

MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUST

September 2017



This watercolour of fields near the prisoner of war camp at Modena was painted by Major E. T. Dobson. On page 3, Ian Dobson writes about the beautiful artwork his father made as a PoW

Advancing on many fronts

This has been a year of exciting progress and achievement as we continue to implement our five-year strategy of developing the Trust's activities in various directions.

As you will read in this newsletter, we have this year:

- increased the number of student bursaries we offer each year from 25 to approaching 30, by building up our links in Italy with schools from towns and villages that helped with the escapes of prisoners of war;
- made substantial progress in indexing and making available online our unique archive of escape accounts, and started to consider a linkage to the records of the Allied Screening Commission in Washington;
- expanded our excellent website, which now attracts about 150 user sessions per week, and added followers to our Facebook page to help "spread the word", particularly among former students and the younger generation.
- continued discussions about the possibility of a permanent central London memorial to the helpers and escapers;
- worked with the Istituto Storico in the region of Emilia-Romagna to support a course of studies focusing on the Allied presence in Italy in the Second World War. We have agreed to provide three bursaries for students from this course annually.
- investigated establishing a "moral courage award" in Italy.



**Letter from
Nick Young,
Chairman**

continues on P2

Although we now have, thanks to our successful Appeal, a solid total reserve fund of £1.8 million, we are spending considerably more each year than the £22,000 we raise in income from donations and legacies. We actually spend currently (and this is likely to increase as we do more) £69,000 each year, with the income from our investments at the moment making up most of the deficit.

We do, therefore, need to continue to ask for your financial help and support. This can be done by a donation (preferably gift-aided so that the Trust gets the tax); a few extra pounds added to the cost of tickets for our Monte San Martino lunch each year (please book early for Thursday November 9th through the enclosed form to avoid disappointment!); a monthly standing order with your bank, or a mention in your Will. These are all simple and effective ways in which you can assist the Trust to continue to celebrate the bravery of Italian people who helped so many of our fathers escape from captivity.

In May this year, I joined our friends in the Escape Lines Memorial Society on its annual walk from the Servigliano PoW Camp in the Tenna Valley around some of the nearby towns and villages that helped escapers. We laid wreaths in various spots to commemorate PoWs and helpers who had been killed, and had some exhilarating walks in the glorious Marche countryside, where small towns perched on hilltops look down on the valleys and fields where our fathers sought refuge in 1943-44.

I do urge you to consider joining the ELMS walk next year (contact Roger Stanton, the director, by phone on 01423 508667 or email rogerstanton.elms@tpiz.co.uk). It is a lovely way to keep alive memories of this fascinating period of history, and to enjoy once again the generous hospitality of the Italian people.



TREASURER'S REPORT

By Justin de Meo

THE Trust's financial position has improved through a combination of donations and good returns on investments. As at June 9th, 2017, the total assets were £1,896,931 with the investment portfolio valued at £1,788,112 together with £108,819 of cash. At the same time last year the total assets were £1,573,000.

In 2016, we provided 26 bursaries to enable Italian students to spend a month in the UK at a time of their choice during the year. This costs the Trust approximately £2,000 per student, including a homestay and attendance at a language school either

near Oxford or in London. We are well placed to continue providing annual bursaries and, following a visit to Italy by Letitia Blake and John Simkins, student applications for 2017 were extended to a wider geographical area. Our "market" concentrates on the regions of Emilia-Romagna, le Marche, Abruzzo and Molise, where prisoner of war camps were heavily concentrated. (Our students report is on pages 4 and 5)

Apart from our continued commitment to annual bursaries, the Trust received a donation with a specified request that it cover the cost of digitising the archives for the future. Nicola Waddington, an experienced archivist, was recruited to guide this process, with the help of George Mitchell, our web technician (see report on page 7 by Christine English, who is overseeing a very complicated task.)

The major part of the Trust's annual expenditure of £69,500 is for the provision of bursaries. These costs are met from a combination of donations received and investment income. The longer-term objective is to increase the level of investment income so that it will cover the total expenses of the Trust.

The investment objective of the trustees is capital growth with medium risk. Our investment advisers, Rathbones, have maintained a cautious stance, reflecting growing political concerns. They manage a portfolio designed to achieve long-term growth on a medium-risk basis with a spread of investments both at home and overseas. It is pleasing to report that for 2016 the total return of the Trust's investments was 21.7 per cent.

Since my last report, the UK has voted in favour of leaving the EU; the US has a new president with the financial markets responding favourably at first, although the economy may face challenges later this year that will test the market's optimism; the UK general election brought about a hung parliament with implications of additional uncertainty. It is especially important to reduce risk in our portfolio during times of uncertainty.

Once again we greatly appreciate the kindness of our generous supporters who provide the means to finance the bursaries to Italian students and the other projects we have embarked upon.

