

MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUST

June 2020



Letitia Blake, Christine English and John Simkins, together with Nick Young for the launch of *Escaping With His Life*, at the offices of the British Red Cross

All in this together

FOR all of us, 2020 will be remembered as the Year of the Virus, possibly the strangest and most unsettling year in our lifetimes. But of course, few of us have personal memories of the Second World War, when separation, uncertainty, fear, and even the deaths of family, friends or acquaintances were everyday experiences not dissimilar to those of today.

Like many of us in the Monte San Martino Trust, I have been in regular contact during this period with friends in Italy, some of them the descendants of people who helped my father in his time on the run from a prisoner of war camp after the Armistice. Their responses have conveyed a strong sense that “we are all in this together”, a feeling perhaps not so very different from the one that prompted their forefathers to open the door when an escaping PoW knocked on it and asked for food and shelter.

This has all served to remind me how important it is that we continue to remember those days and commemorate the bravery of both escapers and helpers. They refused to be daunted by the dangers of the situation they were in, and the fear and uncertainty that lurked just around the corner for all of them.

The talks I have been giving about my book *Escaping with his Life* to literary festivals and clubs have also served to re-emphasise the value of telling the MSMT story. Letitia Blake, Trust secretary, interviewed me in front of a full house at the National Army Museum just before the lockdown, and we were both struck by the emotion that the talk seemed to free. It was as if all the films and TV series had somehow distanced us from the raw truth about war, and that nothing succeeds in unlocking real understanding like a personal story about real people.

Thanks to Keith Killby’s generosity in leaving over £800,000 in his will to the Trust, which he himself founded, and to the extraordinary success of the Appeal run by our dear, departed friend and fellow trustee Vanni Treves (see page 11), we are in a strong position financially – far stronger than most small charities at the moment. We are able to think positively and creatively about our future strategy. There will be more on this later in the year. For now, all I can do is to send you best wishes. The prospects for our annual lunch at the Victory Services Club, London, on 4 November, are currently not all that bright but I do hope we meet again at the earliest opportunity.

Nick Young, Chairman

Escaping With His Life is published by Pen & Sword; contact nyoung@msmtrust.org.uk for details of the audio book which is due out shortly.

TREASURER'S REPORT

THIS review covers the year running from 1 January to 31 December 2019.

At 31 December, the Trust had net assets

of £2,467,554, comprising the Rathbones investment portfolio with a value of £2,348,795 and cash of £118,759. The net assets at the previous year-end had been £1,783,666.

The increase in the value of the portfolio during the year was due largely to receipt of a most generous legacy of £804,312 from the estate of Keith Killby, MSMT's founder. The legacy was received partly as a transfer of shares valued at £501,488 with the remainder as cash. Prior to the transfer the value of the portfolio had stood at £1,820,734. During the year no further amounts were added to the portfolio for investment and £52,052 was withdrawn to meet planned expenditure.

Investment income earned in the year amounted to £46,690 which, when added to income received from legacies, donations and the sale of books, produced a total income of £870,059.

Expenditure in the year totalled £124,630, of which the costs relating to bursaries to Italian students were £75,182. In addition, work continued on digitising the Trust's archives, carried out by a dedicated team led by trustee Christine English, archivist Nicola Waddington and IT consultant George Mitchell. The archive can be accessed through <https://archives.msmtrust.org.uk/>. Please see the team's report on its excellent progress (page 7).

The investment portfolio with Rathbones is managed by their charities team, which has followed a strategy agreed by the trustees and is in line with other charity portfolios. Rathbones report that the total return of the Trust's portfolio for the year was 10 per cent.

During the year the Trust hosted 32 Italian students on four-week English language bursaries, five fewer than in 2018. Each bursary costs the Trust approximately £2,350, which covers accommodation with a family and tuition at either Central School, London, or CES-Oxford, at Wheatley.

We are very grateful to Edward Gretton, the student organiser, and our volunteer meeters for their hard work. As had been the case the previous year, the students were drawn from a wider geographical area than hitherto, with a view to covering areas where wartime PoW camps were established. We are well placed to continue providing the bursaries in future years, although sadly we have had to postpone this year's intake until 2021 because of the pandemic (see page 6).

The 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 and uncertain times and to maintain a careful approach to investments.

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

Justin de Meo



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MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUSTEES

Cavaliere Ufficiale Sir Nicholas Young (chairman);

Hon. Letitia Blake (secretary); Justin de Meo (treasurer);

Anne Bewicke-Copley; Omar Bucchioni; Nermine Delic; Christine English;

Nicholas Gent; Ian Laing CBE; Julia MacKenzie; Christopher Prentice CMG;

Miles Skinner; Christopher Woodhead.

