

MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUST

June 2019



Honouring the Trust's founder: in May, the village of Monte San Martino dedicated this space, Largo James Keith Killby, to his memory (see page 3) – Photo by Giordano Viozzi

Going strong, 30 years on...

THE death of the founder is a big moment in the life of any charity, especially when the founder has played such a big part in the daily life of the organisation – as Keith Killby did until shortly before his death last September at the age of 102. Luckily, we have a very active bunch of trustees, all of whom are keen to see MSMT, which is now entering its 30th year, continue to grow and prosper. So there is no chance of the Trust slowing down. Even so, Keith will be sorely missed by all of us.

The Freedom Trail this year, organised by our friends in the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS), was a particularly special one, as we took the opportunity to celebrate Keith's life in Monte San Martino itself, the first place where he took shelter after his escape. We will also be remembering Keith at the annual lunch on November 13th, when the focus will be on the 30th anniversary of the Trust.

Meanwhile, Trust secretary Letitia Blake and I, as Keith's executors, with enormous help from Christine English and Julia MacKenzie, have cleared Keith's flat and sorted out both his voluminous archive of correspondence and mementos of his imprisonment and escape in Italy. The documents have been identified and indexed and will now form part of the Trust's own archive. We have also been dealing with the financial aspects of Keith's estate, and I am humbled to be able to announce that Keith, with incredible generosity, has left nearly £1 million to the Trust. Inevitably, this work has dominated proceedings for some of us but there has been activity in a number of other areas, including:

- Discussions with Cambridge and Reading Universities about the possibility that one or other of them might provide a home for our archive of original escape accounts, once they have been fully digitised and indexed (now 70 per cent complete). Cambridge is also interested in the idea of a research partnership;
- A cooperation agreement with Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri, which coordinates a network of 65 historical institutes in Italy dedicated to collecting, conserving, enhancing and making available its archive (comprising records of anti-fascism and the Resistance) to researchers and the general public;
- The publication by Pen & Sword of *The British Partisan* by Michael Ross: Michael's son David has produced a revised edition of Michael's excellent book, *From Liguria With Love*. Pen & Sword have also published my book, *Escaping with his Life*, about my father's wartime exploits, including his escape from Fontanellato and home run five months later.

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- The translation into English by our own John Simkins of a fascinating book about PG49 Fontanellato and the mass escape of 600 prisoners by Professor Marco Minardi, a leading Italian historian of the Second World War and the Italian Resistance. It will be published by our supporter, Christopher Woodhead.

There have continued to be echoes of the trip Helen and I made to Italy, when we retraced (by car) my father's descent down Italy. An example is the contacts that have developed with the village of Lucoli in the Abruzzo region, which my father passed through, and where I pinned up one of the "thank-you" letters that I left along the route.

The wonderful people of Lucoli have dedicated an apple tree and plaque to the Trust in their Garden of Memory. I am delighted to say that, as a result of this new connection, a young man from the area, Gabriele Miconi, has been granted one of the 34 bursaries we have awarded this year. Inspired to do some research, Gabriele discovered that his great-grandfather had sheltered two PoWs one night.

It is outcomes such as this that make our work at MSMT so rewarding.

Nick Young, chairman, MSMT

TREASURER'S REPORT

THIS year's report covers the period from January 1st to December 31st, 2018.

As at December 31st, 2018, the Trust had net assets of £1,783,666, comprising the Rathbones investment portfolio with a value of £1,771,604 and cash of £13,316. During the year, no further amounts were added to the portfolio for investment, nor was any capital withdrawn. The year-end asset valuation in 2017 was £1,862,875.

The Trust earned investment income of £48,164 during the year which, when added to other income received (donations), amounted to a total of £71,562. Expenditure in the year totalled £118,649, of which the cost of bursaries to Italian students was £75,913.

Rathbones report that the total return of the Trust's portfolio for the year was -1.8 per cent. Over the same period, the FTSE100 and the MSCI WMA growth indices were -8.7 per cent and -5.4 per cent respectively. Investment values have improved somewhat in the early months of 2019.

During the year, the Trust awarded 37 bursaries to Italian students, 12 more than in the previous year. Each bursary costs the Trust approximately £2,050, which includes the cost of attendance at a language school in Wheatley, near Oxford, or London. We are now well placed to continue providing these bursaries and we thank our student organiser and our volunteer meeters for their hard work.

It remains the Trust's long-term objective to increase the level of recurrent investment income to a point at which the total expenses of the Trust are covered.

The investment objective of the trustees continues to be to achieve capital growth with medium risk. Rathbones maintain a cautious stance, reflecting continuing political and economic concerns, and aim to achieve long-term growth with a spread of investments at home and overseas. It is especially important to monitor the risk in our portfolio during these volatile times and to maintain a careful approach.

Once again, we greatly appreciate the kindness and loyalty of our generous supporters who provide the means to finance our objectives.