Prisoner of war camps in Italy were something like a “university”, where men honed their skills. In last year’s newsletter we featured Stuart Campbell, who painted Monturano. This year, Ian Dobson writes about the art his father, Major Edward Dobson, created at Modena

MY father was a member of the South African Engineer Corps. His unit, the 10th Field Company, an element of the 2nd South African Division, was captured at Tobruk in June 1942. He was flown as a PoW to Italy and, after short periods in camps at Bari and Aversa, was taken to Camp PG47 Modena. In September 1943, when the Germans took over as his captors, he



Prisoners on an exercise march

was transported to Germany and imprisoned in Oflag 12B Hadamar.

Born in Edinburgh but growing up in South Africa, he qualified as a Quantity Surveyor and became a keen amateur artist as a young man, producing artwork in pen, ink and watercolour. He created wonderful illustrated diaries and log books of his early years as a Boy Scout in South Africa, including an illustrated log book detailing events and scenes from the UK 1929 Jamboree at Arrowe Park which he attended. It was followed by an illustrated log of a lone bicycle tour from Pretoria to Durban, showing scenes of the South African countryside and, with a humorous quality, many cycle trip experiences.

I was born after the Second World War and grew up in a house that had many of my father’s paintings of South African, Rhodesian, Scottish, Italian and German countryside scenes. I only realised, as a teenager, that some of the pictures depicted scenes from his PoW period in Italy and Germany. He appreciated fine scenery at all times and obviously, in spite of the privations of captivity, was inspired to draw and paint both in Italy and Germany. The Red Cross and YMCA, praised by all PoWs for the lifesaving food supply, also provided hobby materials that helped PoWs to occupy their time. Quality cartridge paper, water colour paints, brushes and pencils enabled my father to produce good artwork. I suspect it also provided an occupation for his mind to counter the boredom and restrictions of PoW life. It appears that other prisoners were keen to take up this exacting pastime, as my Dad gave lessons on water-colour painting in the camps.

Camp dramatic productions that needed backdrop scenery also found my Dad applying his artistic skills. I have the master sketch of a backdrop produced for the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta “The Gondoliers” depicting a Venice scene measuring 31 x 10 ft. He also produced posters for camp societies and events. I have found through contact



A barracks block at PG47 Modena

on the internet with other PoWs and their families examples of his drawings and paintings in autograph books and diaries, along with an illustrated 1st Prize certificate for a fancy-dress competition.

In later life my father always travelled with his artist materials and usually a piece of blank pre-stretched cartridge paper gum taped to a plywood board. He explained that his tin of brushes was made from KLIM (condensed milk) tins from Red Cross parcels by one of the other PoWs in PG47. I can imagine my Dad was able to trade cigarettes, the camp currency, for that work as he did not smoke.

OUR STUDENTS: strong links with the past

In 2016, 26 young Italians came to England on one-month bursaries, studying either at Central School, London, or CES-Oxford at Wheatley. All but one completed questionnaires following their course, giving high marks for tuition and the homestays with families provided by the colleges. Representative of the remarks was this one: "The experience has enlarged my mind, it has allowed me to know better and accept other cultures. It will help me be a better citizen of the world."

Each bursary covers the cost of tuition and homestay (on average £2,000). For 2017 we awarded 30 bursaries but, disappointingly, seven students withdrew because of academic pressures within Italy, and an eighth was required to go home after only two weeks. As part of efforts to prevent this in future, we shall tell successful applicants they will not be able to re-apply if they withdraw.



In July this year trustee Ian Laing and his wife Caroline kindly entertained three of our Wheatley students at their Oxford home. With Ian, from left, are Emanuele Antenucci, Martina Mazzaferro and Domiziana Trasmondi

In addition to this "normal" intake, we awarded three bursaries through an exciting collaboration with branches of Italy's Istituto Storico in Emilia-Romagna (see page 6).

Although it is not a condition of a bursary to come from a family that helped escaping prisoners, eight of the class of 2017 do have that background. They are:

Lucia Calzolaio, 19, from Macerata: the family have a letter from Yad Vashem in Jerusalem thanking them for the action taken by Lucia's great-grandfather Ermanno Osimani in sheltering a Jewish family.

Veronica Luciani, 21, from Macerata: her grandfather Mario Luciani and his brother Don Ferruccio Luciani, hid soldiers in Penna San Giovanni, sometimes in the church.

Don Ferruccio also went to Servigliano to plead for a hostage taken in retaliation for the deaths of two Germans and refused to move until the man was released.

Martina Mazzaferro, from Fermo: great-grand-daughter of Riccardo Funari, a partisan. He had returned to Monte San Martino to recruit fighters but was captured when a Nazi-Fascist squad raided his family's house at dawn and stripped it of goods and food. Riccardo, aged 24, was taken outside and shot dead.

Chiara Pacella, 18, from Sulmona: her grandfather fought with the celebrated Brigata Maiella partisans.