OFFICERS

John Simkins (administrator and newsletter/website editor)

Antonio Millozzi MBE (representative in Italy)

Edward Gretton (UK student organiser)

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

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The PoW partisans

The names Donny Mackenzie and Gunner Gregg are little known in the UK but are venerated in Piacenza, reports **Shaun Hullis**



Donny Mackenzie (left, with Italian carbine) and two partisans of the Stella Rossa Brigade (with Sten guns air-dropped thanks to Donny and Gunner Gregg)

IN September 1943, the inmates of PG 29 Veano, in the hills south of Piacenza, faced the same choice as their fellow prisoners of war at PG 49 Fontanellato, near Parma: to wait, or to evade. As was also the case at PG 49, the Senior British Officer ordered his men to do the latter.

Many made journeys north into Switzerland or west to the coast; some settled down in the hills to await liberation; a few headed south; and fewer still took a more active role. One such was Gordon Lett, whose operations supporting the partisans in Rossano earned him a DSO; two others, less well known, were Captains A.D. “Donny” Mackenzie, of the Cameron Highlanders, and T.D. “Gunner” Gregg of the Royal Tank Regiment. I was privileged in October 2019 to attend commemorative events in the Val Nure, in Piacenza province, in their honour, and to have told part of their story to an MSMT audience in Fontanellato in September 2018.

Donny Mackenzie was a Scot in his late twenties. According to a fellow prisoner he was a big, solid man and highly intelligent (he had read Classics at Oxford). Gunner Gregg had been transferred to Veano from PG 35 Padula, near Salerno, and was classified as a troublemaker; he had made several escape attempts.

Having spent the autumn and winter of 1943 recovering from illness and moving deeper into the Val Nure to hide from the Fascists, Gunner and Donny were approached by the locals in Ferriere, who wanted help against the garrison of *Carabinieri*. After a short fire-fight, the garrison fled, and Donny led his partisans in an ambush on a lorry-borne counter-attack.

From then on, every community that Donny and Gunner liberated remained free of Fascist control, until the whole valley had been liberated. Further counter-attacks by a battalion of *Alpini* and by a German self-propelled gun battalion were

driven off. The local capital, Bettola, became the centre of a free zone, with Donny and Gunner providing the leadership that the courageous partisans needed. By the autumn of 1944, they had been accredited to SOE as a sub-mission of Lett's "Blundell Violet" operation, had set up airdrops and even two airfields, run several prison camps for captured German and Fascist personnel, and become a vital link in an escape line that fed over a hundred airmen back to Allied lines. It was not until Donny and Gunner's forces captured the small town of Ponte dell'Olio in October 1944 that the Fascists became seriously alarmed. As Donny and two partisans crossed the Nure on 6 October, they were ambushed and killed.

Their funeral in Bettola attracted thousands of Italians, who were free to attend because effectively they were in Allied territory. But, in November, Gunner was summoned to report to his SOE overseers and to his lifelong regret was not allowed to return to the Val Nure. He, therefore, missed the *rastrellamento* of winter 1944, a raid that decimated "his" partisans and visited unimaginable horror on the inhabitants.

Gunner became a close friend when I researched Donny's story and, shortly after his death in March 2014, I completed a book (*Captains Courageous*) about the pair's exploits. It is available from Amazon and I do not make any profit on sales; I wrote it to put on record the bravery of these two men and of the Italians who sheltered, befriended and fought alongside them. If you would like to know more, please contact me at shaunhullis@mac.com.

Partisan memorial

THE attention of the Monte San Martino Trust has been brought to a memorial in southern Le Marche, which refers to the awful events of 11 March 1944, writes *Anne Copley*. Germans and Italian Fascists encircled and attacked the snowbound mountain villages of Pozza and Umito at dawn, burning 11 houses in Pozza and shooting the occupants dead. The raid was aimed at the partisan band of Enrico Bianco. More would have died if the Germans had not received requests for help from comrades who had reached Umito, where they had found *Banda Bianco* ready to meet them. The Germans lost about 30 men in the fighting, including their commander Rudolf Stegmeier. After he was mortally wounded his soldiers retreated, allowing Bianco's men to disengage and climb the hill. The Germans then vented their anger on the civilian population, setting fire to the houses in Umito with bombs and flares. Anna Sparapani, aged 11 months, was burnt alive when her mother was unable to get back into the house to save her.



The number of civilians and partisans killed is put at between 30 and 40. Many were escaped PoWs, including 15 Yugoslavs and two Cypriots. Three were English-speakers, namely Sgt. Joseph Groves, 2nd Rgt Royal Horse Artillery; Sgt Peter Evans, 1st Bn Royal East Kent and WO Sidney Barker, Royal Canadian Air Force. Although their bodies were eventually removed to the Commonwealth War Graves site in Ancona, each is now also commemorated at a small cemetery in Pozza (above), along with comrades-in-arms of various nationalities.

