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Institute

Dunbar, [Ronald] Malcolm Loraine (1912-1963)

(DUNBAR)

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Name of Creator:

Dunbar, [Ronald] Malcolm Loraine (1912-1963) journalist, photographer and Spanish Civil War veteran

Extent:

1 Box

Administrative/Biographical History:

Ronald Malcolm Lorraine Dunbar [Malcolm Dunbar] was born on 29 February 1912 at Belle Vue Lodge in Paignton, Devon; son of Lord Loraine Geddes Dunbar, a banker of independent means, and his wife Lady Liola Violet Dunbar.

Dunbar was educated at Repton School, Derbyshire, (1925-1930) and Trinity College Cambridge (1930-1933) graduating with BA honours. Whilst at Cambridge, Dunbar is reported to have been part of an elite set that included the infamous double agent Kim Philby.

Following his graduation, Dunbar worked as journalist and photographer. He was commissioned by some of the leading ballet companies of the day - positions often facilitated by his mother. It was whilst working with Ballet Rambert that he met and forged a life-long friendship with the famous ballerina Thérèse Langfield. During this time, Dunbar showed an interest in left wing political ideas and a dislike for Fascism, marching against Oswald Mosley's British Fascists in east London, October 1936.

Following the outbreak of civil war in Spain in July 1936, Dunbar left London to join the anti-fascists on 5 January 1937. Historians have since suggested that Dunbar was an unusual recruit. Richard Baxell noted, '[as a] middle-class, Cambridge-educated, homosexual aesthete, he could hardly have been a less typical volunteer. Yet, like a number of other intellectuals, in Spain he discovered a hitherto undiscovered talent for military life. [1]

His Cambridge friend, Kim Philby also travelled to Spain working as a freelance journalist behind the Fascist line. Philby later became an agent for both the Soviet and British Governments sending news from the front via France.

Once in Spain, Dunbar undertook two weeks training before being sent to the front line. He first saw action at the Battle of Jarama on 12 February 1937. As a new recruit, Dunbar had enlisted as a 'soldado' (private) but by 15 February he had been made group leader of the battalion. He continued in this role until his arm was injured in an attack against the Fascists in mid-January 1938.

Dunbar recuperated from his wound at Colmenar, Quintanar, Alcazar and Murcia before moving to Benicassim by 22 February. There, Dunbar was elected partially responsible for the English speaking front at the military hospital Villa Ralph Fox in Benicassim. He remained at the Villa until 10 March, when he returned to Albacete. Finding the 16th Battalion quartermaster unable to command his men, Dunbar took the opportunity to return to the Jarama Front. After the quartermaster returned, Dunbar was attached to the Battalion HQ in the capacity of interpreter. After another 3 weeks, he was sent back to Albacete and the officer school.

Dunbar continued to rise through the ranks. He became the most senior British ranking infantry officer in Spain when he served as the Chief of Staff for the entire 15th International Brigade at the Battle of the Ebro in July 1938.

Dunbar was demobilised in December 1938 having served 23 months.

Returning to London Dunbar resumed a quiet life taking a position at the Labour Research Department, and later British Equity the actors' trade union. However he had returned from Spain a far more committed communist than he had been previously. Although sometimes at odds with the party line, he did join the British Communist Party and contributed articles to the Daily Worker.

During the Second World War Dunbar served in the British Army, but never rose above the rank of Sergeant fuelling contemporary claims that veterans of the Spanish Civil War faced discrimination from their seniors.

Back in London, Dunbar renewed his friendship with Thérèse Langfield. Throughout the 1950s the two would regularly work on her garden at 3 St James' Street, London together. It was in Langfield that Dunbar confided when he began meeting up with his old Cambridge friend, Kim Philby. Since his return from Spain, Philby had risen in the ranks of the British secret service to head of MI5, whilst also working as a Soviet Agent. For Langfield, Dunbar's confession marked a change in his behaviour. She reportedly told her husband, CJ Pearsall-Horner, that Dunbar had become increasingly withdrawn and depressed.

In July 1963, aged 51, Dunbar walked into the sea at Milford-on-Sea, near Bournemouth. His body washed up on the Welsh coast some days later. All identifiable marks had been removed from his clothes leaving the police unable to identify the body. It was Langfield who was able to identify Dunbar after reading a tabloid newspaper report then mentioned an embroidered handkerchief on his person. Although widely reported to be a suicide, the coroner declared an open verdict at the

inquest. Dunbar's funeral was held on 30 July 1963.

Philby defected to USSR on 23 January 1963, where he lived until his death in 1988.

Langfield cleared Dunbar's flat on 4 August 1963, discovering the Spanish Civil War documents which were later transferred to Bishopsgate Institute. According to her husband Langfield found nothing else of value, instead finding Dunbar in debt despite his affluent background.

Custodial History:

The papers were collected from Dunbar's house after his death by Thérèse Langfield 4 August 1963, and passed to her husband, CJ Pearsall-Horner, after her death.

In July 2013 Pearsall-Horner contacted Spanish Civil War historian Richard Baxell and passed the papers on to him. Baxell deposited the archive at Bishopsgate Institute on 9 June 2016.

Scope and Content:

Papers of Malcolm Dunbar regarding service in the 15th International Brigade of the Spanish Civil War, his membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, and the circumstances of his death, (1912-2013).