Andrea Pagliai, 18, from Pistoia: his grandfather and great-grandmother, Barbera Venturi, hid two British officers for two months. (One of them was the father of Andrew Adams, Trust work group member). After a tip-off, Barbera was imprisoned for three weeks.

Eletta Palestini, 23, from San Benedetto del Tronto: her great-grandmother Elvira Fioravanti owned a small grocery shop at Ascoli Piceno and struggled to bring up nine children alone during the absence of her soldier husband. Despite this, she helped the needy and sheltered anti-Fascists. In 1972, she was declared "Madre d'Italia" in the presence of President Leone and Pope Paul VI.

Andrea Santopaolo, 23, from Fermo: his grandmother, Raffella Scipioni, worked in the town's registry office. She created false documents for the partisans and people on the run. She received a medal and Diploma d'Onore from the National Association of Partisans in 1984 on the 40th anniversary of the liberation of Fermo.

Antonio Tantalocchi, aged 23, from Montefalcone Appennino in le Marche: his grandmother and her parents hid English PoWs in a farmhouse. They got them to take off their uniforms, which were then burnt, and gave them some of their own clothes. His paternal grandparents also hid a PoW in a cave.

Wheatley: a study in peace

THE CES language school on the high street of the attractive Oxfordshire village of Wheatley describes itself as a “boutique”. In education, the word suggests a friendly, intimate atmosphere, with small classes and a homestay nearby. This is exactly what MSMT founder Keith Killby and trustee Caroline Gavin sought in the early 1990s – and what the school continues to provide, to the great satisfaction of the Trust and the students we send there.

It contrasts with the other college we use, Central School of English in London, with which we have also had a long and successful relationship. Although the majority of our students opt for London, this year 10 chose Wheatley, a larger number than usual.

The quiet setting of Wheatley, five miles from Oxford, might appear an odd location. Since 2012 it has been owned by the CES group, which has seven schools and its nerve centre in Dublin. CES acquired it from Robin and Chris Vernede who founded the school in 1983, buying the derelict Oxford House Stores. The building is on the site of a Tudor inn that had once been owned by John Milton and burned down in the 18th century. It was rebuilt in the Regency period, with white plaster covering the limestone façade.

Robin recalls: “The building had become a doss-house for tramps and feral cats and it took us a year to convert into a school. Our idea was to create a school of limited size where students would enjoy a greater degree of personal care and attention, both academic and pastoral, than is normally possible in larger city-based schools. It provided an attractive and safe location, close to Oxford but away from the tourist masses.” The current Principal of CES-Oxford, Peter Williams, has fully bought into this ethos. “It is a hard-selling marketplace but a type of student is drawn to that very English environment,” he says.

Like Robin and Chris Vernede, Peter puts a value on the MSMT connection well above its impact on the bottom line. “Your Italians come from normal families, not the super-rich, they are very grounded,” he says. Robin adds: “We were aware of the special circumstances that led to the Trust’s foundation and each year it sent us lovely and appreciative students.”

We are very grateful to members who answered our plea for more volunteers to take students from airports to their homestay – an invaluable “bonding” process. We would welcome still more helpers.

Students arriving in high summer find the school at its busiest, with about 100 pupils from all over the world at Wheatley and another 100 junior learners (aged 12 to 16) at a residential campus in Ruskin College. Another “bulge” occurs in March/April, while at other times there may be as few as 20 students.

The school has three office staff and four teachers – rising to 20 during the “bulges”. “This industry reflects tourism rather than education,” says Peter. “The challenge is how to deal with growth and contraction.” A long-term student will have any issues dealt with in the first week and then be settled; in summer, with short-term students, there are always issues to address.

The school has 11 classrooms, with an average of six students per class. Morning lessons begin at 9.30, with an emphasis on grammar. Afternoon lessons take place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursday, concentrating on reading and writing skills and pointing students towards relevant exams, such as IELTS, FCE and CAE. The school arranges a busy social programme, including an orientation tour of Oxford every Monday afternoon, run by Mihai Leca, the Social Organiser. For example, for £5, go punting! The school also uses UK Study Tours for more distant trips.

The school has an attractive garden and a kitchen that students often use to throw a party. “The Italians are particularly good at this,” says Peter.

On my visit in June I chatted to two MSMT students. Antonio Tantalocchi, from le Marche, who wants to join the Carabinieri military police, chose Wheatley because it was smaller than London. Chiara Pacella, from Sulmona, who is working towards a CAE certificate (Cambridge English: Advanced) and wants to study medicine, says: “I chose Wheatley because of bad news in London, like terrorism. It’s peaceful here, the quality of life is better than in a big city and Oxford is the centre of English culture.”