The site was damaged in the 2016 earthquakes but has now been restored. It was discovered that the names of the three had been misspelt. The Aquasanta branch of the ANPI (National Association of Italian Partisans) wishes to supply new headstones with the correct details, at a cost of 1,100 euros plus VAT. The Trust has agreed to pay £600 towards the cost, with our sister organisation, WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society, contributing the balance.

THE coronavirus outbreak has brought a temporary halt to projects intended to raise the profile and restore one of Italy's most important PoW camps, PG 59 at Servigliano in Le Marche.

A parliamentary bill to nominate the camp as a site of national interest has been unable to make progress. It was presented by a Marche Senator, Francesco Verducci, and Liliana Segre, a Senator for Life, and is supported by all the political parties. Besides recognising PG 59 as a symbol of the fight for democracy, the initiative would help efforts by the Casa della Memoria, which oversees the former camp, to obtain funding for restoration of the walls and sentries' quarters. It is also planned to adapt the former kitchen into a library capable of presenting exhibitions.

During the First World War, PG 59 held Austrian prisoners; in the next conflict the inmates were captured Allied servicemen and Jews. It then became a refugee centre. It is now known as Parco della Pace.

MSMT LUNCH 2019

THE 30th anniversary of the founding of the Monte San Martino Trust was celebrated in fine style at our annual lunch on 13 November 2019 at the Royal Overseas League in London.

The centrepiece was a short film shown to the 117 guests, consisting of interviews highlighting aspects of the Trust's work and featuring MSMT representatives and former PoWs. Chief among the former is Keith Killby, the founder. A strong theme of the occasion was to recall the achievements of Keith, who remained active within the Trust right up to his death, at the age of 102, in 2018.

Nick Young, chairman, introduced the guests of honour: Malcolm Angus and Lesley Angus, Keith's nephew and niece; Keith's cousin, Gill Langston, and her husband, Derek; Michael May, a relation of Keith; and Sue Martin, Keith's cousin and goddaughter.

Nick signalled out for thanks Roger Stanton and Steve Sims of WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS), with which MSMT is closely associated. ELMS organised the Freedom Trail in Le Marche in May 2019, which coincided with the dedication in Monte San Martino of a piazza to Keith's memory. This has been renamed Largo Keith Killby. Keith hid near the village after his escape from the PoW camp at Servigliano. He was devoted to Monte San Martino, of which he became an honorary *cittadino*.

Asked to say a few words, Malcolm, who now lives in New Zealand, said that, as someone who emigrated to Australia in 1964, he did not believe in hereditary entitlements and that to be a guest of honour was undeserved – “the honours lie with the Trust”.

Thanking the trustees and supporters for all their efforts on behalf of MSMT, Malcolm said: “Keith had a vision, was obsessed by it and he made it work. It is extremely meaningful to me as his nephew to know it continues.” He presented gifts to Letitia Blake, the secretary, “for the love and care you gave to Keith”.

Letitia (**pictured with Malcolm**) then introduced the video about the Trust, made by film director Zak Jarvis, a MSMT supporter and the great-grandson of Ernest Day, a PoW at Gavi. Zak was assisted in the production by Letitia and fellow trustee Anne Copley. The film can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1fb8bhpDd4>.

After the viewing, Letitia thanked trustee Christine English, the “queen of the lunch”, for yet again organising the occasion so faultlessly.



Allied Screening Commission files

AS described in previous newsletters, the Trust is considering how best to increase access to the 1.5 million documents of the Allied Screening Commission stored in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) at Washington. The files range from official reports and administrative correspondence through to personal accounts by both the PoW escapers and their Italian saviours. More than 100,000 helpers are recorded in numbered folders.

Owing to excellent relations with the Senior Archivist at NARA, the Trust can help enquirers access specific files by providing them with relevant contact details and instructions. However, it is still the plan to explore ways of funding the digitisation of the entire archive so that academic researchers and others can access this trove of information. After more than 75 years, it remains largely unexplored.

One of our trustees, Anne Copley, at acopley@msmtrust.org.uk, is happy to answer any queries.



OUR STUDENTS

IN March, with great regret, we concluded that the student bursary programme could not take place during 2020, *write John Simkins and Letitia Blake*. The coronavirus pandemic, which by then had already brought about the closure of schools, was casting an ominous shadow. It was too much to expect that the language colleges, the home-stay hosts and the Italian students would be able to lay firm plans at any stage of the year.

It was a particularly bitter blow that this should happen during the 30th anniversary year of the awards. We had offered four-week bursaries to study English to 35 young Italians, from different areas of Italy. All of them were excited at the prospect of following in the footsteps of about 600 former bursary winners (see panel). They have all been assured that they may take up the offer in 2021.

