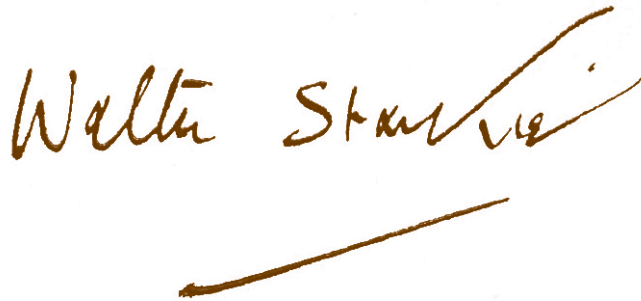




A TRUE FRIEND OF SPAIN

PROFESSOR WALTER STARKIE

and the early years of the British Council in Spain



Walter Starkie

Walter Fitzwilliam Starkie (1894 – 1976)

A True Friend Of Spain

This text draws on Jacqueline Hurlley's forthcoming biography on Walter Starkie.

Cover picture is taken from a portrait of Walter Starkie by Eduardo Chicharro Briones, 1948. Reprinted here, courtesy Caja Segovia.

A True Friend Of Spain is edited by Tony Norman

“PERSONA GRATISIMA IN ALL CIRCLES IN SPAIN”

Seventy years after his arrival in Madrid, as first Cultural Representative of the British Council, Walter Starkie is still remembered and respected for his tireless work in developing special links between Spain and the UK. Walter was an outstanding musician, writer and communicator; he had the gypsy in his soul. He lightened the darkest days of the war, by creating a series of vibrant exhibitions and concerts in Madrid.

However, his most outstanding contribution came in the field of education, as founder and first director of the British Institute in the city. He went on to open branches in Barcelona, Bilbao, Seville and Valencia. British Council centres flourish across Spain to this day. Walter retired in 1954, but continued to have a home in Madrid until his death. Walter and his wife Italia are buried in the British Cemetery.



Primary school pupils at the British Institute in Madrid, founded by Starkie in 1940.

Walter Starkie

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70 YEARS IN SPAIN



By Rod Pryde
Director British Council Spain

This autumn of 2010, we are celebrating 70 years of the British Council in Spain – 70 years of building relationships, sharing educational and cultural experiences and helping to make long-lasting friendships between the peoples of our two countries. I'm in no doubt that the success of the British Council in Spain over these 70 years is due to the enduring legacy of Walter Starkie and his excellent work. It seems that almost every day I meet people who have either studied at the British Council School or learnt English at our teaching centres and remarkably, as you will see when you read this story, all of these activities were set up by Walter Starkie as soon as he arrived in Spain at the end of the Spanish Civil War and when Britain was caught up in the Second World War. He also quickly made friends with the Spanish arts and science communities and engaged partners with whom we are still working today, such as the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC).

It gives me great pleasure to celebrate our 70 years by producing this short historical record and I hope you enjoy reading it.



Walter's daughter, Alma Starkie, at home in Madrid in 2010

“My father spoke a universal language.”

The Spanish people liked my father and our family, because we liked them. We got on very well. The fourteen years my father spent at the British Council in Madrid were certainly challenging, but he had tremendous drive and enthusiasm and derived great satisfaction from his time here. My mother, Italia, was with him when he arrived in the city in 1940 and she supported him in everything he did. They both loved Spain and lived their lives here to the full. I first came to Madrid as a child in 1943 and instantly fell in love with the city. I was aware of my father's popularity even then. He was an intellectual, a literary man, but he was also a good speaker. He enjoyed meeting new

people and, of course, his love of music proved to be a universal language. He was very natural and broad-minded, a true individual. When he reached retirement age, a group of Spanish intellectuals and artists asked the British Council if they would let him stay for one more year. They were very fond of him and he was touched by their friendship and respect. My parents continued to live in Madrid for the rest of their lives. I'm sure my father would be absolutely delighted to see the success the British Council enjoys in Spain today. My message is keep on with your wonderful work and thank you for this tribute to my father.