John Simkins



Peter Williams at Wheatley



**From left, the three institute pioneers:
Gregorio Marchesini, Salvatore Caterino
and Giacomo Cavalieri**

PROJECT IN EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Raising our profile in Italy

THREE of this year's intake of students have been selected through a new project designed to make the Trust better known within Italy – one of the aims of our five-year strategy plan and the focus of our Communication and Promotion work group, comprising John Simkins, Rossella Ruggeri, Edward Gretton, Jenifer Landor and Michele Ronchini.

We are collaborating with Italy's highly-respected *Istituto per la Storia della Resistenza e l'età contemporanea* – commonly known as Istituto Storico – through three branches in the northern region of Emilia-Romagna (Forlì-Cesena, Modena and Bologna). In September, the institute is laying on workshops and site visits on the subject of the Allied Presence in Italy, 1943-45, including the prisoners of war story. The institute has obtained funding from Emilia-Romagna, which has a strong record of anti-Fascism and has recently passed a law to promote the teaching of human rights and peace studies.

The Trust's contribution is to put three one-month bursaries at the institute's disposal, to be awarded to students as it sees fit. This year the three branches nominated three young men (see photo) to receive the bursaries who themselves will help teach the course of studies that takes place in September. In turn, three

students will emerge from that course to take up bursaries in 2018.

The institute bursaries will be in addition to the "normal" 28 bursaries that the Trust awards each year through its established contacts with Italian schools and local authorities.

The trio studying in England this year – Gregorio Marchesini, Salvatore Caterino and Giacomo Cavalieri – all participated in the **Tenna Valley Freedom Trail** in le Marche in May, organised by the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS) and co-hosted by MSMT. They made an excellent impression and will be fine standard-bearers of what we see as a long-term and fruitful partnership with the institute, which may be extended to more branches in the region.

They were escorted on the Trail by Rossella Ruggeri of Modena, who should be congratulated for suggesting the scheme in the first place and for liaising with the institute throughout. Rossella, a former teacher, is one of our regional "champions" in Italy tasked with coordinating with schools.

The fifth annual Freedom Trail, which ran from May 18th-22nd, was as enjoyable as ever. The walk on Saturday morning took place in heavy rain but the annual ceremony at Montelparo, honouring the British soldier Sidney Smith, who was shot by the SS, went ahead. The weather relented the following day for speeches, music and food at Villa Salvadori, a former "safe house", before dinner in Servigliano, the Trail's home base.

As ever, the Trust is extremely grateful to Roger Stanton, Steve Sims and colleagues in ELMS for organising the Trail. A particular focus was to deliver hampers of "English Fayre" – made up by the "Oldest Sweet Shop in England" at Pateley Bridge in the Yorkshire Dales – to PoW helpers affected by the earthquakes. MSMT members are warmly invited to join ELMS on the Tenna Valley Trail in May 2018.

- Nick Young and Christine English of MSMT attended the **annual ELMS reunion in York** from April 28th-30th. Despite the recent sad loss of some of the ELMS family, the meeting was the usual combination of happy reunions and poignant memories. A highlight was the moving service of commemoration held at Eden Camp, accompanied by military brass bands and a pipe band. Eden Camp is one of the largest museums covering British military and social history from 1914 onwards and is well worth a visit. During the ceremony a wreath was laid at the Helper Memorial on behalf of MSMT.

Once again, a group of Italian students and their teachers came from the Tenna Valley, with their costs supported by ELMS and MSMT. The students were delighted to meet some escapers and their helpers and spoke movingly of their determination to ensure that these memories would not be forgotten in Italy.

ELMS have kindly invited MSMT members to join them at their Memorial Lunch at the RAF Club, London, on December 9th. Contact Roger Stanton, whose details are on page 2.

MSMT ARCHIVE WORK GROUP

Memoirs go online

THE archive group (led by trustee Christine English, our archivist Nicola Waddington and website designer George Mitchell) has been pursuing the Trust's goal of transferring its archive to the current MSMT website. This will allow English- and Italian-speaking supporters and researchers rapid access to our valuable trove of escaper stories. The technology will also allow searching capability, such as PoW camp, PoW name, town/village in Italy, etc.

It has been a fascinating exercise to transform the accounts donated over the years to MSMT by ex-PoWs. Many of them were typed up, often years ago, but a significant minority were submitted in handwritten form. These are now being transcribed so that they can join the other approximately 150 scanned historical accounts contained in the archive, adding to the stories that have already been posted on the website.

The reader is constantly reminded that the authors are no longer with us and it is therefore even more important that their stories are preserved and made available to a wide audience.

As with any library of information, the archive website will be divided by subject. The web pages – each of which will include links to further information and documents – will include: timeline (significant dates/events); interactive map of Italy including locations of camps and helper villages; index of PoW stories; index of Italian helpers; published sources (including a list of published material held by the Trust); a virtual museum, containing images of memorabilia saved by escapers, such as a 1 lira note; research (archive sources) containing links to archive material relating to this period of history; research blogs (updates on research conducted by supporters); and contact pages. The web pages have been drafted and are undergoing technical development.

