

As this year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War, we decided that we would make this three-year conflict the focus of our April read. We gave ourselves the option of reading one, two, or all three of the following:

- 'As I walked out one Midsummer morning', by Laurie Lee,
- 'Homage to Catalonia', by George Orwell, and/or
- An Anarchist's story: the life of Ethel MacDonald, by Chris Dolan

I confess that I, for one, had only the sketchiest knowledge of this period in history and I was therefore glad that I chose to read all three books. Each provided a distinctly different perspective of the conflict and together they helped me better understand the complexity of the events.

Starting my reading with Laurie Lee's account was a wise choice. His short, and beautifully written story of busking around Spain in the lead up to the Civil War provided a picture both of the society and culture of the time.

Moving on to George Orwell's account of his time as a volunteer fighter was fascinating if a little challenging. He provides a detailed description not only of his role as a fighter but also of the ever-changing political situation.

Finishing with Chris Dolan's story of the activist and journalist, Ethel MacDonald, brought the realities of the conflict close to home. Born in Bellshill in 1909, Ethel was both a print and radio journalist in Barcelona during the War, was imprisoned to international outcry, and returned to Scotland a reluctant heroine.

Our experience of choosing a theme for our reads was highly enjoyable and one that we intend to repeat in future.

Our next meeting is on 13 May at 11.00 when we will be discussing 'The Long Road from Jarrow', Stuart Maconie's account of his walk north to south retracing the steps of the 200 men from Jarrow who, in 1936, marched to London to protest the destruction of their towns and industries. If you're interested in coming along please contact me, Irene Scullion.