Justin de Meo



Sulmona restoration

ONE of the most important prisoner of war camps in Italy, Camp 78 Fonte d'Amore at Sulmona, in the Abruzzo region, is to be restored. The announcement, in January 2019, came as excellent news for those who have campaigned for the dilapidated camp to be protected and for those with family ties to it.

The restoration will turn the camp, which housed PoWs in both world wars, into a memorial park.

The work is just part of a 12 million euro project, funded by the EU and the region, that will regenerate the historically rich Celestinian area of Sulmona at the foot of the Morrone mountains.

The area, which commemorates Sulmona's famous sons – Ovid and the 12th century Pope Celestine V (Peter of Morrone), who resigned in order to return to his hermitage – includes the Celestine abbey.

A memorial to *cittadino* Killby

ONE afternoon in 1961, Keith Killby got off the bus in Contrada Barchetta, a hamlet at Monte San Martino, and approached the first person he spotted – who, in fact, was named Vittorio Barchetta.

“He got my attention and asked me if I knew Maria Levi, and could I show him where she lived. She was my aunt. She had looked after Keith after he had escaped from Servigliano prisoner of war camp.

“I think that, at the moment that Keith knew he was safe, it was then that he thought of showing gratitude to those who had helped prisoners of war.”

Vittorio spoke these words on May 16th in a charming little piazza in Monte San Martino, known as a largo, which was on that day dedicated to the memory of Keith and given the name of Largo James Keith Killby.

Following that encounter with Vittorio, Keith used to return twice a year to the Tenna Valley in le Marche – “my valley” – until he became too old to do so. Keith died last year aged 102.

Among his many friends in the town was Antonio Millozzi, who helped Keith set up the Trust in 1989 and is still its representative in Italy. Speaking during the dedication ceremony, Antonio said: “I felt sympathetic to the cause as I was a war orphan – my father had died in Albania.” Since then the Trust has granted more than 600 study bursaries to young Italians as a way of thanking the *contadini* who gave refuge to escaping PoWs despite the risk of retaliation at the hands of the Germans and Italian Fascists. “Our citizens broke the laws without realising they were laying the foundations of Italy’s future constitution,” said Antonio.

Keith’s bond with Monte San Martino was recognised in 1988 when the town made him an honorary citizen. In 2001 he was awarded an OBE and in 2003 the Italian Republic conferred on him the honour of Cavaliere Ufficiale.

Another speaker at the ceremony was the mayor of Monte San Martino, Valeriano Ghezzi. “This is a moment that will remain in history for our small village. The gratitude expressed by the ex-prisoners of war for the help given by the people of this area will never be forgotten. I hope that the Trust’s activities will continue for decades.”

Returning the compliment, Nick Young, MSMT’s chairman, said: “Monte San Martino was so special to Keith, the first village he came to on his escape journey, the place where he first experienced the true spirit of St Martin himself – the soldier who shared his cloak with a poor and vulnerable stranger, and whose church we are standing in front of.



Vittorio Barchetta and Antonio Millozzi at the ceremony in Monte San Martino. The two men were of invaluable help to Keith Killby

“You shared your cloaks, your food, your homes, your fragile security with Keith. You risked your lives for him. You gave him a whole lifetime of friendship. You were, in a very real sense, home for him.”

The audience at the ceremony included members of the Trust and the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society who were taking part in the annual Tenna Valley Freedom Trail, organised by ELMS (see page 4). The day had begun with a group of walkers trekking from Servigliano, the Trail’s base, to join the inhabitants of Monte San Martino in laying wreaths at the war memorial. Following that, there was a



MSMT chairman Nick Young marches with the Cassino Band of the Northumbria Army Cadet Force

magnificent lunch for about 75 people prepared by Paola Carraro and Fabiola Anselmi, president of the Pro Loco, the organisation that promotes the town. Then came the dedication service at the largo, which had been planned by Vittorio Barchetta, the mayor and Matteo Pompei, the cultural assessor. All the ceremonies were accompanied by the beautiful playing of the Cassino Band of the Northumbria Army Cadet Force, which had driven out from the UK to play both on this occasion and at other moments during the four-day Freedom Trail.

An obituary of Keith Killby, and tributes to him, are at <https://msmtrust.org.uk/about-the-trust/keith-killby/>

TENNA VALLEY FREEDOM TRAIL



THE weather omens had not looked good. In the run-up to May 16th, the first day of the sixth annual Tenna Valley Freedom Trail in le Marche, it had rained hard and was unseasonably cold. The Tenna river was in spate.

In the nick of time, the sun came out and allowed three days of excellent walks based on the village of Servigliano. It was no more than the Trail organisers – the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society – deserved. Among the walkers were members of the Monte San Martino Trust, the co-hosts, who owe a huge debt of thanks to ELMS director Roger Stanton and his colleagues Steve Sims and Boris Spence.