We are excited that we can add to escaper accounts that have already been posted on the Trust website, even if it is a huge and complicated project. The website will be made available as soon as possible, even if it is not the final version, with information added gradually. We would be delighted to hear from any MSMT supporters willing to volunteer with this fascinating work at the editing stage. This is likely to involve picking out key words and writing text. For further information please contact Nicola Waddington via info@msmtrust.org.uk.

We plan to have a demonstration website at the annual lunch on November 9th.

Christine English



Archivist Nicola Waddington

COMMEMORATION WORK GROUP

EVERY now and then a hitherto unexplored treasure-trove of information is brought to light, and the immediate question then becomes how to make it available

to the widest possible audience, from academics to writers to individuals researching their family history. Just such a trove sits in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, Washington, USA, known only to a few and currently difficult to access.

The documents were generated by the work of the Allied Screening Commission (ASC) in Rome, lasting from June 1944 to November 1947. The Commission's job was to investigate and reward all assistance that had been given by Italians to Allied escapers and evaders. This generated an enormous amount of correspondence (estimated at a million documents) ranging from letters from the mayors of tiny mountain villages and from escapers asking why their helpers had not yet been rewarded, through to reports by the investigating officers, chits, photos and other paraphernalia surrounding the relationship between Italians, escapers and officials of the Allied forces.

It seems that the intention behind this work was to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of the Italians, and to further good relations between the two countries. In the words of a Major P. A. Hewitt, introducing the 1947 ASC Final Report: *"A foundation of sympathy and friendship has been formed, particularly with the huge mass of*

Treasures in Washington

Contadini. Whether this foundation is kept in repair, or allowed to crumble is a matter beyond the Commission's scope ... it is hoped that the work that has achieved so much, will not in the future be shelved and become an apathetic memory." Words that strongly echo the Trust's own aims.

Those few who have been able to access this documentation have found that it enormously enriched their studies, adding both depth and texture. And given how under-researched this area is, bringing the archive to public attention should also produce a good deal of academic interest and therefore a wider audience.

I am in talks with Greg Bradsher, Senior Archivist, and his colleagues as to how this archive might be digitised and therefore available online, bringing it within reach of a much wider audience. Initial costings are being sought, to be followed by a thorough consultation on how to fund such an enterprise. Watch this space!

Anne Copley

- The Commemoration work group, which includes Letitia Blake and Andrew Adams in addition to Anne Copley, has also explored establishing a Moral Courage Award within Italy, reflecting the selfless bravery shown long ago by the Contadini. Andrew is collaborating with Silvia Angelini, Deputy Director of the Lucca branch of the Istituto Storico. They are identifying members of a working group who have experience in the field of civic initiatives and aim to convene it in the autumn in order to define the actions meriting the award and the entry criteria. There will be representatives from the Commune of Lucca, the Prefecture of the province, the Peace School of Lucca, the Association of Voluntary Organisations in the province, and academics.

Regarding plans for an MSMT memorial, after considerable efforts, it has become clear that Grosvenor Square is not a possible location due to the many restrictions on London parks. Nick Young has identified a new site – Mount Street Gardens, near the Jesuit Church at Farm Street, a short walk from the Italian Embassy. The Ambassador has written informally to the owners, Westminster City Council, as a prelude to making a formal planning application.

Medals for Italians

IN connection with the Washington archive, members will also be interested in the work of Brian Lett, our former chairman, who is researching the stories of Italians who were recommended and approved for a variety of British medals for their courage in helping escaped prisoners of war in Italy.

Sadly, a British Government embargo in 1948 prevented the presentation of almost all medals to Italian nationals, since Italy had entered the war in 1940 on the wrong side.

Brian, who is the author of several books relating to the Allied presence in wartime Italy, intends to publish a book in Italian, containing the full "Roll of Honour" of medal winners and their stories, to mark the 75th anniversary of the Italian Armistice in September 2018.

Home by Christmas?

TO commemorate the 74th anniversary of the Italian Armistice, the book *Home by Christmas?*, one of the most important PoW texts and always much in demand, is being reprinted.

First published in 1997 by Ian English, himself a PoW, and revised by his children Christine, John and Diana 20 years on, the book recounts the remarkable adventures experienced by some of the 600 prisoners of war who marched out of Camp PG49 at Fontanellato after the Armistice on September 8th 1943. It is an invaluable resource and several of those who told their stories were early supporters of MSMT.

The book also tells of the extraordinary bravery and sacrifices of the Italian people without whose assistance the ex-PoWs would have been forced to give themselves up. As with the first edition, MSMT will receive proceeds from sales of the book which is priced at £12.95.