Walter Starkie

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Starkie knew the odds were against him, but his keen sense of service, aligned with immense stores of energy and enthusiasm, helped him face each new challenge with great determination.

Dublin-born Walter Fitzwilliam Starkie was no stranger to Spain when he flew into Madrid in July 1940 to take up the post of first Cultural Representative of the British Council. He and his wife Italia Augusta honeymooned in Spain in 1921 and this proved to be the beginning of a lifetime's association with the country and her people.

Walter's connections with Spain flourished throughout the twenties. He was appointed to the first Chair of Spanish at Trinity College Dublin and lectured at the Residencia de Estudiantes, the renowned Madrid institution, modelled on the university colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. He enjoyed the company of Spanish artists, including the composer Manuel de Falla and the writer Miguel de Unamuno. He also frequented the Revista de Occidente "tertulia" of the philosopher Ortega y Gasset in Madrid and interviewed General Miguel Primo de Rivera.

In the thirties, Starkie appears to have relished throwing off the strictures of university life to assume the trappings of a minstrel vagabond, setting off in pursuit of adventure, with only his violin for company. His travel books, including Spanish *Raggle-Taggle*

(1934) and *Don Gypsy* (1936), described his colourful life 'on the road'. In 1936, in the context of the Spanish Civil War, he pronounced in support of General Franco, a political sympathy which, together with his Roman Catholicism, would render him a persona grata for the new regime in Spain and, thus, enable his nomination for the post of Director of the British Council in Madrid.

From the time of his arrival in Madrid, at the age of 45, Starkie focused on building cultural bridges between Spain and Britain. With World War II raging, Starkie knew the odds were against him, but his keen sense of service, aligned with immense stores of energy and enthusiasm, helped him face each new challenge with great determination. His first major task was to find suitable premises for what became called the "British Institute" (also known locally as the Instituto Británico or by many simply as "El British") in Madrid. A number of properties were considered before the lease of a building in Méndez Núñez Street was taken on, near the Retiro Park and the Prado Museum. In spite of wartime difficulties, ranging from shortages of food and furniture to the insecurity created by "spies and counterspies", Starkie succeeded in staging a housewarming in late August 1940.

Over 70 people, British, Spanish and American, were invited. Starkie recorded delivering: "a short speech of welcome defining the objects of the British Council and made a special point of linking the names of Shakespeare and Cervantes as symbols of the two countries." He also "explained the attitude of the British Council towards cultural relations – the practical policy and the general humanistic outlook." At this early stage, Starkie was also planning to provide short, intensive English courses for young Spanish ex-servicemen who wished to present themselves for the Diplomatic Service examinations. He had listened to potential students expressing their needs and understood their "wish to receive not only instruction in English language and literature, but classes and lectures in economic and general political affairs, from an English point of view."

Activities at the Institute would not be limited to delivering classes. Cultural pursuits such as concerts, lectures, film shows and exhibitions were also planned. An early triumph was a recital by Czech pianist Rudolf Firkusny, who was passing through Madrid in October 1940, en route to the United States. Finding a grand piano for Firkusny in war-torn Madrid was no easy task, but Starkie located a new Steinway and the concert went ahead, bringing together a significant representation of Madrid society. Starkie reported back to London: "I am glad to say that the whole musical public turned up, including the principal composers, conductors, pianists, string instrumentalists, and the musical critics of all the papers. The hall of the Institute where the recital was held was thronged and we also filled the gallery above. There were over 220 people present."



Students at the British Institute Madrid in the early 1940s

Walter Starkie

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There was diplomatic representation from the American Embassy and a number of Ministers, Dutch, Polish, Egyptian, Turkish and Czech, also attended. The success of the Rudolf Firkusny concert was undoubtedly a significant public relations coup.

By December 1940, a primary school had been established at the Institute and guidelines for adult English classes had also been set up. Students would be admitted from the age of seventeen onwards and classes would take place from 5 until 9 in the evening. Students were required to pay 10 pesetas for registration and prices for classes varied, subject to the number attending, either three or six times per week. The Institute also offered a non-student membership, which gave access to the library and a variety of activities including lectures, concerts, teas and art exhibitions.