The ELMS crew, along with local guides Giuseppe Millozzi and Ian McCarthy, and David Runciman, who drove one of the back-up vehicles, escorted us as we walked through the villages, laying wreaths at memorials in tribute to the *contadini* who in 1943–44 sheltered the many Allied servicemen who had escaped from the PoW camps of Servigliano and Sforzacosta. On several occasions, we were treated to concerts by the Cassino Band of the Northumbria Army Cadet Force.

The three walks were to Monte San Martino, where we attended the ceremony honouring Keith Killby, Penna San Giovanni and Montelparo. On three occasions we crossed the swirling waters of the Torrente Salentino (*left*). On the way to Penna San Giovanni we received refreshments in the hamlet of Santa Lucia at the house of Pancrazio Tulli and his wife, Margret Cornelius, where we listened to a tragic story, told by Cesarina Di Biagio. Cesarina was a young girl when her uncle was killed by a former prisoner. The uncle had objected to the man's romance with his daughter.

In Penna San Giovanni itself we encountered Lorenzo Falcioni, who was eleven and a half years old when he came across escaped prisoners from Sforzacosta hiding in the wood. His family sheltered a prisoner named Jimmy Wilson for six months.

At Montelparo, as on previous trails, a wreath was laid at the memorial to Signalman Sydney Smith, an escaped prisoner executed by the SS. The village had great affection for Smith, who taught in the local elementary school while hiding out in the village. Local families, particularly that of Cristina Franca, have for the past 75 years put flowers at the spot where he died.

The fourth day included a visit to PG70 at Monte Urano, where Giuseppe Millozzi read out Red Cross reports about conditions there, and to Casa Brugnoli, a "safe house".

- The annual Freedom Trail in the Tenna Valley is just one aspect of the work that ELMS does in connection with Italy. All funding raised through the trail is used to assist Italian helpers and students attending the Tenna Valley event and other ELMS trails in Italy, by contributing to the cost of their transport, accommodation and meals. ELMS also provides gift boxes for Italians whose families sheltered escaping prisoners of war.

ELMS also funds coach transport to and from a UK airport to York for its annual reunion in the city at the end of April. At this April's event, Roger Stanton, ELMS director, thanked MSMT for its annual donation of £3,000 and for a special donation of £5,000 made in memory of the Trust's founder, Keith Killby. Nick Young, Trust chairman, is a patron of ELMS and was present at the York reunion. The donations will be spent only on ELMS's Italian work, or to assist Italian students attending functions in the UK.

Reports by John Simkins

Fontanellato, September 2018: 75th anniversary of the Armistice

BACK in 1943, in the days following the escape of 600 PoWs from PG49 at Fontanellato, the townspeople put themselves out to hide, feed and clothe the escapers. Seventy-five years later that same generosity was on show as the town welcomed 90 MSMT members to celebrate the anniversary of the Armistice and the escape.

Mayor Francesco Trivelloni and his colleagues had organised a weekend full of interest. The main features were lectures on Friday, a walk on Saturday along the embankment, known as the Bund, where the prisoners hid from the Germans, and on Sunday a Mass followed by a ceremony at former PG49. But interspersed with these events were dinners, a picnic and, on Friday evening, a rollicking concert of arias in the town's theatre by a brass quintet and soloists.

Some of the Trust's visitors had also attended the 70th anniversary in 2013 but there were many new faces in a group that included members not only from the UK but also from the USA, South Africa,



Above: the ceremony at PG49;
below left, Mayor Trivelloni and Nick Young;
below, visiting the Bund

Photos by Ibrahim Malla



Canada, Australia and New Zealand (see page 6).

On Friday evening, however, there was a poignant moment. The sad news reached officers of the Trust that Keith Killby, MSMT's founder, had died in London, at the age of 102 – at the very moment when supporters were raising three cheers to him in Fontanellato. Nick Young, the Trust's chairman, and Mayor Trivelloni went on stage at the end of the concert to inform supporters.

Enormously enjoyable as the weekend was, there was rightly no forgetting that the Armistice with Italy did not necessarily mean an end to pain and suffering for the prisoners nor, indeed, for Italy's civilian population. On Sunday, Brian Lett, MSMT's former chairman, gave a talk about his research among documents of the Allied Screening Commission, which was set up to identify Italians who had helped prisoners on the run.

He spelt out how much they had to lose if caught. If they had assisted prisoners of war they were offered freedom in return for information. Otherwise they were likely to be tortured and sent to Mauthausen concentration camp.

Brian tells the story in his recent book *Italy's Outstanding Courage: The Story of a Secret Civilian Army in World War Two*.

A full report of the anniversary celebration can be found at msmtrust.org.uk/news/fontanellatocelebration-september-2018/





Riding in Grandad's footsteps

*Two participants at the Fontanellato reunion last September had arrived the hard way. **Angus Henderson** and **Quinton Moss** had just completed a 600-mile bike ride retracing the escape of Angus's grandfather, Major George Norman Girling (known as Norman) of the Green Howards (left). Here Angus recalls a gruelling but exhilarating journey.*

I REMEMBER, as a child, my grandfather looking down at me and stating in his most Major-like voice, "Angus my boy, any silly bugger can be uncomfortable". Those words stick with me today. When things aren't planned as well as they ought to be, inevitably, the self-induced discomfort resonates with me being that "silly bugger".