In 2019, the Trust hosted 32 students, of whom 20 chose to attend Central School, in London, and 12 opted for CES—Oxford, at Wheatley. Our thanks go to the volunteers who met students and took them to their home-stays, and to Edward Gretton, our student organiser, who managed the programme flawlessly.

From June onwards, Central School operated from new premises, having moved from Tottenham Court Road to 12 Buckingham Street, by Embankment. A plaque on the wall there attests that the house was the home of Samuel Pepys, the diarist and Naval official, from 1679 to 1688.

The main reason for the switch was that Central School's owner, Till Gins, did not own the Tottenham Court Road building but does own 12 Buckingham Street. Central runs independently but is one of the schools acquired over the years by Instill Education, as the business is known. Two other language schools under this umbrella share the five floors in the new premises and their collaboration provides flexibility in terms of meeting students' needs. This is essential at a time when enhanced knowledge of English across much of Europe means that the market for UK language schools is declining.

Pictured above, from left, are Edward Gretton, student organiser, Trust student Davide Montini, and David Mullany, Central School's principal. To read more about Central, go to <https://msmtrust.org.uk/students/our-students/central-schools-historic-location/>

TO celebrate 30 years of bursaries we asked Arianna Barchetta, one of the earlier students, for her recollections.

"I had the bursary in September 1996. Today I run a farm company in Le Marche and work in it with my husband; vineyards, olive groves and rolling hills are my daily life. I use English every day, especially in summer when I receive guests from all over Europe.

How can I explain at such a difficult time for all of us what the Monte San Martino Trust experience signified for me? These days I read a lot of messages hoping for a strong Italy but my thoughts are for the whole world, and I'm sure that was imbued in me by Keith Killby's vision. I learned to think inclusively and globally, open to others.

At the school in London I didn't meet Germans, Italians, Japanese... I met joyful people trying to cut distances through a common language. Spending time with a local family and enjoying their hospitality, I learned to respect other rhythms of life, other traditions.

So, Trust supporters are not only giving a chance to learn a language, they are building a human being.

Thank you very much, from the bottom of my heart."

Captain's charity

THE coronavirus lockdown forced the closure of the prestigious Sudbury Golf Club, west of London, shortly after its captain, Graham Jones, had generously nominated MSMT as the captain's charity in 2020, the club's centenary year.

Graham and his brother, Peter, are the sons of Corporal Albert Jones, who escaped from PG 53 Sforzacosta in Le Marche after the Armistice in September 1943 and was given sanctuary by the Marzialetti family for several months before being repatriated in Naples in July 1944.

With the help of Albert's diary written in a school exercise book, Peter researched the story. In 2011, assisted by Antonio Millozzi, the Trust's representative in Italy, he and Graham tracked down the Marzialettis, who had great affection for the memory of "Alberto". The families have remained in contact ever since.



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MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUST ARCHIVES

Welcome to the Monte San Martino Trust Archives. The Trust's Archives include the personal stories of Allied soldiers transferred to Italy as prisoners during the Second World War after being captured mainly in North Africa. Many of those soldiers managed to escape. The Monte San Martino Trust was created to commemorate them and the Italian families who helped them.

Search for prisoners of war, camps, Italian helpers etc...

Search



A rich resource online

WORK has continued apace on digitising the MSMT archive of escaper stories and other documents, and tremendous progress has been achieved. When we embarked on this task in 2016, none of us appreciated the technical and editorial challenges involved. Gradually, we realised that a successful conclusion was far off. I am extremely grateful to our archivist Nicola Waddington and website designer George Mitchell, my colleagues on the project team, and to the many editors. These have mainly been Trust supporters but include people who had no previous connection with the Trust.

Last autumn, as we had uploaded 75 per cent of the edited documents, we launched the archive live online, promoting it with organic and paid social media adverts. More than 1,100 unique users have now viewed the online content. Indeed, some of the individual stories have attracted over 100 people.

Each of these amazing escape tales is presented on its own webpage. This includes a short introduction, a window containing a pdf scan of the original document, followed by a second window comprising a transcription of the pdf. This transcription allows for Google to index and search for the names and places in the document; for it to be translated via Google translate; and for the story to be viewed by people who use disability adaptive software, perhaps to enlarge the text or to hear it as the spoken word.

At the end of April 2020, there were 5,500 pages of documents on view. These pages contain 133 stories – out of a total of 177 held in the physical archive. Another 10 or so have been edited but require further work around confidentiality and copyright. This leaves only about 27 memoirs on which we need to start work.

The online archive can be viewed at <https://archives.msmtrust.org.uk/> or through our main website, www.msmtrust.org.uk. As an interesting introduction, I recommend looking at <https://archives.msmtrust.org.uk/pow-index-2/coe-frank/>. Frank Coe's account is a detailed and evocative story from the end of September 1943 (when he was imprisoned in PG 78 Sulmona) up to November of that year. It is based on diary entries and focuses exclusively on the three months between his escape from a German train transport taking the PoWs away from Sulmona, to when he rejoined the Allied forces. Not only does the diary record in detail the countryside and villages through which he and his comrades passed, and their adventures, illnesses and hunger, but also the daily lives of the peasant families they met and the courageous assistance provided by them.