“As crowded as a
London railway station
in rush hour.”

Starkie was soon reporting that the Institute was being, “besieged by people who are interested in our work”. There also seems to have been a growing show of sympathy and solidarity since “small donations” were also accompanying the subscriptions for membership. With almost five hundred students enrolled by early December 1941, the Institute’s premises were becoming so cramped that the Starkies’ private sitting room and spare bedroom had to be converted into classrooms. The Director described the building as being, “a hive of industry from 8:45 in the morning until 9 at night”, and likened it to “a London railway station in rush hour” but he was energised by the challenges around him, recognising that he held “a tough fighting job” and speaking proudly of the Institute’s “great success”.

Highlights of 1941 included: a recital of Spanish dances; a student dance with live jazz; a flamenco party; and a Christmastime celebration, where music, singing and dancing were provided by the singer Gracia de Triana, the cantaoer El Niño de Almaden and the guitarist Manolo de Badajoz, with two gypsy dancers completing the “cuadro”. The Institute was also the setting for a series of successful public lectures. Speakers included the Spanish Jesuit, Father H. Heras, and the British Ambassador, Sir Samuel Hoare.

Starkie himself delivered a lecture on the subject of “Music, Magic and Minstrelsy – Some Experiences of a Folklorist”, illustrating his lecture by playing violin melodies he had collected during his travels in Spain, Hungary, Romania and Greece.

It was also during 1941 that Starkie’s wife, Italia Augusta, worked with the American Red Cross to provide flour and milk for 400 needy families. Every Tuesday, between 40 and 50 Spanish and British women would go to the Institute to make clothing from

the sacks in which food relief was transported, thus enabling destitute children to be clothed.

When giving an account of the Council’s work in Madrid to the new Chairman Sir Malcolm Robertson, Starkie outlined the distinct cultural areas he had worked on so far: scientific, literary, musical and artistic. Another successful initiative was the creation of a “tertulia” of writers and artists, among them the novelist Pío Baroja and painter Ignacio de Zuloaga.

Number	NAME OF CHILD	Date of Birth	Place of Birth	Nationality	NAME OF FATHER
1	Diaz - Conchita	7-4-33		Spanish	Sotera de Diaz
2	Skarynska - Leon	3-3-33		Polish	Constant Skarynska
3	Ruiz de Alda - Juan Angel	15-2-34		Spanish	Mother: S. Ruiz de Alda
4	Martinez Campuzano - Joaquin	1-4-33	Madrid	Spanish	Antonio Ramirez Martinez
5	Antonio	12-4-36	"	"	"
6	Logie - Prudence	7-9-34		British	James J. Logie
7	Ross - Donald	21-12-31		British	Jan Ross
8	Balbuena - Joaquin Antonio	22-1-34	Madrid	Spanish	Jose Balbuena
9	Goyanes - Jose Antonio	22-12-33		Spanish	Mr. Goyanes
10	Escandi - Fernando	13-8-32		Spanish	Fernando Escandi Pimaster
11	" Javier	11-12-34		"	"
12	Bourguignon - Jack Madrid	11-12-34		"	Jan Bourguignon
13	Sirvent - Armando			Spanish	Fernando Sirvent
14	Garcia Lorygori - Adriano	30-11-34	Madrid	Spanish	Mother: Felicitas Ruiz de J. L.
15	Gonzalez Tomandy M ^o Paz	24-1-39	Madrid	Spanish	D. Fernando Gonzalez Uria
16	M ^o Vera "	26-6-33	"	"	"
17	Morero y Ariza - M ^o Antonio	2-30		Spanish	Escame de Coude de Villada
18	Martinez Ferrero - Maria	4-12-32		Spanish	Maria Martinez Ferrero
19	Ross Hannah - Julia	12-2-34		British	Jan Ross
20	MacLaurin - David	12-11-32		British	James de Marquis de Villanueva
21	" Colin	23-10-30		"	MacLaurin