Grandad fought through North Africa and was captured after the battle of Mersa Matruh. He was shipped to PG49 Fontanellato and then, in 1943, escaped into the countryside with 600 of his fellow prisoners. As they scattered in groups of threes and fours into the Italian countryside, Grandad decided to make for the front line, 1,000km to the south, and break through to regain his freedom.

In August 2018, seventy-five years after that remarkable journey, my colleague Quinton Moss and I set off for Fontanellato to see if we could retrace his journey to get a sense of what he had achieved. This time, however, rather than on foot, we would attempt the journey by mountain bike. Quinton had his own reasons for making the trip: his uncle, Private Charles Moss, was killed in fighting at Faenza. After our journey we had an emotional trip to pay our respects at his grave in Forlì.



Quinton Moss, left, and Angus Henderson at Fontanellato

As a teenager I had received a copy of Grandad's diary from 1943. He had recorded the daily mileages and the locations. So, after many painstaking hours of research, I tracked down the locations and joined the dots to identify the route that he most likely followed: mountain trails, stock tracks, river beds and rural roads that run from Emilia-Romagna in the north, through Tuscany, Umbria, Abruzzo, to Isernia in the Molise region.

We completed the route in 28 days. It was incredibly challenging but awe-inspiring. The days were long and at one point the temperature soared to 44 degrees. On our longest day we covered a distance of 93km but with a combined vertical ascent of over 2,000m. There are so many stories from the trip. Day 16 stands out.

We had set out for the Umbria border but the climb was so steep all we could do was carry our bikes. Wrong turns and delays prevented us reaching Vado until evening, with another 22km to our destination of Apecchio. In the forest, along the SP90 rural road, suddenly the night was ripped open by the howls of wolves. Under a one-third moon I felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end as we realised how insignificant we were. With relief we reached Apecchio at 10pm.

The contrast with my grandfather's journey was immense. Whilst he hid in hay barns, slept in cowsheds and on kitchen floors, we sampled some of Italy's finest B&B's, hotels and Agriturismos. Whilst he travelled by foot, in dishevelled clothes, disguised as a peasant farmer with no maps or compass, we had the luxury of hi-tech mountain bikes, modern man-made clothing, GPS and cellphones. Whilst he communicated with limited Italian, we had the amazing Google Translate to help us on our way. I can only imagine the strain of being on continual lookout for the enemy and his apprehension as he knocked on random doors to seek food and shelter.

Grandad and his companions reached safety among Allied troops at Isernia after 53 days, covering 626 miles. The entry in his diary, at 08.30 on 5th November 1943, simply states "deliverance".

It is with a great sense of satisfaction that I now look back on my own journey. Having grown up with family stories of his time on the run, I am proud to have followed in his footsteps. From this life-changing experience, I come away with a great sense of admiration for all those who made the trek in such dark times, and an appreciation for the courage shown by the Italian people, who, at great risk to themselves, sheltered my grandfather and others in their time of need.

OUR STUDENTS

“I was twelve years old during the displacement of the battle front... I was in the Rovigliano woods (south of Naples) because of the Germans’ advance. The conditions of life were difficult: the food was scarce, the risk of dying from minute to minute due to a bomb was very high. I remember two English soldiers who repaid our hospitality with canned meat and a caress on the cheek.”

This testimony comes from the grandmother of Filippo Bocciolesi, who is one of 34 young Italians awarded one-month bursaries to study English during 2019 at Central School of English in London or CES-Oxford at Wheatley, near Oxford.

Filippo, himself from Perugia, is by no means the only recipient with a family background of assistance to prisoners on the run. The students are coming from a wide geographical spread, with a strong presence from L’Aquila, Sulmona, Castel di Sangro and Isernia in the south, as well as from our traditional catchment zone of le Marche. Among the group are three students benefiting from bursaries placed by MSMT at the disposal of branches of Italy’s historical institute in the region of Emilia-Romagna, which in return puts on a wartime studies workshop. ***This year’s institute candidates are pictured above during a site visit to the former prison camp at Servigliano in le Marche.***



The class of **2018** numbered 39 students, the largest intake to date. Almost all completed a survey following their stay, with 90 per cent awarding top mark, or second to top, for tuition. The same scores for accommodation, which is with families nominated by the colleges, were recorded by 75 per cent: the unavoidably lengthy commute to central London in some cases continues to be a problem.

Our thanks once again go to Edward Gretton, our student organiser, for his careful attention to the students’ arrangements.

Here are some of the students’ comments following their stay in 2018:

“London has her own beauty, the city keeps changing, reveals herself in every corner, every hidden garden. Simply amazing.” (*Caterina Papa*).