Reaction from users of the online archive shows that accessibility to this treasure trove of memoirs is extremely valuable. We expect it to play an important part in further research into the Allied presence in wartime Italy, by professional historians as well as private individuals.

Progress has also been made in finding a permanent home for the physical archive, which had been housed in the apartment of the late Keith Killby, the Trust's founder. We hope that it will be kept in a library with a professionally run archive and to which the public has access. Within the next year, therefore, it is likely that the entire MSMT archive of stories will finally be available both digitally and in hard copy. And, as further documents and pieces of research come to light, the online resources will continue to expand.

Christine English

The day I met Iside Fontana

Paola Bondani, who conducts walks in the footsteps of escaping prisoners of war in the Parma area, describes her encounter with a lady whose life was changed by the events of 1943

IT IS rare to meet people who can remember events of more than 70 years ago and are willing and able to talk about them. But word of mouth is the best introduction to stories still hidden in our territory.

It was thanks to a friend aware of my passion for researching escapes from prisoner of war camps in 1943 that I met Iside Fontana on a cold winter's day.

Iside is a lady in her nineties, with dark eyes that suggest she has had an interesting and busy life. She lives on a hill above Fidenza with a beautiful view over the Po valley in the hamlet of Gabbiano, where her half-English son runs a pottery studio. The fact that she has an English son immediately leads us to a PoW story!



Iside and her father, Nino, photographed in 1949

She was at first a little suspicious and could not fully understand why I had come to see her. But when I explained that I led walks to tell people about the escapers and, above all, about what the *contadini* had done for men on the run, she started to talk.

In 1943, Iside was 14 years old. She remembers clearly how her secluded village of Gabbiano, near Noceto, often hosted partisans or soldiers who had deserted from the Italian Army. One thing she will certainly never forget is an exchange of fire between partisans and Germans located on the opposite hill: she was spotted due to her red coat, a vivid colour in the snow, and a bullet grazed her.

She took off her coat and crawled home. But the following day, when her sister recovered the garment, it was found to be pierced by bullet holes. Mercifully, snow fell that night covering the footsteps leading to a cave below Monte Desio where inhabitants and fugitives hid for three days.

One day Germans carried out a round-up at Gabbiano but didn't manage to find anything and lives were saved. A few days later, however, seven partisans were killed in the nearby village of Varano Marchesi.

Iside's life began to take a different turn the day she spotted men climbing their hill who were obviously not local. She realised they were British soldiers looking for food and shelter. Four of these made a great impression on her: she knew them as Pop, Major James, Lt. John and Captain Peter Barshall.

Iside was the youngest of Nino Fontana's children and the most eager to read and study, and understand what was going on in the world. She had studied sociology but after the war badly wished to travel abroad and learn English. She was curious

to see the soldiers whom her family had sheltered. After writing to Peter Barshall she was invited by him to go to England and study at a nuns' college in Kent. One day, somebody rang the doorbell and it was this person, named Robert Cross, who was to become her husband! She and Robert lived in Kent for 42 years.

After Robert's death she returned to Gabbiano, where her only child, also named Robert, had opened a pottery workshop, taking inspiration from the surrounding nature.



Iside Fontana, pictured at her house in Gabbiano in 2019. A full account of her story is in *Bugle Call to Freedom*, which is soon to be published by MSMT (see page 9)

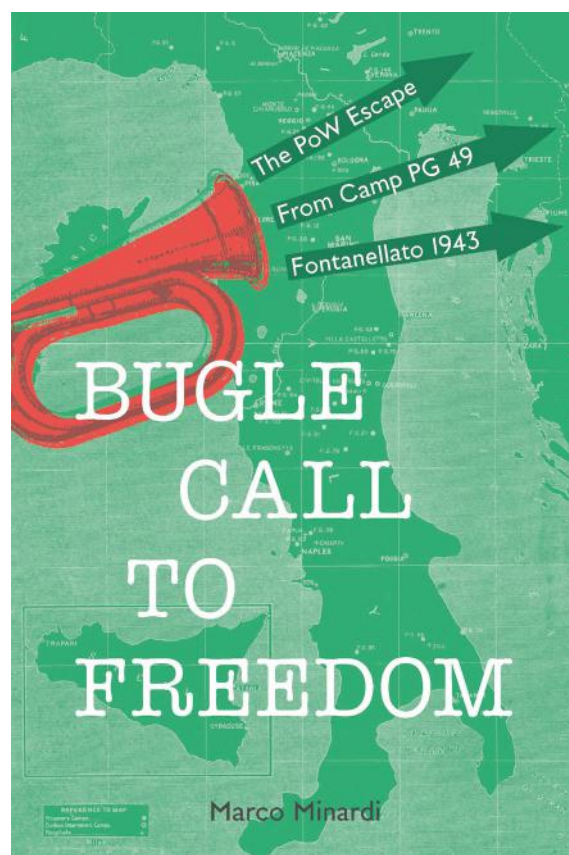
PG 49 story translated

SEVERAL of the PoWs who escaped in 1943 from Camp PG 49 Fontanellato later wrote about the experience but, until now, no publication in English has satisfactorily covered it from the perspective of the Italian people.