- Spanish Civil War Documents (1937-1939)
- Photographs, (1937-1939)
- Papers and correspondence, (1936-1983)
- Membership cards and certificates (UK), (1912-1949)
- Biographical papers, (1937-2013)

System of Arrangement:

No further arrangement at present

Language/scripts of material:

English, Spanish

Access conditions:

OPEN

Copying conditions:

Photocopying, scanning and digital photography (without flash) is permitted for research purposes on completion of the Library's Copyright Declaration form and with respect to current UK copyright law.

Finding Aids:

Copy of handlist available in Library Reading Room.

Rules and Conventions:

Compiled in compliance with General International Standard Archival Description, ISAD(G), second edition, 2000; National Council on Archives Rules for the

Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names,
1997.

DUNBAR/1 Spanish Civil War Documents 1937-1939

Official documents and papers of Malcolm Dunbar collected whilst fighting in the Spanish Civil War as well as immediately after demobilisation. Dunbar served in the 16th Battalion of the 15th International Brigade, (1937-1939). Includes:

- Military record card, Republic of Spain, International brigades [Carnet Militar, República Española, Brigadas Internacionales], (1937-1938)
- Identification card, Mobile Brigade, Republic of Spain [Republica Espanola, Brigada Movil], (1937)
- Membership card, Communist Party of Spain [Partido Comunista de España, Carnet de Afiliado], (1938)
- Travel certificate allowing Dunbar make one trip through Valencia [El Comisario general de Seguridad], (1939)
- Certificate of honour [Testimonio de honor y agradecimiento], (1938)
- Certificate of honour, 35 Division [35 División, Carnet de Honor], (1938)
- 'Goodbye brothers, till [sic] our speedy reunion', International Brigades October 1936 – October 1938, transcribed and translate speech by Dolores Ibarruri, including signed dedication to Dunbar from Ibarruri, [Brigadas Internacionales Octubre 1936 – Octubre 1938, Hasta, Pronto, Hermanos], (September 1938)
- Membership card, International Brigade Association, London branch, (1939)

OPEN

DUNBAR/2 Photographs 1937-1939

Photographs taken by, and taken of, Malcolm Dunbar whilst fighting in the Spanish Civil War as a member of the 16th Battalion, 15th International Brigade. Includes images of individuals, groups of soldiers at ease, and soldiers undertaking their duties (c.1937-1939)

OPEN

DUNBAR/3 Papers and Correspondence 1936-1983

Papers and correspondence kept in connection to Dunbar's involvement in the Spanish Civil War as a member of the International Brigade, (1936-1983). Includes:

- Statement, receipt for use in clearing goods through HM customs, (1p) (11 September 1936)
- Invitation from the military commander of Catalonia to a luncheon hosted by the officers of the

International Brigades, [Comandancia militar de Catalunya, Invitacion al almuerzo ofrecido por la oficialidad de esta guarnicion a la de las brigadas internacionales], (1p) (1938)

- Letter regarding a temporary change of leadership of the 15 International Brigade, (1p) (11 May 1938)
- Invitation from the Minister of Defence of Spain to a dinner in tribute to the soldiers. Includes menu, (2pp) (October 1938)
- Letter allowing passage of a convoy through the French border, (1p) (c.1938?)
- Letter from Dunbar to 'Harry' regarding events in Spain, (5pp) (8 March 1939)
- Two empty envelopes sent from Spain, (2pp) (c.1938)
- Fragment of a postcard, (2pp) (c.1938)
- Letter from Vincent Brome to Mrs Horner regarding the return of some of Dunbar's photographs, (1p) (10 September 1965)
- Letter from David Machin to Therese Horner regarding the return of some of Dunbar's photographs, (1p) (16 September 1965)
- Newspaper cutting, book review by Files Romily of 'A Poets' war' by Hugh Ford, (1p) (c.1966)
- Newspaper cutting, 'Anatomy of a massacre', Siegfried Bushchsluter, (1p) (21 February 1983)

OPEN

DUNBAR/4 Membership Cards and Certificates (UK) 1912-1949

British membership cards and certificates belonging to Dunbar, (1912-1949). Includes:

- Certified copy of Ronald Malcolm Loraine Dunbar, (13 April 1912)
- Communist Party of Great Britain membership cards, (1939, 1940, 1947-1949)
- The Clerical and Administrative Workers' Union membership cards, (1948-1949)

OPEN

DUNBAR/5 Biographical Papers 1937-2013

Biographical papers regarding Dunbar's involvement in the Spanish Civil War, his archive, and the circumstances of his death, (1937-2013). Includes:

- Photocopied handwritten 'autobiography' of Dunbar, (2pp) (c.1937)
- Photocopy of Dunbar's death certificate, (1p) (1963)
- Letter to Aurnum Press Ltd from CJ Pearsall-Horner, (1p) (9 July 2013)
- Letter to Richard Baxell from CJ Pearsall-Horner, (1p) (n.d.)
- Photocopied notes about Dunbar [written by CJ

Pearsall-Horner?], (4pp) (c.2013)
- Article 'International Brigades' from an unknown
publication, (2pp) (n.d.)
- Five letters from Richard Baxell to CJ Pearsall-
Horner (5pp) (9 December - 20 July 2013)
OPEN