“All the people in Oxford are very kind, especially my host family, she was lovely!” (*Sofia Piergallini*)

“I opened my mind, there is a world to discover!” (*Nicola Torri*)

“My first experience abroad and alone, useful for my behaviour.” (*Beatrice Rosso*)

“I remember my friends, teacher and the cup of tea in the morning.” (*Benedetta Felici*)

John Simkins and Letitia Blake

ONLINE ARCHIVE

THE editors working on the MSMT archive continue to do a sterling job and we are moving closer to our goal of transferring the physical archive of escaper stories and other historical documents to the MSMT website. About 70 per cent of the

original documents have been scanned, transcribed, edited, proofread and uploaded onto the draft website.

Together with the stories that had already been posted on the website and documents that continue to be discovered and lodged with the Trust, this online library will form a treasure-trove of information and reminiscences from events in Italy during the Second World War.

Thanks are due to the editors who have undertaken this huge task, especially those who have worked with the almost indecipherable handwriting in handwritten accounts. The archive group (led by trustee Christine English, our archivist Nicola Waddington and website designer George Mitchell) met in June to celebrate the work completed so far and to evaluate the draft website. The site will become accessible later this year.

- Still on the subject of digital matters, over the past year the Trust conducted an overhaul of its supporter database and emailing arrangements. The impetus was the requirement to make the Trust compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was duly fulfilled. The Trust decided to employ an IT firm to guide it through the process and selected Bongo, based in Oxford. Our database and website are now safeguarded and Bongo will continue to be employed as consultant for a monthly fee.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

THE Trust's links with Italian organisations have gone a step further with the signing of a five-year collaboration agreement with Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri, which is based in Milan and oversees a network of 65 historical institutes throughout Italy. The collaboration builds on a partnership already established with branches of the network in Emilia-Romagna, whereby Trust bursaries are provided in return for courses laid on in wartime studies. MSMT is also associated with the Lucca historical institute through its award for Moral Courage (see below).

The Parri Institute takes its name from Ferruccio Parri, a partisan who was briefly prime minister of Italy in 1945. The network, now known as *Istituti Storici della Resistenza e dell'Età Contemporanea*, promotes research into Second World War and contemporary history and bases its activities on the ideals of anti-fascism and the Italian Resistance.

In April, John Simkins and Rossella Ruggeri, on behalf of MSMT, met Parri's chairman, Professor Paolo Pezzino, and chief executive Mirco Carrattieri to explore joint projects. The focus will be on encouraging research and disseminating information about the Allied presence in Italy in 1943–45. As an initial project, a full analysis of Italy's 200 PoW camps, similar to one done previously by Parri about Nazi/Fascist massacres, is being considered.

Accessibility to the archives of both Parri and MSMT, and a possible link between the latter and an academic institution in the UK, can help stimulate research. Meanwhile, the Trust plans to publish an English translation of *L'Orizzonte del Campo*, an account of the mass escape from Fontanellato's PG49 by Professor Marco Minardi, who is himself attached to the Parma historical institute.

MSMT also continues to be interested in the Allied Screening Commission files archived in Washington (NARA), which could be an extremely rich source of material for both academic and genealogical research. This would be much easier to access if the whole 1.5 million documents were digitised. Trustee Anne Copley is in contact with NARA and has established that the cost of such an exercise is about \$160,000. She is in correspondence with an American journalist based in Berlin who writes *inter alia* for the *Smithsonian* and the *New York Times*. If persuaded to write an authoritative piece this could then be used in applications to relevant foundations.

A pilot project came to a successful conclusion last September when MSMT and its partner, the historical institute (ISREC) in Lucca, announced the winner of their **Moral Courage award**.

The aim of the award, conceived by Trust supporter Andrew Adams, was to recognise the same display of moral courage and leadership in 2018 as that shown by Italian civilians towards Allied escapers and other fugitives in 1943–45. Nominees were sought among people exposing, and fighting against, discrimination in any form; befriending those whom society has excluded; and daring to stand up for fair and transparent dealing in the face of violent corruption.

The exacting requirements were met in the person of Ortensia Mele, for her unselfish actions in providing a home in Lucca for a family of Syrian political refugees. The prize of 2,000 euros was passed to the father to help him buy a means of transport so that he could take up a job.

The award was presented in Lucca by MSMT trustee Anne Copley. Talks continue on how to increase awareness in Italy and move the project forward.

- On April 25th, Liberation Day in Italy, at ISREC's invitation Andrew Adams attended celebrations at Capannori in Lucca province. The commemoration focused on the courage of the villagers who took in escaped PoWs from the local camp, PG60. Backing was given to an initiative in schools to engage students in their local and family history using modern media.

We are very sad to say goodbye from the board of trustees to Caroline Gavin, the first trustee Keith Killby invited to join him when he founded MSMT in 1989. Keith had met a young man in need of a kidney transplant who lived near Monte San Martino and Caroline responded to his fund-raising appeal in the magazine of the British–Italian Society.