Bugle Call to Freedom, which will be published by MSMT later this year, makes good this omission. It is a translation of *L'Orizzonte del Campo*, by Prof. Marco Minardi, a leading Italian researcher into the Allied presence in Italy during the Second World War. Prof. Minardi, who is attached to the Parma historical institute, first published *L'Orizzonte* in 1995 and revised it in 2015. The translation is based on the latter edition. The book's early chapters describe life at the camp and the mass escape through the eyes of the prisoners; Prof. Minardi then explores the efforts of the local anti-Fascist resistance and the impact of the events on the local population. There are a number of extra illustrations in the English edition, including contemporary drawings of the camp made by an inmate, Lt. Mike Goldingham. The Goldingham family have kindly agreed to their inclusion.

Bugle Call to Freedom is the work of four MSMT volunteers: the translation is by John Simkins, the administrator of MSMT and son of a Fontanellato prisoner, with the assistance of Rossella Ruggeri; Christopher Woodhead, grandson of Lt. Col. de Burgh, the camp's Senior British Officer, has designed the book and handled production; and Julia MacKenzie has worked on editorial matters and checked the text against original English sources, particularly those in the National Archives at Kew.

Publication details will be provided at a later date. All proceeds go to the Trust.



News from ELMS

By Rog Stanton

IT has been a difficult year for the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society, and no doubt many other charities, so far. Regrettably, for the first time, after 32 years, our annual four-day reunion in York and Malton was cancelled, defeated by Coronavirus. Italian students obviously had to withdraw, together with the French and Belgians. Our annual

Tenna Trail in Le Marche and the Sulmona Trail events were also casualties of the virus, together with the high and low Pyrenees routes. Normally ELMS members attend commemorative events during every month from April through to December, but health and safety and logistics have to be foremost in our considerations this year. The ELMS Christmas lunch in December, in London, may be the only possibility this year.

Currently we are working on a project with MSMT to erect a memorial to the people of Italy who assisted Allied escapers and evaders in the Second World War. It is planned to install a large rock boulder of Yorkshire Limestone (from England), bearing a dedication etched onto an Italian marble plaque (from Italy) – symbolising the close relationship between the escapers and the Italian people – at Eden Camp modern history museum, near Malton.

During the war Eden Camp housed Italian prisoners of war, and today there are Italians living in the area who are descendants of PoWs. The prisoners used to work on local farms. Then, in September 1943, at the time of the Armistice with Italy, many chose to remain in North Yorkshire and later married local women.

The rock for the memorial, together with the marble for the plaque and the stone mason to engrave it, have been identified. In March, my wife Jackie and I visited the aptly named Coldstones Quarry, high in the Yorkshire Dales, to discuss with the quarry manager of Hanson, the operator, the possibility of sponsoring a suitable rock. On learning more about the project and the history of the escape lines, the manager kindly agreed that the quarry would donate one.

We were taken on a winding tour down into the massive working quarry in a 4x4, in biting wind and snow, then braved the deep, slippery mud and slush to choose the rock (Jackie really enjoyed her day out!). The rock was then moved to a holding area to await the 60-mile journey to Eden Camp. Once the rock is in place the inscription for the marble slab will be confirmed and things will be able to move quickly. It is envisaged that there will be hardwood dedicated benches either side of the memorial and an area for flowers and wreaths.

We have been in touch with our friends and members in Italy and have also heard from some of the escapers' helper families. Our thoughts are with them.

OBITUARIES



Giovanna Antonia Ross, 1925–2019

Giovanna, who died on 8 November 2019, aged 94, was the Italian wife of the late Major Michael Ross, Welch Regiment (Capua, Padula and Fontanellato). She passed away peacefully in Bordighera, Italy, where she and Michael had spent many happy years in retirement. They met when Giovanna's father, Beppe Porcheddu, who was a well-known Italian artist and fervent anti-Fascist, risked his life and that of his family in hiding Michael and another British officer, George Bell, during the war. They had escaped from Fontanellato and were dependent on Italians and partisans to shelter them as they made their journey back to Allied-held Europe.

