

Notes on notable people of Buscot Park : 1: Arturo Barea.



Not many people know that tiny Faringdon was once home to some of Franco's worst enemies! **Arturo Barea**, the exiled republican left-wing Spanish socialist writer lived at Buscot Park in a house on the Lechlade Road that Lord Faringdon rented to him. He lived there with his Austrian wife, Ilse from 1944 until his death in 1957 at the age of 60. After that Lord Faringdon then generously gave Ilse an annuity for life.

Arturo was a regular at the Volunteer Inn in Faringdon where no doubt he was gathering stories and ideas for his popular 856 BBC broadcasts 'from a Spaniard in England' for the Latin American Service. He liked to entertain at the annual Faringdon Labour party fete, and was said to be 'a born storyteller'.

As well as tending the garden at Middle Lodge, cooking paella, and entertaining he was completing his semi-autobiographical trilogy The Forging of a Rebel, which is regarded as one of the most important (and readable) books written about the time before and during the Spanish Civil War (1936-9). In book 3 The Clash he tells how he had realised that his writing had 'the force to release things which he and others like him kept painfully buried in themselves'. He hoped that his work would relieve some of the shame felt by the Spanish of that time for what had befallen their country. Ilse made excellent translations of The Forge, The Track and The Clash and they were published as a trilogy in England in 1946, though not in Spain until 1977, since Barea was unable to return during Franco's dictatorship.

He wrote the book The Broken Root (1951) at Middle Lodge imagining a man who returns to Spain. (He himself had left his 4 children behind in

Spain when he left). He contributed articles and short stories to influential periodicals such as *Horizon*, *Time and Tide*, *The New Statesman*, *Times Literary Supplement* and *Tribune* and George Orwell commissioned from him an essay 'Struggle for the Spanish soul' for his series *Searchlight* books calling him a 'British gain from Spanish fascism'.

How did he become a writer?

Barea had worked up from humble beginnings to a top job at the Patent Office but it was during the siege of Madrid 1936-39 when he was installed at the Press Office as Censor that he started to write seriously. He refused to put out information as propaganda but was committed to getting the full truth published because he wanted the world to know that the republican government supporters in Madrid were resisting Franco. He met Ilse Pollak in 1936 -8 during the siege of Madrid while he was working as censor. She was an Austrian socialist and multi-linguist who turned up in his office after coming to Spain to help out. She was useful as a translator of the Danish and English reports and it was she who persuaded him not to censor the truth. She encouraged him in his writing but the research was dangerous work during a civil war that "held enemies in its midst". He realises that she is 'his woman' and they manage to marry before they leave Spain. Working in a Madrid that was starving and under fire broke his health and when in 1938 he had to leave Spain to protect himself and his wife Ilse he was in a bad way physically and emotionally. After 3 tough years in Paris they embarked for England in 1939. They lived in Hertfordshire and Berkshire before they came to Faringdon when, with 6 other Spanish writers, Lord Faringdon offered them accommodation on the Buscot Estate.

What do the books contain?

In *The Forge* he describes his early years in the 1897 – 1910 in Lavapiés, one of the poorest parts of Madrid, where his widowed mother worked as a laundress. She was either at the river working "in icy water or being roasted in the hot sun." These descriptions of his young life are told with such vivid detail that it is easy to imagine that remote childhood..

In *The Track* he joins the army and his description of the Spanish war in Morocco and the military dictatorship prior to the fall of the monarchy shows how Franco was involved. He tried to write without the influence of later knowledge. He wanted to show the experiences of the rank and file of the army, but to put his anecdotes in a broader context than the

common soldier would have understood. In the third book The Clash he presents his view of the causes of the Spanish Civil war and the rise of Fascism under Franco in a country that was scarred by religious corruption, poverty and unfairness:

“Our war had been provoked by a group of generals who were in their turn manoeuvred by the sectors of the Spanish Right most grimly determined to fight any development within the country which might threaten the privileges of their caste. But the rebels had committed the mistake of resorting to outside help and of converting the civil war into an international skirmish. Spain, her people, and her Government no longer existed in a definite form; they were the objects of an experiment in which the States standing for international Fascism and the State standing for Communism or Socialism took part, while the other countries looked on as vitally interested spectators. What was happening to us was a signpost for the future road of Europe and possibly the world.”

He also describes how festering resentments between left and right led to violence and the destruction of the churches of Madrid. He feels sadness as his childhood neighbourhood is destroyed. In one passage he enters a deserted bar full of spiders:

“I walked away quickly, almost running, pursued by the stare and cry of the dead things. The tram rails, torn from the paving stones and twisted into convulsive loops, blocked the path like angry snakes. The street had no end”.

The Forging of a Rebel is in the Faringdon Library and The Broken Root can be borrowed from the Oxfordshire County Library Service.

The complete papers of Arturo and Ilse Barea were placed in the Bodleian Library in January 2018 MSS 12614/16-20.

- Their joint memorial can be seen in the 4th row in the Coach Lane graveyard of All Saints Church Faringdon (once tended by Martin Murphy, an Oxford academic, who had broadcast with Ilse in the 1940s.) His ashes were scattered at Middle Lodge and Ilse died in Vienna. The memorial adjoins the plot of Ilse's parents.
- The plaque on the Volunteer Inn was placed there in 2013.
- There are 3 streets named after Barea in Badagoz, Merida and Noves and a square, Plaza Arturo Barea in Madrid.

Bibliography.

Trilogy – The Forging of a Rebel (Granta paperback) comprised of:

1941 The Forge

1943 The Track

1946 The Clash

1949 Lorca, the poet and his people. (Faber and Faber)

1951 The Broken Root. (Faber and Faber)

1952 Unamuno (a biography)

Short stories:

1937 The Fly (published through Sefton Delmer)

1939 A Spaniard in Hertfordshire (The Spectator)

1940 Kleptomania (Cuentos completos)

1941. The Scissors (Horizon stories 1943)

1984 Valor y miedo (Courage and Fear) Barcelona: Plaza y Janes

2000 Palabras recobradas edited Nigel Townsend Madrid: Debate.

About Barea:

Triumph at Midnight of the Century Michael Eaude

(Sussex Academic Press 2001, easily available in paperback)

Hotel Florida Amanda Vaill Bloomsbury 2014

the Intellectual Exile of Arturo Barea – Core a PhD thesis on the work of Barea as an exile. <https://core.ac.uk> >

www.buscot-park.com > *history* > *basque-and-spanish-exiles*