Not long afterwards, when Keith and Antonio Millozzi set up the Trust, he approached Caroline, as a fellow-Italophile, to be a trustee. Thus began her long involvement with the charity and her warm friendship with Keith. She regularly met Italian students on their arrival in London and often entertained them in her London home, with help from her late husband, Alastair, a staunch Trust supporter.

Caroline was a regular visitor to Keith in his final years, bringing his favourite Chinese takeaway for them to share over lunch. On her final visit she was accompanied by one of her many small dogs, much to the amusement of Keith who was very impressed by its good behaviour.

We are very grateful to Caroline for her long and diligent stewardship of the Monte San Martino Trust and the significant part she has played in seeing it grow from strength to strength over the past 30 years. Thank you, Caroline!

Letitia Blake

By Julia MacKenzie

BOOKS were my introduction to the story of the Allied PoWs in Italy, notably those by Eric Newby (*Love and War in the Apennines*), John Verney (*Going to the Wars*), and Peter Medd and Frank Simms (*The Long Walk Home*).

After my own 250-mile walk down the Apennines in 2017 I started to search for more memoirs and histories, which has resulted in the bibliography of around 200 publications that can be found on the MSMT website (<https://msmtrust.org.uk/activity/research/pow-bibliography/>) and, in more detailed form, on this webpage: www.librarything.com/catalog/Julia-MacKenzie.

Although many of the books are now out of print, second-hand copies of a good number can be obtained via sites such as www.bookfinder.com.

About three-quarters of the books on the list are first-hand accounts and I concentrate on these in this brief overview. Many PoWs set to work recording their experiences while still incarcerated. Dan Billany and David Dowie left their manuscript (*The Cage*) with a farmer after their escape from Fontanellato but sadly did not live to see it in print. Others were more fortunate: injured and medical personnel who had been repatriated published their accounts even before the war had ended (Brian Stone, *Prisoner from Alamein*; Jim Henderson, *Gunner Inglorious*; John Mustardé, *The Sun Stood Still*).

Immediately post-war, the narrative pattern of escape and help from the *contadini* was quickly established in books by former PoWs from New Zealand (John Broad, *Poor People, Poor Us*; J. D. Gerard, *Unwilling Guests*), Britain (Ian Reid, *Prisoner at Large*), the USA (Winton K. Sexton, *We Fought for Freedom*) and South Africa (Uys Krige, *The Way Out*). Krige was a war correspondent captured in North Africa with *New York Times* journalist Harold Denny (*Behind Two Lines*) and BBC reporter Edward Ward (*Give Me Air*).

Interconnecting stories can also be found in the books about the Rome Organisation by the three British officers who helped Monsignor O'Flaherty (himself the subject of three biographies) run it: Sam Derry (*The Rome Escape Line*), John Furman (*Be not Fearful*) and William Simpson (*A Vatican Lifeline*); as well as those by men they assisted (E. Garrad-Cole, *Single to Rome*; John Miller, *Friends and Romans*). A number of those held in PG12, the "Generals Camp", wrote memoirs (James Hargest, *Farewell Campo 12*; A. Carton de Wiart, *Happy Odyssey*; Philip Neame, *Playing with Strife*; John Leeming, *Always Tomorrow*); and Pat Spooner (*A Talent for Adventure*) tells of his role in the rescue of Generals Neame and O'Connor and Air Vice-Marshal Boyd. New Zealanders Colin Armstrong (*Life Without Ladies*) and Allan Yeoman (*The Long Road to Freedom*) and Scotsman Tommy Macpherson (*Behind Enemy Lines*) chronicled their joint escapes, as did Tony Davies (*When the Moon Rises*) and D.S. (Toby) Graham (*Escapes and Evasions of 'An Obstinate Bastard'*).

Many of the early classic "escape" accounts were by officers (e.g. Michael Blackman, *By the Hunter's Moon*), but as the years passed more books by Other Ranks appeared, such as those by G. Norman Davison (*In the Prison of His Days*), Roy Marlow (*Beyond the Wire*), Keith Killby (*In Combat, Unarmed*) and Archie Baird (*Family of Four*). Some authors placed emphasis on certain aspects of their experience: Stuart Hood's political beliefs led him to fight with the partisans (*Pebbles from my Skull/Carlino*) and other narratives focus on leading bands of partisans (Gordon Lett, *Rossano*; Ian Bell, *And Strength Was Given*) or helping groups of fellow PoWs reach freedom (Arch Scott, *Dark of the Moon*).

Another perspective is provided by Alan Flederman (*And Direction Was Given*), who was guided by his religious faith, and army chaplains such as James B. Chutter (*Captivity Captive*) added to the information we have about life behind the wire.

Some PoWs chose to present their memoirs in a different format: Robert Briggs through cartoons (*A Funny Kind of War*) and Gordon Horner via his drawings (*For You the War is Over*), while Michael Gilbert (*Death in Captivity*) and Martin Jordan (*For You the War is Over*) used their incarceration as material for novels.