Michael recorded his time with the Porcheddu family and falling in love with Giovanna in his memoir, *From Liguria with Love*, which was first published in 1997. It has recently been republished by Pen & Sword under the title of *The British Partisan*, with new material and an extensive postscript by his son, David.

Michael and Giovanna were married in the family villa near Bordighera in October 1946 at a double wedding with her twin sister, who was also marrying a British officer. This was the same house where the family had hidden Michael. After the war Michael remained in the British Army and Giovanna became an Army wife, following him on his overseas postings and later when Michael transferred to the Diplomatic Service. Giovanna's natural charm, fluent command of four languages and approachability meant that she enjoyed a busy social life and made her a great asset during Michael's careers; she was also knowledgeable about the arts (she was an accomplished pianist). Giovanna was able to recall her family's dangerous opposition to Fascism during the rise of Mussolini, family exile in France in the 1930s, the war years and her father's work with the partisans, which led to his temporary imprisonment by the Fascists. More difficult to talk about was the mysterious disappearance of Beppe in Rome in December 1947, never to be seen again. This dark shadow was to have a dramatic effect on the family and is the subject of a biography being written by David.

Giovanna was at her happiest when surrounded by her family. She derived particular pleasure from the company of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who all immediately took to her as a result of her natural warmth, kindness and fondness for children.

Michael and Giovanna were early supporters of the post-war reunions of fellow prisoners of war in London, from which emerged the Monte San Martino Trust. They much enjoyed attending the annual lunches, renewing friendships and supporting the Trust, which they believed was very important. Giovanna is survived by David, Stephen and Alessandra, nine grandchildren and four great grandchildren.



Manny Bragazzi, 1937–2019

Ermanno (known affectionately by family and friends as "Manny"), was born in the north Tuscan village of Villa di Panicale, Lunigiana. The third child of six, he remembered how German troops regularly patrolled the area; they were garrisoned nearby. He used to tell stories of himself, his brothers, sisters and friends hiding from the troops and watching bombing raids on the nearby port of La Spezia.

He left home at the age of 17 and travelled to Switzerland where he trained as a tailor. He lived there for eight years and in the early 1960s migrated to England to work and to learn English. He met Gillian, whom he married in 1967, in the Lake District. They had two children, Kate and Ivan.

Manny diversified into the hospitality business. He part-owned and ran two successful restaurants in London's West End. His first, La Cucina in Rupert Street, was followed by L'Appuntamento in Haymarket. During that period Manny felt privileged to be asked to host the annual Monte San Martino Trust lunch for former Allied prisoners of war at Fontanellato. Manny used to return to Tuscany for three or four weeks a year. This extended to several

months after he retired. Gillian and he devoted much of their time to restoring their 400-year-old home and welcoming their children and partners, grandchildren and friends. Manny loved his life in England but was happiest in Italy and became a greatly liked member of the community. He was always delighted to help newcomers navigate their way through the complicated Italian planning system.

As an addendum, mention should be made of Manny's work to have a commemorative plaque erected in the village dedicated to Ivan Torri, his cousin. Ivan, a partisan, was executed by German troops in 1945. He was posthumously awarded the *medaglia d'argento al valor militare*. His death is commemorated each year by the villagers.

Vanni Treves, 1940–2019

Vanni Treves had, in his own words, a start to life that was “not terribly auspicious”. But he overcame that to become a highly successful lawyer, businessman and chairman of several public bodies. He found the time, too, to serve as a trustee of the Monte San Martino Trust, notably as chairman of its fund-raising committee between 2012 and 2016. Drawing on his extensive contact list and using his formidable powers of charm and persuasion, he was instrumental in raising £1m, thus securing the long-term future of MSMT's programme of study bursaries for young Italians.



Vanni forged important ties for MSMT with the Italian embassy in London and his contribution to Anglo-Italian relations was recognised by the Republic of Italy conferring on him the honour of Cavaliere Ufficiale.

Vanni's passionate support of MSMT and its mission to give something back to the Italian people who had bravely sheltered escaping Allied prisoners during the Second World War did in fact owe much to his start in life. His father was an Italian Jew who, despite being a patriot and completely assimilated into Italian life, fell foul of the racial laws introduced in Italy in 1943. Banned from the army in which he had served and forced to leave his university in Florence because he could not teach, he joined the partisans. Eventually he was killed in Florence while with the Eighth Army. Meanwhile, Vanni and his mother were on the run, moving from place to place.

In 1946, Vanni's mother met and married an English businessman and the family moved to London. Vanni won a scholarship to St Paul's School, London, and studied law at University College, Oxford. Upon graduating he joined the City law firm of Macfarlanes but delayed his entry for a year to take up a Fulbright scholarship, studying at the University of Illinois. Having settled in the UK, he relinquished his dual Italian-British nationality because he would have been required to serve in the Italian armed forces.