1940 registration document of the first students to join the British Institute’s primary school

Additional staff were also enlisted to keep pace with the Institute's growing success and popularity in Madrid

In January 1942, at the request of the British Council, Walter and his wife moved to what he described as "a charming suite of rooms" in Gaylords Hotel. However, lack of space remained an issue at the Institute, where student and member registrations continued to grow, as did the number of children attending the primary school on the same premises. By July, Starkie reported the number of students to be 762 and members 408. With nearly 100 primary school pupils to accommodate too, reorganisation of the premises was undertaken. Additional staff were also enlisted to keep pace with the Institute's growing success and popularity in Madrid.

Starkie was always alert to cultural opportunities. 1942 marked the fourth centenary of the birth of Spain's Renaissance mystic Saint John of the Cross, as well as the centenary of the death of the Romantic poet José de Espronceda. A series of lectures, inspired by these two anniversaries, helped reinforce significant connections with Spain, particularly with the Church. In the same year, the Institute's first art exhibition, comprising 160 pictures, built closer links with the university sector. The event featured lectures from Professor Thomas Bodkin, former Director of the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin and proved, moreover, to be a financial success, with almost half the pictures being sold.

Starkie's enthusiasm and drive knew no bounds and he was determined to make the British Institute a

centre of significant cultural activity. National Gallery expert John Steegman organised a historical print exhibition which led to the Institute being "thronged every day." Then, recognising that Madrid was "a great centre for stamp collecting", where philatelists were "legion," Starkie supervised the setting up of a stamp exhibition, which proved to be highly successful, nearly all the stamps being sold on the opening day.

Apart from lectures and events in the arts, efforts were made to be of service to the medical profession. Starkie reported that "a close relationship" was being built up with the profession, some of whom were becoming members of the Institute in order to read the "Monthly Medical Bulletin" sent to the Institute from England. In June, the brain specialist Dr. H.W.B. Cairns read a lecture in Spanish on "Brain Abscesses" to "a packed hall of Spanish medical men" and in December a British film on "Blood Transfusion" was shown to "a select audience of seventy-five doctors and medical students."

Over the year, the cinema evenings would prove particularly popular. MGM's *Mrs Miniver*, directed by William Wyler, starring Greer Garson and Walter Pidgeon, was shown three times in order to accommodate eager audiences. British films included the 1939 version of James Hilton's *Goodbye Mr Chips*, directed by Sam Wood and starring Robert Donat and Greer Garson. Garson was screened again in Jane Austen's *Pride and*



Walter Starkie with his violin

Prejudice, directed by Robert Z. Leonard, with Laurence Olivier playing Darcy to Garson's Elizabeth Bennet. Starkie enjoyed the positive reaction to the Institute's exhibitions and film shows, but he was equally determined to maintain educational standards. Moreover, summer courses in Madrid were kept "at a cheap rate so as to attract the poorer employees." Well over a hundred students attended and were "mostly from Government and private offices, eager to study English."

In spite of periodic setbacks, as a consequence of developments in the War, the Institute's increasing success enabled Starkie to sally forth and generate or reinforce connections with individuals and institutions outside the Institute's walls. His links with the Bishop of Madrid-Alcalá, Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, and the prominent Basque Jesuit, Father Nemesio Otaño, Director of the "Real Conservatorio de Música y Declamación", helped to strengthen ties with the Church authorities. The Church wielded much authority in the educational field, but Starkie did not limit his contacts to the clergy. The Minister of Education, José Ibáñez Martín, was also grateful for the collaboration of the British Council in providing books.

Another educational link which Starkie qualified as "of decided importance" was the collaboration with the "Instituto de Selección Escolar", which had been founded with a view to making secondary and university education available to poor children of exceptional gifts. In the summer of 1942, Starkie was asked, as Representative of the British Council, to provide the "Instituto" with "an English professor." He was able to supply Brian Kelly, already employed on the Institute staff, who reported finding his teaching task at the "Instituto", "one of the most interesting experiences of my teaching career". Starkie was convinced of the importance of the Council's cooperation, observing: "Some of the boys, with their exceptional gifts of mind and character, will exercise considerable influence on the intellectual life of the country, and it is right that they should find it possible to become acquainted with English life and literature."