There are a few accounts of the PoWs from the Italian point of view: Dominick D'Alesio (*The Worst is Yet to Come*), Ettore Damini (*A Boy at War*) and Iris Origo (*War in Val d'Orcia*). And women who met and later married an escaping PoW told their stories: Wanda Newby (*Peace and War*) and Vilma Goddard (*A Partisan View*). In the 1960s the former PoWs started to describe return visits to Italy (John Verney, *Dinner of Herbs*; Malcolm Mason, *The Water Flows Uphill*; Errol Allison, *Kiwi at Large*). And as time has gone on, children have written about their fathers' lives on the run in Italy and their own

Escape into Books



encounters with the families who helped them, for example Howard Reid (*Dad's War*) and Tom Carver (*Where the Hell Have You Been?*).

More general histories include books on particular camps (Ian English, *Home by Christmas?* [PG49]; Gabriella Di Mattia, *Campo 78: The Aussie Camp*; Brian Lett, *An Extraordinary Italian Imprisonment: The Brutal Truth of Campo 21*), and on the experiences of national groups: South Africans, Australians and New Zealanders (e.g. Susan Jacobs, *Fighting the Enemy: New Zealand PoWs and the Italian Resistance*). But no discussion of this subject would be complete without mentioning Roger Absalom's seminal account of the relationship between the PoWs and the *contadini*: *A Strange Alliance: Aspects of Escape and Survival in Italy, 1943–44*.

That relationship is central to many of the books listed here, as dedications like this one bear witness: “to the *contadini*, who did not pass by on the other side but recognised us as ‘neighbours’ and helped us on our way.” While the flow of those personal memoirs has inevitably diminished, interest in the subject continues to grow and books are still being added to the bibliography.



‘La figlia di Pip’

By Jane Bradburn

LIKE many people who served in the Second World War, my father did not talk about it but, after he died in 2002, I found some photos and a diary with the name Giacomo Columbatto and an address in a village called Varisella.

I decided to go to Italy to find out about my father's wartime story. I discovered that Giacomo was no longer alive but was delighted to meet his son Remo and wife Maria. Initially they were sceptical about my story because they thought that my father had died making his escape over the Alps as nothing had been heard from him since he left the village. However, when Remo put a photo of his father Giacomo on the table in front of me, I produced an identical one which had been in my father's possession. It was a very emotional moment – from then on I was family and became known as “la figlia di Pip”.

I was taken to meet elderly villagers who remembered my father well; Lorenzo, who as a young boy met my father when he first arrived in the village and explained how his mother hid him in a cave in the woods; Dentina, who remembered how her mother hid my father under the floor of their bakery. During this period, they had faced constant danger from raids by Germans troops.

My father, **Kenneth (Pip) Bailey (left)**, had been captured along with his entire regiment, the 67th Medium Regiment R.A., at Tobruk in June 1942 and shipped to PoW camps in Italy. He ended up at La Mandria, a work camp north of Turin. In September 1943, at the Armistice, he escaped and found sanctuary in the village, which was controlled by partisans sympathetic to the Allies.

In spite of the dangers, the villagers hid and fed him and, when in November 1944 it became too dangerous to stay, arranged for him and 10 others to escape over the Alps to safety in France.

They were picked up by American forces and taken to Marseilles. From there they were sent to Naples and by ship back to England.



After the war my father spent the rest of his life farming in Suffolk but he did not forget his debt to the village which had saved his life all those years ago. When he retired, he had a bungalow built and named it Varisella – without giving an explanation.

I have continued to visit regularly and was delighted when, in 2006, **Remo, Maria and their friend Nadia (centre)** came to England to stay in that very same bungalow.

OBITUARY: Frank Unwin, MBE, 1920–2018

THE phrase “tunnelling out” came to be something of a catchphrase for Frank Unwin in later life, used by him with an inimitable twinkle in his eye. He employed it to explain how no illness or hospital incarceration would prevent him from making an appearance – at an MSMT annual lunch, at the launch of his autobiography, or memorably at the 75th anniversary celebration at Fontanellato last September when he was in very fragile health.

But most notably of all, the phrase harked back to his five months on the run after escaping from PG82 Laterina, in Tuscany, following the Armistice in 1943.

Frank, who died on December 5th, was the Trust’s last remaining PoW veteran, having survived Keith Killby, the founder, by two months.

Frank’s autobiography (*Escaping Has Ceased to Be A Sport*) was published in 2018 after 25 years of work in conjunction with his daughter, Betty Merrick. It is an invaluable insight into the daily life of the *contadini* with whom Frank lived at Montebenichi, between Siena and Arezzo. It is also one of the relatively few accounts of PoW life by members of the Other Ranks. Frank, who originally came from Liverpool and was a lifelong supporter of Liverpool FC, enlisted in the Territorial Army in 1939 and was mobilised the same year.