MSMT Founder Keith Killby celebrated his 101st birthday on June 15th 2017 at a party at his home. *Cento altri di questo giorno, Keith!*

‘Always remember, never forget’

Francesca Rama describes how her Italian grandparents hid a British soldier – and how she tracked down his family

FORTY-FIVE kilometres from Verona is the village of Vestenanova where my mum’s parents were born and lived all their lives. They owned a humble house and a stable in a hamlet called Pezzati. By 1940, my grandparents had been married for about eight years and had three girls. By 1943, there was a fourth girl.

One day in 1944, some partisans arrived at the hamlet with two English soldiers and asked the inhabitants to hide them. An amazing friendship between my granddad, Attilio Pezzato, and Frank Ashford, or Franco as he was known, was born. My grandparents were the ones who mostly helped Frank and his companion Armand during their long stay. My grandmother provided clean clothes and fed them with the little food available.

The Germans were carrying out reprisals on civilians. When it was too dangerous to be close to the houses, Frank and Armand would hide in a hole dug out of the side of a valley hidden in the woods. My granddad and other men would take them food but, so as to leave no footprints, would lower the basket on a long pole.

The bond between my granddad and Frank grew steadily. Frank, who had left four little boys and a wife back in England, never explained why he was in the area, behind enemy lines, but it was obviously something to do with partisans.

In January 1945, Frank and Armand disappeared. My granddad was sad they had not said goodbye.

The war ended but had left deep scars. One day some German troops had arrived at the hamlet, rounded up the men, shut them in a house and set fire to it. My granddad, along with Frank and Armand, had escaped thanks to being warned in time. My grandmother with her girls and other children had stood in a courtyard with a machinegun pointed at them for hours. Tough moments, which were ingrained in the memories of my granny, granddad and my oldest auntie, who was nine years old, for the rest of their lives.



Attilio Pezzato and family

In 1949, a letter arrived: it was Frank! He said how grateful he was to Attilio for saving their lives. He said they had left without notice because they didn’t want to put them in danger. Frank and Armand had decided to go north while the other two soldiers hiding in the area went south. The latter were freed by the Allies almost immediately but Frank and Armand were caught and taken to a German camp. It was May 1945 before they returned to Britain. A few more cards followed but then for about five years there was no news. In 1954, Frank sent a letter from Australia. He had moved to Melbourne a few years earlier. By now a daughter had been born. Over the following years a few more letters and Christmas cards were exchanged.

My granddad’s family had also grown: there were seven daughters, the youngest born in 1950. The oldest one, Pia, still remembered Frank, who used to play with her. In 1973, my granddad passed away. I was born two years later. My mum and my granny always pointed out how he never forgot Frank; he reminded everybody to “write to Frank when I pass away”. And so they did. Frank replied but then the bond broke, probably because Attilio had died.

I started studying English at school and felt a connection with Frank’s story. I always hoped to find him.

I moved to London for a while in 2000, which led me to meet my future husband, a Scot, in Edinburgh. We moved back to Verona, got married and had three lovely kids. Then my mother died in 2012. On a visit, my youngest auntie brought me Frank’s letters. That night I had an inspiration: in London I had met an Australian girl, Kath. She lived in Sydney and maybe she could help me.

It only took Kath’s mum three or four phone calls to track down Frank’s son, Peter. I spoke to him on the phone, with tears in my eyes. Peter, himself a dad of three, told me Frank has passed away in 1984. It would be wonderful to meet Peter. For now I am just happy to keep in touch with him.

“Ricordare sempre, dimenticare mai” (“always remember, never forget”). Frank would always say this to my granddad. This is why I want to pass on to my kids these memories of friendship and hope for the future, born in a terrible moment of darkness.



AN ITALIAN Contadino comforts his daughter outside the barn where they hid two English prisoners of war who had escaped from a train taking them to Germany. This is a frame from a 22-minute film written and directed by Zak Jarvis, a former student at the Northern Film School in Leeds.

Zak was inspired to make the film by the exploits of his great-grandfather, Ernest Day, who died in 2006. Ernest was a prisoner at Gavi who did indeed jump off a train and was then sheltered on a family farm. The film has had two premieres, in the north and south of England, and been submitted to 30 festivals.

To make it, Zak launched a crowd-funding campaign that raised £5,500, including contributions from Trust members.

Zak recalls his great-grandfather telling him about his adventures. Last year he visited Gavi and also interviewed veterans including Keith Killby, the Trust's founder. Zak and his crew shot the film in the Peak District and at Middleton Railway, Leeds. Fittingly, the music for the film, entitled *Across Frontiers*, was composed by Alessandro Apolloni, grandson of a man who fought against Ernest Day in the battle in North Africa where Ernest was captured. Zak says: "I wanted to pay tribute to the brave farming family who sheltered my grandad. It was hard to summarise the whole PoW situation in Italy in 22 minutes with a small budget, so the theme I went for is 'sacrifice'. Hopefully one day I shall get to make the feature version and tell the story of the Contadini and escaped PoWs in much more depth."

PS: On the strength of the film, Zak has been taken on by a London production company.