Starkie reinforced connections with individuals and institutions outside the Institute's walls.

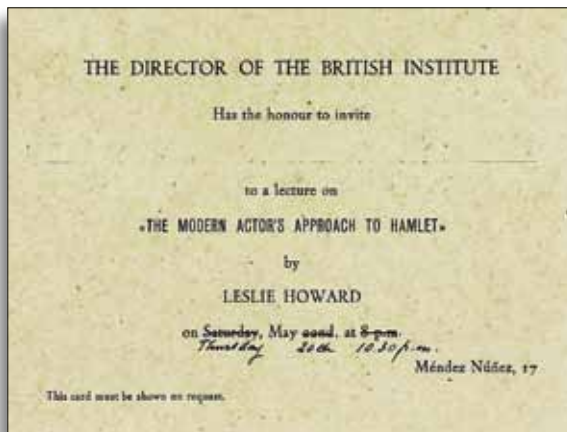
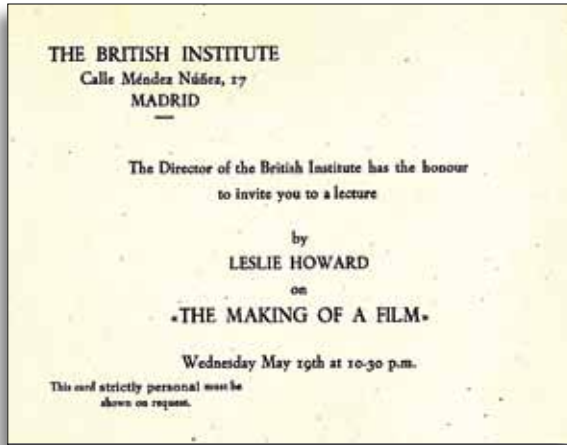
The year ended with a sense of significant progress on a number of fronts, in spite of Madrid being "officially ...an entirely Axis city and ..., therefore, the atmosphere being one of extreme delicacy." Starkie repeatedly noted the difficulty of advertising events at the Institute, given the German monopoly of the local press. The success of the Institute's art exhibition was "the result of personal contacts and by word of mouth, since the press gave no publicity at all, owing to German pressure." However, despite these difficulties, the overall success of Starkie, supported by his wife, was repeatedly hailed by lecturers sent from England, who were unanimous in their praise. National Gallery expert John Steegman declared: "The Institute in Madrid has become, through Starkie's personality, a remarkable centre of intellectual and social life, quite apart from its function as a teaching organisation and from its charitable work." Sir Ronald Storrs expressed nothing but praise for Starkie's labours, underlining his appropriateness for the job in hand:

"I was profoundly impressed by the depth, extent and variety of Professor Starkie's interests and attainments. He has a real knowledge of Spanish literature, art and music, and his personality seems to be known and greeted with evident warmth by such opposite poles of

thought as novelists and scientists, and the Archbishop Primate of Toledo. I have rarely seen a man with so many obvious qualifications for the post he occupies. From a lecturer's point of view, there can be no doubt whatever that the Institute and its Director deserve all the support that can be accorded them."

Professor Thomas Bodkin also underlined the superlative achievement forged by Starkie and his wife: "I must put on record my emphatic belief that no couple could possibly do the work better ..., I heard nothing but praise of them from every Spaniard I met. ... a number of members of the Embassy ... seemed to be on excellent terms with [the Director] and his wife and to be well aware of the importance and success of the efforts they are making to promote a better understanding between the English and Spanish peoples."

Starkie went into the new year with flying colours. Perhaps he didn't need a film star by his side to boost his popularity, but that is what the British Council provided with the arrival of Leslie Howard in May 1943. Howard's fame preceded him and the translation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* "Lo que el viento se llevó" would appear before the year was out. Howard lectured



Invitations to two lectures given by Hollywood star Leslie Howard at the British Institute in Madrid, May 1943

in both his acting and film director capacity and his visit delighted Spanish critics and audiences. At a later date, Starkie would evoke Howard's visit and describe him as, "such a good friend of Spain.

