French officers of their command. Treated as soldiers and not criminals, they were absorbed into the Pioneer Corps at Westward Ho, forming No. 1 Spanish Company.

From then on, they were selected and trained for a series of SAS, and commando operations, including one to send an SOE force back into Spain itself to organise guerrilla resistance, had Spain invited the Germans in and threatened Gibraltar. Fortunately, a programme of bribing and subverting Franco's generals prevented that.

Others were drawn, via the Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey), to No 50 Middle East

Commando where they were known as SCONCES.

Their uniform included a dashing Australian slouch hat with a badge of a "Fanny", a fearsome combined knuckle duster and dagger. They fought in the German invasion of Crete, taking casualties.

Those taken prisoner disguised their Spanish Republican origins by claiming to be Gibraltarians. Fighting elsewhere was vicious, particularly against the Italian Army, extracting retribution for Italian army action during the Spanish Civil War.

Following the Allied invasion of Vichy French North Africa in 1942, a separate tranche joined either General Le Clerc's Free French Forces or the British Army in North Africa. Others were recruited directly in Britain,

including some who came as refugee children from the Basque Country in 1937 fleeing the Spanish Civil War. A few paid the ultimate price. Séan's absorbing book describ

es in enormous detail not just the actions of Churchill's Spaniards in Norway, France, North Africa, Crete and in Germany, but what happened to them afterwards. Disappointed that the Allies did not oust Franco at the end of the conflict, and finding it impossible to return to Spain, they successfully garnered political support to remain in Britain.

Most settled down, married and started a family, many in the Midlands. They developed anti-Franco pressure groups including the Spanish Ex-Servicemen's Association. London social life developed

around the *Martinez* restaurant in London's Swallow Street, the *Hogar Espanol* and the *Casa Catala*.

Their service to the Allied cause was never lauded in their own country. As we approach the 80th anniversary of the end of WWII, it is fitting that Séan Scullion is finally, and superbly, telling the story of Churchill's Spaniards in Britain today.

Churchill's Spaniards is published in September 2024 by *P Helion & Company*

Geoff Cowling will be "in conversation" with Séan Scullion at a BSS event at the Spanish Embassy in London on Thursday, 12 September.

For more information about the event contact Lisa Chambers info@britishspanishsociety.org



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Postcard from Dénia

Nigel Aston



Dénia is both the home of Quique Dacosta's eponymous, flagship, Michelin 3 star restaurant and of the "caviar" of the Mediterranean - *the gamba roja de Dénia* (*Aristeus antenatus* for the marine biologists amongst you).

The exclusivity of the red prawn is mainly due to its unique habitat; the channel between Cabo de San Antonio (10 kms to the ESE of Dénia) and Ibiza – about 50 nautical miles. The prawns dwell at a depth of about 1000m – very cold water with an absence of light. And shoals are not dense. The prawn is trawled using particularly long nets. Whilst a fishing boat does not confine itself purely to crustaceans or to sea food in general (a catch will also include many common types of fish), the red prawn is prized as a major source of income for the owner and crew. The prawns are landed preselected into one of four categories where buyers (fish specialists, supermarkets, individual restaurants) bid for the catch. Size is determined by

sex, the fairer in this case being the larger! At current (May) wholesale prices, category 4 red prawns may fetch around €40 a kilo but, in the auction, the true "caviar" - category 1 - will command a price in excess of three times that and in peak demand season like Christmas around €200!! By the time VAT and retail/restaurant mark ups are added in, an individual Category 1 prawn can cost the diner around €15! As, away from inclusive menus, the menu price is shown as "mp" (market price) many a credit card has taken an unexpected battering.

The category 3 and 4 prawns can be found, of course, cooked in rice dishes (but normally arroz a la banda and, never ever, Valencian paella)

or in fish stews. But the top two categories will usually be presented simply cooked (quickly boiled) as dishes in their own right or, perhaps, as a garnish – exactly as some top chefs may use *sturgeon eggs!!* Apart from exclusivity, the price can also be justified by the succulence of the meat, the intensity of the sea taste when compared to white prawns along with an unexpected, and characteristic, sweetness.

With the *gamba roja* in a headlining role, it is perhaps no surprise that Dénia has a growing reputation as a culinary temple. Earlier this year National Geographic designated a "red prawn" route through the town – one of five such culinary routes in Spain. Nevertheless, it would

be wrong to suggest that Denia is some exclusive enclave. One of its charms is that it remains a fundamentally Spanish town. Yes, the population is boosted in the summer season and at other holidays by visitors, but many are Spaniards, few are on packages and part of Denia's charm is that the permanent population is overwhelmingly Spanish. Whilst there are at least 300 restaurants, only a few can be classed as truly top end and, irrespective of price, their chefs are able to draw on the range of fresh local products that underpin the Mediterranean diet, from both land and sea.