THE award of an Italian honour to MSMT chairman Sir Nicholas Young is special enough. To have it presented by the Italian Ambassador at the Trust's annual lunch made it doubly a cause for celebration.

Honours and celebrations

Report on MSMT lunch 2016

Ambassador Pasquale Terracciano pinned the award on Nick's lapel – "the Queen does it with a sword but I only have a pin" – at the Royal Overseas League on November 8th 2016 in the presence of 110 guests. The event was both enjoyable and moving, taking place against the background of the earthquakes that had hit central Italy.

Also present were Mrs Karen Terracciano and Embassy colleagues, and Jonathan Newby and Sonia Ashmore, the children of author Eric Newby and his wife Wanda. Other guests included Frank Unwin and his daughter-in-law Maggie. Frank was a PoW at Laterina. He said he had been in hospital the day before the lunch and that, if he had not been released, he would have "tunnelled out". Another "Original", Trust Founder Keith Killby, unfortunately was unable to attend. Nick Young called for Three Cheers in the hope that he would hear them from his home.

Presenting the Italian Republic's award of Cavaliere Ufficiale to Nick, in recognition of the Trust's services to charity, Ambassador Terracciano said that the experiences of his own family gave him reasons for endorsing the commemoration of escaping PoWs and the Italians who gave them refuge. His grandfather, Chief Prosecutor in Salerno during the Allied landings, had been impressed by a British officer who persuaded the Americans not to reinstate the death penalty. Mr Terracciano said; "As a country, Italy owes a debt of gratitude to the Trust. You found a way to recognise unsung heroes."

Thanking the Ambassador, Nick Young told the remarkable story of his father's escape. While crossing minefields on the approach to Anzio, two young Italian partisans who had offered to guide Leslie Young and his New Zealand companion were killed. Their names were Eugenio and Silvia Elfer. It was a pleasure to welcome to the lunch Anthony and Peter Elfer, and Joan Siddall and Frances Tulett – the four children of Walter Elfer, the first cousin of Eugenio and Silvia.

Nick then introduced our guest speaker, Christopher Prentice, who had retired recently as British Ambassador in Rome. Christopher said he could not resist the Trust's offer to become a trustee. "My reasoning was similar to the reason why being British Ambassador in Rome had been such a rich and rewarding experience. Relations between two countries operate at many levels and have many constituent elements. But the best relationships depend on a bedrock of mutual affection and esteem between peoples."

The lunch, as on previous occasions, was brilliantly organised by Christine English.

OBITUARIES

We are sad to record the deaths of three PoW escapers who were stalwart members of the Trust

Major Mike Lacey, who died last December, aged 96, was commissioned into the Royal Artillery and assigned to 60th Field Regiment in 1939. As part of the BEF in France, the regiment escaped from the Dunkirk beaches after an encounter with some Stukas whose bomb aiming was, happily, inaccurate. Subsequent service took Michael through Syria and Iraq to tank warfare in North Africa. After the battle of Sidi Razegh, he was captured in November 1941. From his first internment camp at Benghazi, Michael was taken to Montalbo, Italy, until the spring of 1943, when he was transferred to Fontanellato, near Parma. Following the mass escape from Fontanellato, shortly after the Armistice in September 1943, Michael set off south with two companions, later to be joined by a deserter from the German army. After six months, while trudging through snow in the Maiella mountains, he was ambushed and captured. After incarceration in Germany he returned to England in 1945 and continued to serve in the Army for several years, in both Australia and Germany. In 2013, Mike was among 80 Trust supporters who celebrated the Armistice's 70th anniversary at Fontanellato. He was given the notebook he had left behind at the camp and which had been picked up by a camp guard. He also met the grandchildren of the Ferrari family who had sheltered him. At the MSMT lunch that year, in a poignant meeting, Mike was introduced to Steve Dickinson, the nephew of Mike's Signalman, Robert Dickinson. The two men had been captured together but Robert, after his own escape, had been killed in a skirmish. After the war, Mike followed up all his men and had been aware that Robert had not survived.



Major Mick Wagner, who died on January 2nd, aged 99, was captured between Benghazi and Agebadia when his B Company of the 1st Battalion, the Welch Regiment, was overrun by German forces commanded by Rommel. As he spoke German, he was taken to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who told him: "For you, the war is over."

After incarceration at Padula, Italy, he was transferred to PG19 Bologna. When Italy capitulated, the Germans planned to move the PoWs to Germany, but Mick escaped while the camp was being evacuated. After hiding in a roof space with four others for two nights, sleeping on nine-inch concrete rafters, he escaped under the wire. On the 250-mile journey south to rejoin the Allies, hindered by illness and winter weather,

Mick and two companions only survived with the help of Italian Contadini. Acquiring arms, they harassed the enemy and briefly joined a group of Yugoslav partisans. The Germans posted rewards for their capture. After joining up with a large group of escapees, in May 1944 about 130 of them were evacuated from the coast just south of the Tenna River in a landing craft sent from Termoli to rescue them.