Meanwhile, student numbers at the Institute had risen to 1,500. Regular activities included: the fortnightly "tertulia"; chamber music concerts; gramophone recitals; lectures illustrated with music; book and art exhibitions as well as dinner parties aimed at bringing together "leading personalities who want to be in touch with the Embassy." However, contact was not limited to bringing people into the Institute. Starkie also moved out, eager to develop links with a range of institutions, from the "Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas" in Madrid to the Benedictine Monastery of Montserrat in the mountains of Catalonia and before the year was out, an Institute would be opened in the city of Barcelona.

Starkie was satisfied with the progress made by this time, claiming: "We have built up a special place in the affections of the Spanish people generally, and we have made the Institute a centre of cultural life in the broader sense. It has become firmly established and is looked upon with sympathy by the people of Madrid."

“We have built up a special place
in the affections of the Spanish people.”

In 1944, Starkie went to Valencia to lecture at the invitation of the university, a significant achievement given that “it was a set policy of the Spanish Government not to invite the British Institute to give lectures in Universities.” One month later, he delivered the same lecture at the headquarters of the “Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas” (CSIC) in Madrid. He was delighted with the reception he received, describing the event as “perhaps the most conspicuous success I have had here for the Council.” From June on, events gathered speed. In early July 1944, Starkie was summoned by the Minister of Educación, José Ibáñez Martín, with whom he discussed “the whole question of English in the “Bachillerato”. English was discriminated against within the law then in force, but during the hour-long interview, the Minister invited the Council Representative to place his request for reform of the law in writing. Starkie reported that he was doing so and signalled what the change would mean. “I consider that if the Minister keeps his promise, I have gained a great victory for English in Spain and have destroyed one of the main advantages of the Germans here.”

In late November, Starkie hosted a dinner for eleven members of the “Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas”, together with the Minister himself. It was Ibáñez Martín’s first visit to the Institute, now installed at number 5 Almagro Street, and he expressed the view that “the moment has come to push on energetically the study of English.” A step had already been taken,

by means of a decree passed on 12 August, whereby “Bachillerato” pupils could freely opt for either English or German during the last three years of their course.

A further move towards closer collaboration was also made with the Minister offering the Council the summer University of Menéndez y Pelayo in Santander for the teachers’ course in the summer. The offer signified a marked degree of recognition since it was the first time that the summer university had been offered to a foreign Institute.

There was also some satisfaction in 1944 for Starkie the 1930s travel writer, with the publication in Spanish translation of his first travel book, *Raggle-Taggle* (1933). He reported back to London that “Trotamundos y Gitanos (Aventuras de un juglar en Hungría y Rumanía)” had been published in time for the “Feria del Libro” in Madrid and was being well received: “The book has been selling very widely and looks like being a bestseller this year.”

Starkie found that his workload had multiplied with the opening of the Barcelona Institute. He travelled to the Catalan capital to give two lectures, one in English, one in Spanish and was able to report a considerable degree of success: “Both ... were extremely well attended, the second had a really big audience of the most prominent Barcelona people ... and members of the City Council of Barcelona.” Furthermore, a ten-minute summary of his



Walter Starkie and family at the British Institute Victory Mass in 1945.

lecture in Spanish was broadcast on Radio Barcelona and he noted that it was: "the first time that we have got on the air in Spain." On his next visit, Starkie took the opportunity to visit the Bishop of Barcelona: "a very strong influence in the city and one most necessary to us in our work" and entertained the Barcelona bourgeoisie in style: "I gave one big tertulia at the Ritz to over 90 writers, publishers, scientists, professors, etc., and this was a great success, for it enabled me to gather together an immense amount of pro-British Catalans, who long to get into touch with our work. I gave also a dinner for some of the publishers and writers who have helped us."