During his career at Macfarlanes, which ended in 2002 and where he became senior partner, Vanni became a specialist in corporate governance and a non-executive director on an array of quoted companies. Upon leaving Macfarlanes he became chairman of Korn Ferry, the organisational consulting firm.

In an interview in 2016 with *Martlet*, University College's magazine, he described his chairmanship of the stricken Equitable Life insurance company as his most challenging task. The firm, which had £30bn of assets and more than a million policyholders, was almost insolvent and the board had been removed. Upon his arrival in 2001 Vanni appointed a new board. “Many of those eight and a half years were terrifyingly difficult,” he told *Martlet*.

Other roles undertaken by Vanni included the chairmanship of Channel 4, London Business School and the National College for School Leadership. He was appointed CBE in 2012 for services to education.

Vanni cared deeply about giving opportunities to the less fortunate and his involvement in a number of charities gave him great pleasure. He raised money for the NSPCC and Sadler's Wells and was a trustee of two large grant-making charities, the 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust and the J. Paul Getty Charitable Trust.

Vanni and his wife Angela had two sons and a daughter. In a letter to Nick Young, MSMT's chairman, Angela wrote: “The connection with the Monte San Martino Trust gave Vanni the utmost pleasure. It ticked so many boxes and brought together so many strands of his life.”

Obituaries of Vanni Treves were published in the Daily Telegraph on 16 December and The Times on 2 January

New trustees

WE are delighted that Nermina Delic, Julia MacKenzie and Christopher Woodhead have agreed to join the board of Monte San Martino trustees. All three have contributed strongly as supporters and their respective areas of expertise will be of great value. As you will read below, Nermina was the first former MSMT student to become a meeter, and now breaks new ground as the first ex-student to be a trustee; Julia and Christopher have worked with John Simkins and Rossella Ruggeri over the past 18 months on an English edition of Marco Minardi's account of the PoWs' escape from PG 49 Fontanellato, shortly to be published by the Trust (see page 9).



Nermina Delic: I was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina just before the Balkan war. A combination of luck and my parents' bravery brought me to Comunanza, a village in Le Marche. I consider myself very fortunate to have grown up there. I met many kind people who then became friends and I regard them as my family.

When I was in high school I heard of the Trust and decided to apply for a bursary in 2007. I had wanted to improve my English and, because of my background, I felt very close to the Trust's mission. It was my first time abroad on my own, the experience changed me. It made me more confident and prepared me to leave Le Marche for Perugia, where I went to university.

I never thought I would come back to London but, in 2013, a professional opportunity there came my way. In 2016, I decided I would love to be involved with MSMT and I became a meeter of its students. Having someone to wait for you at the station and take you to the host family is such a great initiative. Now I myself am in a position to speak to the students and see how excited and happy they are. I'm currently a finance officer for Article 19, a charity that works for a world where all people everywhere can freely express themselves and engage in public life without fear of discrimination.

Julia MacKenzie: A fascination with the long walks down Italy undertaken by thousands of PoWs and the help they received from the *contadini* led me to the work of MSMT. Initially, I was seeking help to find a route that would reflect those taken by the PoWs for my own 250-mile trek from Tuscany to Rome in 2017, but I soon became a student meeter and joined the team transcribing memoirs for the archive. In 2018, I participated in the Tenna Valley trail and attended the Fontanellato commemorative weekend.

My career has been in publishing and I am currently senior editor at Thames & Hudson, specialising in history and art history books. I've worked with contemporary artists such as Grayson Perry and Antony Gormley as well as on projects with institutions such as the British Museum and the Imperial War Museum.



The combination of my interest in books and the stories of the PoWs in Italy led me to compile a bibliography of some 250 books on the subject, which can be found on the Trust's website. In the future, I hope to improve my Italian, first learnt at the British Institute in Florence some years ago, and to continue with walks in Italy, seeking routes that cover ground crossed by the PoWs.



Christopher Woodhead: I never met my grandfather, Lt. Col. H. G. de Burgh (Senior British Officer at PG 49 Fontanellato), who died before I was born. However, I grew up with copies of the book in which his escape story was published, *Great Escape Tales from "Blackwood"*, and recall being read his exploits by my mother.

Inspired by his climbing adventures, I realised a life-time ambition by leading a team of family and friends over Monte Rosa to Zurich on the 70th anniversary of his escape, in 2013. We kept to my grandfather's route as closely as possible.

The trip over the mountains followed a weekend in Fontanellato organised by MSMT and it was then that I understood the depth of feeling and history that the Trust engenders. And how important it is to keep the connections of both place and people through its work.

I have spent my life working in publishing including periods at Pan Macmillan and Harper Collins but most recently running a university press in Buckingham. I also run a literary festival which would have been in its fifth year but for the coronavirus lockdown.

A full list of trustees and officers is on page 2.