He was first deployed to Egypt with the Royal Artillery before being sent to Greece to support the Greek Army. He was evacuated from mainland Greece to Crete and again a few weeks later from Crete to Alexandria on HMS *Orion*, which was persistently attacked by Stuka bombers, resulting in the loss of 260 lives. In June 1942, following the collapse of the Tobruk garrison, he was captured by German forces and handed over to the Italians, still aged only 21. Transferred to mainland Italy, he was imprisoned at Laterina where he learned Italian by talking to the sentries.

His first escape lasted one week before recapture. He then joined a tunnelling party but shortly before the tunnel was completed the Italians signed the Armistice and he was able to escape. Despite the kindness of the people of Montebenichi, Frank left the village in spring 1944, knowing that his parents had had no news of him. He was recaptured and taken to a work camp in Germany where conditions were dire. As the Allies drew nearer, the prisoners were ordered to leave the camp. They joined in the Long March, marching for several weeks before being rescued by the Americans.

After the war Frank worked first for the Ordnance Survey before joining the Foreign Office in 1958. He served in several overseas postings accompanied by his wife, Marjorie, who died in 2005, and their children Peter and Betty. He frequently returned to Montebenichi.



Frank Unwin at Fontanellato

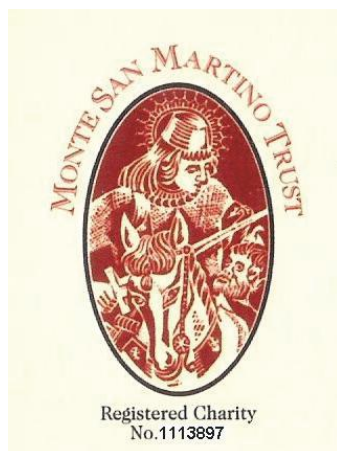
Photo by Ibrahim Malla

Recent PoW Books

Frank Unwin’s book, *Escaping Has Ceased to Be A Sport*, is published by Pen and Sword. The same publisher has brought out two other fascinating books by MSMT members.

Under the title *The British Partisan*, Brigadier David Ross, CBE, has updated the memoir of his father, Michael, published as *From Liguria With Love* in 1997. The book tells the story of Michael’s capture in North Africa, life as a PoW and marriage to Giovanna, the daughter of the family who had hid him while on the run. The second book is *Escaping With His Life*, in which Trust chairman Nick Young describes the wartime experiences of his father, Leslie, which began with evacuation from Dunkirk. He joined the Commandos, was captured in Tunisia and imprisoned, like Ross, in Fontanellato, Italy. After escaping he reached Allied Lines, was repatriated and fought his way through Germany.

Another excellent read, available through Amazon, is an account of the extraordinary adventures of First Lieutenant Loftus Peyton Jones, who found himself in charge of a damaged destroyer during the battle of the Barents Sea. He survived its sinking, volunteered for submarines but was still training aboard HMS *Sahib* when she was depth-charged and sunk. Captured by the Italians, he escaped from PG19 Bologna and set out south towards freedom. *Wartime Wanderings* has been published by Commander Peyton Jones’s son, James.



THIS year's annual lunch, to be held on Wednesday November 13th 2019, will be a special occasion in two respects. We shall be looking back at the life and achievements of the Trust's founder, the late Keith Killby, and are delighted that his niece Lesley Angus and nephew Malcolm Angus will both be present – the latter arriving from New Zealand.

It is exactly 30 years since Keith founded the Trust and this anniversary will also be a focus of the lunch. More than 600 young Italians have benefited from MSMT study bursaries and both the student programme and other projects are in full vigour. The first 30 years have just been a springboard.

The lunch will be held at the Royal Overseas League in London. Please note the date in your diary: we hope for another bumper attendance!

Invitations will this year be sent out by email but if you require one by post please ring John Simkins on 01372 815724

MSMT LUNCH 2018

THE Trust has benefited greatly in recent years from the strong support for its activities given by the Italian embassy in London. At MSMT's annual lunch in November 2018, held at the Royal Overseas League, we were very pleased to welcome Raffaele Trombetta, who had taken up his post as Italian ambassador at the start of the year in succession to Pasquale Terracciano who had been transferred to Moscow.

Mr Trombetta (**pictured with his British wife, Victoria, who was also at the lunch**), is on his second posting to London, having served as consul from 1990 to 1995. The ambassador said how much he looked forward to working with the Trust and how important it was, in the current political climate, to maintain initiatives on the human level such as those promoted by MSMT.

The main feature of the lunch was an address by Letitia Blake, the secretary, who described how, over the course of 14 years, a working relationship with Keith Killby, the Trust's founder, developed into a personal friendship and ultimately membership of the care team that looked after him up to his death in September last year.

Among the 139 guests were Mayor Francesco Trivelloni of Fontanelato and three colleagues, all of whom had done a magnificent job in organising the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Armistice, held in the town two months earlier.



MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUSTEES

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

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The Trust was founded in 1989 by Cavaliere Ufficiale Keith Killby, OBE (1916–2018)

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