By 1945, the British Council had managed to expand its influence beyond Madrid and Barcelona, travelling

north-west to establish an Institute in Bilbao, and the sphere of influence would continue to grow. British Embassy official James Bowker observed that the Institute was "on the crest of a wave" and given "the turn of the tide of the war in our favour" was optimistic that "our cultural relations offer almost unlimited possibilities."

In this final year of the war, "the question of Starkie remaining" in Madrid was broached. Martin Blake in London and James Bowker in Madrid both agreed that Starkie had carried out "excellent work" and following his lectures in Madrid in April, the University of Oxford Hispanist W.J. Entwistle hailed Starkie's charismatic personality. "He is persona gratissima in all circles in Spain, with the connexions and initiative to take a high line."

Walter Starkie

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When the war in Europe came to an end in May 1945, Starkie could look back on five years of outstanding service, which had strengthened links between Britain and Spain, during the most delicate and difficult of times. His vitality had never wavered and he was ready to continue his work at the Institute. However, in January 1946, he told the Spanish Minister of Education, Ibáñez Martín, that he had “only been lent” to the British Council by Trinity College Dublin and should have already returned. In an account of his conversation with the Minister, Starkie wrote that Ibáñez Martín expressed “deep anxiety at my possible departure”. Certainly an article devoted to Starkie and published in 1946 in the *Revista Nacional de Educación*, produced by the Ministry of Education, expressed a high opinion of the Representative’s labours at the head of the Institute and stated that moves had been made with a view to ensuring that Starkie might stay on: “Spain deeply regrets the departure of Walter Starkie. So much so that negotiations have begun with a view to ensuring that the great professor might remain with us. Intellectual circles in Spain will view the continuing presence of their illustrious and hearty friend with genuine satisfaction.”

Starkie’s interview with the Minister of Education was preceded by a summons on 8 January, requesting

that Starkie present himself at “El Pardo”, the official residence of the “Caudillo”, on the following morning at 11:00a.m. Starkie expressed surprise at the summons, “because [General Franco] has not made any attempt to see me during the five years that I have been running British Council work in Spain.” Nonetheless, the meeting proved amicable. Having spent an hour with the General, Starkie concluded that the point of the audience was to enquire about developing cultural relations abroad since “the Spanish government hoped to establish an Institute in London which would be representative of the art, scientific and literary elements in Spain today.”

Despite the uncertainty over his future, Starkie continued to work at a hectic pace. He travelled to Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, Bilbao and the Canary Islands, investing each event and project with characteristic energy and enthusiasm. Starkie’s contribution as the Council Representative in Spain over the war years was praised in a Reuters article by Douglas Brown, who was trenchant in his defence of Starkie’s efforts: “Throughout the war, the underlying sympathies between Spaniards and Englishmen of all degrees were kept alive in the genial atmosphere of the British Institute”.

Widespread support, notwithstanding, Starkie's future as Representative of the Council in Spain was not secured until the autumn of 1946. He left Madrid on 12 October and spent a number of weeks in Dublin, before receiving the news he had been waiting for. He returned to Madrid on 8 December, when his new contract came into force.

As Starkie resumed residence in the Spanish capital, a new bout of darkness seemed to be threatening. In the wake of the closing of the frontiers between France and Spain in the month of February and the April Declaration by France, Great Britain and the United States rejecting the Franco regime, the year ended with the United Nations recommendation that member nations withdraw their Ambassadors and Ministers plenipotentiary. Thus, the period became one of increasing isolation for Spain, but Starkie was not one to be daunted by dictatorship.

He returned to his task with customary verve and vitality. The Institute's "Programme for the Easter Term, 1947" lists an intense sequence of events, including a music circle, a spelling bee, a chess tournament, a brains trust, discussions on the cinema, education, as well as play readings, plus a full programme of lectures, given in both Spanish and English.

"If ever anyone had a 'special mission' in Spain, it was that scholar-gypsy Professor Walter Starkie, who forged a thousand permanent Anglo-Spanish links even in the darkest days of the war."