The range is considerable, and tapas has taken on a new meaning with creativity and imagination to the fore, as is also the case in more formal settings. It is, therefore, no surprise that UNESCO, in 2015, designated Dénia as a "creative city of cuisine". We are steadily working our way through this daunting number and variety. As with anywhere, there are those where we shall not return but our task is really made harder by the number that deserve multiple repeat visits. Although it takes a little time to reach Quique Dacosta!

Note on the author:

BSS Member Nigel Aston retired to Dénia from Madrid, with his wife Elizabeth, in March this year.



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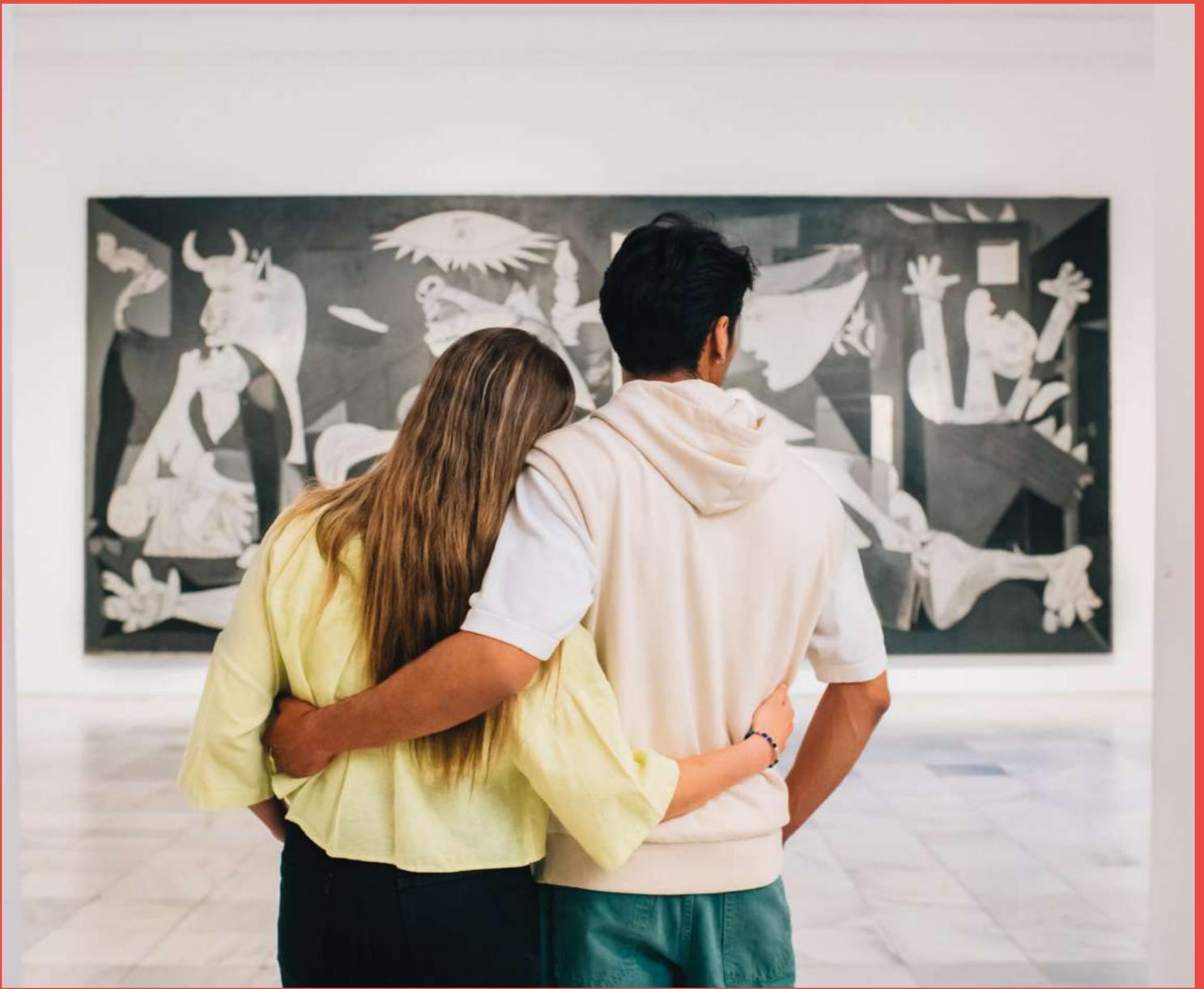
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