

# Glasgow Museums' Spanish Civil War Banner

## Introduction

The banner of the Scottish Contingent of the British Battalion of the International Brigade was given to Glasgow Museums in 1986. It complements the Spanish Civil War Roll of Honour (PP.1982.110) also held by Glasgow Museums. In the accessions register the banner is described as a replica but, it is more generally referred to as the Spanish Civil War banner. These two appellations show two views of the banner: the first our awareness that it is not the original artefact, and the second its importance as a physical symbol of people and events. In recent years the banner has had several roles:

as a museum object, requiring the care for its longevity; in the remembrance of the Scottish contingent, being taken to Spain in 2001 and being present at the funerals of the last two members of the Scottish Contingent; and in the civic remembrance of Glasgow being present at the rededication of *la Passionaria*, the Glasgow memorial erected by the International Brigade Association of Scotland.



Spanish Civil War banner PP.1986.286.1; front



Spanish Civil War banner PP.1986.286.1; reverse

## Description

The banner is double sided and was designed to be carried. The two sides are the same and are composed of a red silk like synthetic ground fabric with a length of silver grey fringing on the top, bottom and fly edges. A vertical blue oval appliqué in the middle is bisected horizontally by a yellow and brown appliqué banner/ribbon. On the yellow side 'International Brigade' is painted in red, on the brown side and 'Spain 1936-38' is painted in pale yellow. 'British Battalion' is painted on the upper part of the oval, with a five pointed yellow star appliqué at the end. On the lower half is painted 'Scottish Contingent'. The communist symbol of the clenched fist in front of a globe with the words 'Freedom - Democracy - Peace' painted in red around the topside inside the upper part of the oval. The globe is appliqué in blue and the fist in white with grey for shading. The detailing is embroidered in white thread. In the lower part of the oval a five pointed star is outlined in yellow braid. In the upper half of the banner are two

scrolls outlined in yellow braid with four battle honours on each side; on the left are Cordova, Jarama, Brunete and Belchite, and on the right are Saragossa, Teruel, Gandesa Road and El Ebro. Along the top of one edge are five small pole loops of red ribbon, their positioning showing that the flag would be carried with the pole edge on the right hand side.

## Comparative Banners

Images on the website of Associació Catalana de Vexil·lologia show two British Battalion banners. One, that appears to be older, has a simpler design on a dark red ground with yellow fringing and no battle honours. This is shown with the pole edge on the right hand side as is a banner being carried in a black and white image. The second banner is very like Glasgow Museums banner but it has 'Volunteers' painted on the lower half of the oval and a second yellow star before British. It is shown with the pole edge on the left hand side.

## Cultural Significance

A banner such as that of the Scottish Contingent of the British Battalion of the International Brigade tells of identity, ideals and events. That so many of the volunteers were members of the Communist Party is shown by the use of that imagery; the use of English and the identification of a Scottish contingent are about identity; and the battle honours tell of where the battalion fought. All these highly emotional concepts are bound into and represented by, the banner. These concepts are of immense importance to the history of the city and its people, as much support and almost half of the Scottish contingent came from Glasgow.

Support for the Spanish Republican Government was an act of solidarity with the working class in the brutal conflict of the Spanish Civil War. The radical political (socialist) sentiment and the background of industrial unrest and social struggle in Glasgow and Scotland, perhaps explains the strength of support for the International Brigade and its lasting resonance, as much as the events of the war.



Surviving Brigadiers outside the People's Palace in 1986 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Spanish Civil War with the banner and the Roll of Honour P.1982.110



Photograph by Anne O'Hara of the International Brigade Association, taken at the funeral of Stephen Fullerton

In memory of Stephen Fullerton, Brigader

## Museum Object

The banner has had a continuing role, with Glasgow Museums facilitating its presence at the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the International Brigade in 2001. It was taken to Spain by Stephen Fullerton, one of the last survivors of the Brigade. In 2003 it was taken to the rededication ceremony of *La Passionaria*, on Custom House Quay, Glasgow for the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the withdrawal of the Brigade from Spain. In 2007 it was shown at the funeral of James Maley and in 2008 at the funeral of Stephen Fullerton, the last two Scottish Brigaders. In 2009 it was borrowed for a memorial service to Blantyre's Spanish Civil War heroes.

Proposals are being made to display the banner in the People's Palace in Glasgow in 2013 to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the withdrawal of the International Brigade. With new generations coming to see the banner its role is changing, and it will not only be there as a symbol of the volunteers who went to Spain, but as a gateway for new generations to learn about the Spanish Civil War, those who fought there and its supporters and events in Glasgow. As the banners role is changes it raises questions such as; where and when it was made, just how much it replicates the original, who were the Scottish contingent and what happened to them in Spain; what happened to those who returned; and how have they and their experiences affected our current society.



Fiona Hayes  
Curator, Social History  
Glasgow Museums  
People's Palace  
Glasgow Green  
Glasgow  
G40 1AT  
E-mail  
[fiona.hayes@glasgowlife.org.uk](mailto:fiona.hayes@glasgowlife.org.uk)

Helen Murdina Hughes  
Conservator, Textiles  
Glasgow Museums  
The Burrell Collection  
Pollok Country Park  
Glasgow  
G43 1AT  
E-mail [helenm.hughes@glasgowlife.org.uk](mailto:helenm.hughes@glasgowlife.org.uk)