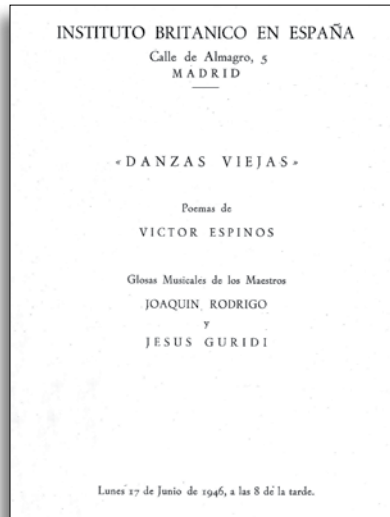
Walter Starkie

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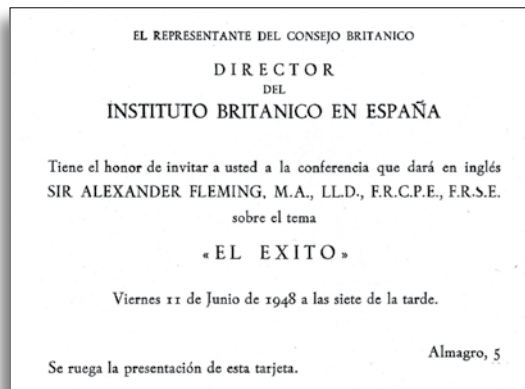
FAMOUS FACES



Lecture by eminent physician Charles Burns.



A lecture by acclaimed scientist Sir Alexander Fleming and a recital by classical composer Joaquín Rodrigo were among the many prestigious events produced by Walter Starkie.



“Five branches, all blossoming.”

Further success would be reaped for the Council by means of a summer course Starkie organised in the Catalan town of Puigcerdà in the Pyrenees. In an article in the Barcelona daily *El Correo Catalán*, the Spanish professor José María Castro y Calvo stated: “Professor Walter Starkie has achieved one of his greatest successes in Puigcerdà.” The professor was struck by Starkie’s ability to retain his audience’s attention, in spite of his Spanish still being “a little foreign.” He also noted the attraction of Starkie’s “magic violin”, which had greatly entertained, as on so many occasions during his years of service. In December 1947, *The Times* carried the news that Starkie had been appointed Professor of English Literature at the University of Madrid, and still he soldiered on.

The Duke of Alba’s words recognising Walter Starkie’s achievement in establishing five flourishing Institutes in Spain, headed the volume *Ensayos Hispano-Ingleses, Homenaje a Walter Starkie*, published in January 1948. The text included a collection of essays and pieces produced by Spanish writers, poets, musicians, artists and intellectuals and constituted a tribute to a man who had won both respect and friendship. He was further honoured in 1948 with the painting of a portrait by Daniel Vázquez Díaz, which was exhibited in the National “Beaux Arts” Exhibition.

Starkie was also rewarded with the CBE for his dedicated service, but rather than leaning on his laurels, he looked to the future. Thus, he continued to travel extensively, with regular working visits to Barcelona, Valencia, Seville and Bilbao. He also hosted visits to Spain by a number of distinguished British speakers through to the end of the decade and into the fifties.

It may be argued that the war years were Starkie’s “greatest hour,” when he strove against all odds to establish the first Institute in Madrid and set up a second one in Barcelona. Nevertheless, following the war, the Representative certainly didn’t slacken his pace. Indeed, his striking vitality and determined sense of service to Britain would weather Labour’s “age of austerity”, “the daunting economic situation” which met the Conservative Party on their victory in October 1951, and his own advancing years, steadfastly stoking the work of the British Council throughout Spain, till sixty winters did besiege his brow.

Walter Starkie retired from the Council in 1954 and died in Madrid at the age of 82, on 2 November 1976. He is buried in the British Cemetery, alongside his wife. The contribution of the British Council’s first Representative in Spain to the Council’s task was unique and Starkie’s devotion to Spain and her people extraordinary. His enduring legacy is valued at the British Council in Spain to this day ●

THE BRITISH COUNCIL TODAY