Upon return to England in June 1944, he was posted to 21 Army Group Headquarters, by then in Brussels, with the task of assessing German troop movements. Later he was sent to meet Rommel's widow in Stuttgart in the hope she could shed light on the circumstances surrounding her husband's forced suicide.

Following the war, at the age of 30, Mick joined the Colonial Service and was posted to Northern Rhodesia. When it became independent in 1964 he stayed on, serving the Zambian Government in various ministries. While on leave in 1953, he and his wife Nan made their first visit back to Italy to seek out and thank the Italians who had helped him. On retirement from Zambia in 1968, they lived first in Suffolk and then for nearly 50 years in Somerset at North Cheriton and Holton. Nan died in 1993 and he is survived by two daughters and a son.

● SHORTLY before going to press we were sad to hear of the death, at the age of 97, of **Geoffrey Harmer**, who was captured as a tank commander in North Africa. At the Armistice he walked out of his PoW camp in le Marche and lived with an Italian family before being recaptured by the Germans. Later he revisited the family. The war interrupted Geoffrey's career as a journalist. He eventually retired in 1984 after 37 years on the Swindon Advertiser. His family kindly arranged a retiring collection on behalf of MSMT at his memorial service. His daughter Caroline said: "His stay in Italy remained a significant memory to him."



Benvenuti to Highfield!

A REMARKABLE initiative bears fruit this autumn when two 12-year-old Italian children spend six weeks at a private school in Hampshire as part of a pupil exchange.

It has come about through the desire of Bill Mills, left, chairman of Highfield School at Liphook, to “give something back” to the Italian people for the support given to his father, Peter, while on the run after escaping from Fontanellato PoW camp in 1943. After four months, Peter and his companion Bob Williams were recaptured a few miles short of the Allied Lines and taken to Germany.

Following the war, Peter became headmaster of Highfield, a co-educational school for children aged up to 13 which had been founded by his own father. About 100 of the pupils are boarders.

The pupil exchange started to take shape after Bill came across the Monte San Martino Trust in February 2015 and floated the idea. The Trust only gets involved with students over the age of 18 but the proposal was so heart-warming that we were keen to help out.

We are delighted to announce that Bill Mills, Highfield’s chairman, will be guest speaker at the Trust’s luncheon at the Royal Overseas League, London, on Thursday November 9th. Invitations are included with this newsletter. Please come!

We contacted our former student Francesco Trivelloni, then the deputy mayor, now mayor, of Fontanellato. He got in touch with teachers at the town’s Scuola Secondaria di Primo Grado. Rosaria Poi, who is on the school’s senior management team, and Giorgia Batteca, the English teacher, were enthusiastic, as were a number of parents – although Bill’s initial suggestion that the children spend a whole term at Highfield, in an unfamiliar boarding environment, met with some anxiety.

In November 2016, Bill, together with Phillip Evitt, the headmaster, and the Head of Boarding spent three days at Fontanellato to finalise arrangements. “We were incredibly well looked after, we had a super time,” says Phillip. “It’s tremendously exciting, and it’s great to be establishing these links post-Brexit.”

Fontanellato’s townspeople have always been hospitable to families of former prisoners, just as their ancestors were to the original escapers, and there was an incident during the visit that startled Bill: at a restaurant he was introduced to Ubaldo Arduini, who insisted that his grandfather had driven Peter Mills to safety outside the town in his ambulance.

In March this year, Rosaria and her husband, and two teachers came over to Highfield. The outcome is that Fontanellato has selected a boy and a girl, from among the five families interested, to spend the first six weeks of the autumn term at Highfield, selected on the basis of their conduct and academic performance. During their stay they will join the Year 7 trip to an outward-bound centre in Shropshire and spend the first Exeat with a Highfield family who used to live in Milan. The parents of the Italian children, who may visit the UK for the second Exeat, are asked only to pay for the flights.



LIST OF TRUSTEES

Cavaliere Ufficiale Sir Nicholas Young (chairman); Hon. Letitia Blake (secretary); Justin de Meo (treasurer); Anne Bewicke-Copley; Omar Bucchioni; Christine English; Caroline Gavin; Nicholas Gent; Ian Laing, CBE; Christopher Prentice, CMG; Miles Skinner; Cav. Uff. Vanni Treves, CBE.

MSMT OFFICERS

John Simkins (Administrator and newsletter/website editor); Antonio Millozzi, MBE, (Representative in Italy); Edward Gretton (UK student organiser).

Website: www.msmtrust.org.uk. For enquiries, contact info@msmtrust.org.uk

Monte San Martino Trust Founder: Cav. Uff. Keith Killby, OBE.

Registered address: Fletcher & Partners, Crown Chambers, Bridge Street, Salisbury, SP1 2LZ.
Company no: 05604293