

MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUST

June 2022

The next five years

AS we all emerge from the extraordinary hiatus of the pandemic, we have spent some time looking at the priorities for the Trust over the next five years. Thanks particularly to the generosity of the late Keith Killby, our founder, and the successful fundraising appeal led by Vanni Treves, we are in a strong position financially, with more than £3 million invested for our future work.

Of course, we want to ensure that the work continues for as long as our successors in the Trust consider it appropriate. But, at the same time, we are all enthusiastic both to continue with existing initiatives and to extend the work where we have the capacity to do so. With this in mind, we are now looking at three priority areas of activity:

- Commissioning more research, particularly into the Italians who helped escaped prisoners of war, and about a wider range of PoWs (including those of other nationalities, and all ranks). Our projected digitisation of the records of the Allied Screening Commission, and our work with the Parri Institute in Italy and with Cambridge University will be at the heart of this project. You can read more about these initiatives in these pages;
- Improving and broadening our communications with individuals and organisations who may have an interest in our story but whom currently we do not reach. This will include an upgrade of our website and social media presence;
- Enhancing the Trust's presence in Italy, particularly with the appointment of an Italian Co-ordinator to boost our links with schools, local research institutes, former students and others.

We see this newsletter, the webinars which many of you have attended, the annual lunch, and our other regular communications as the key means of staying in touch with our members and escaper families. However, we are hampered by the fact that we do not have the email addresses of nearly half of the supporters who receive this newsletter in the post! Please, please could you therefore email info@msmtrust.org.uk if you think we might not have your own email address – that will certainly be the case if you only hear from us by post.

Now, this year I really would be grateful for some feedback from you. It's about costs.

In spite of us being volunteers, we spend more on bursaries, maintaining and building the archive, and so on, than we raise in year-on-year donations and legacies. Of course, this is simply not sustainable in the long run, so we are wondering how you, our supporters, would feel about being asked to pay a small annual subscription, or to make a regular modest donation, to help us cover some of our regular outgoings. Money is always a sensitive subject, and many of you have already given generously to support our work. So before making any decision, we would LOVE to hear your views. Please email us at info@msmtrust.org.uk or write to me at Lord's Waste, Caters Road, Bredfield, Suffolk, IP13 6BE.

Finally, as we look ahead to the 80th anniversary in 2023 of the Armistice and breakout of the prisoners, we hope to see as many of you as possible at this year's **annual lunch on Wednesday 16 November**. After many years of enjoyable meetings at the Royal Overseas League, we have chosen a new venue, the Royal Air Force Club in Piccadilly. This promises to be a splendid occasion, so please mark the date in your diaries!

Nick Young, Chairman



Jacopo Bondani, left, and Tommaso Bondani cook for Jacopo's hosts at the Manor House, Wheatley. The brothers were two of only four MSMT students who braved the pandemic and social restrictions to take up bursaries in 2022. This year 39 students are expected. See page 4

TREASURER'S REPORT

YEAR TO 31 DECEMBER 2021

THE 43 students we had been expecting in 2021 were unfortunately again unable to take up their bursaries. In fact, only four students managed to come over to the UK in the Covid window. So, once again with very few students, our expenditure on bursaries for the year was a modest £8,000 compared with a budget of £105,000. With income of £98,795 we had a healthy surplus of £53,126.

This is, of course, not our usual state of affairs and we expect when back to normal to have a shortfall of about £40,000 in 2022. We have £80,000 in the budget to cater for 39 students in 2022 and are expecting all of these to arrive.

I reported last year on the generous donation from Sudbury Golf Club, where we had been nominated as the Captain's Charity by our supporter, Graham Jones. I am delighted to say that because of Covid the club was unable to change beneficiary and we were again its adopted charity. This year it raised over £4,000 on our behalf. We have also received large donations from the Swire Trust and the Moynitrust.

Happily, the annual lunch, our chief means of keeping in touch with our supporters, was able to go ahead and it was marvellous to all get together again.

The Trust portfolio remains in good standing with net assets at £3,282,450 (2020, £2,873,940) at the year-end. This gives the Trust plenty of scope to realise our ambition to fund the various research and other commitments, even to the extent of drawing down on the total value of the fund while of course leaving sufficient funding for our core activity – the bursaries. The investment objective continues to be a balance between capital growth and income generation but, following meetings of the trustees, the emphasis has changed somewhat to that of using more of the capital to fund relevant projects. These are mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our portfolio with Rathbones has done well with total return of +17.3% outperforming Index by over 5% (Index 13.1%). We also outperformed the other benchmarks against which we measure our portfolio rate: the MSCI PIMFA grew at +10.1% and the ARC Charity Steady Growth Index +11.7% for 2021. The fund generated cash of £64,042 which when taken alongside the increase in portfolio value suggests a good balance of investments. We are also moving the fund into the Rathbones portfolio which will have a significant reduction in both Rathbones and third-party fees.

Christopher Woodhead

The Trust is extremely grateful for the hard work put in by two trustees who have decided to step down. Nick Gent and Miles Skinner reflect on their time on the board

Nick Gent: If my records are correct, I was a trustee for around 18 years, half of them as treasurer. It was thanks to a few column inches in the *Daily Telegraph*, in 2004, that I came across the charity. Fortunately, at the bottom of the article, were the name and correspondence address of the secretary, a certain Keith Killby, our esteemed founder, whom I contacted to enrol. There was then no escape route!

Within a few months of becoming a supporter I was invited to become a trustee and treasurer by Brian Lett, the then chairman. It was a time of change, including our incorporation, new banking arrangements and professional advisers. I really sensed us moving forward, even more so when we raised £1 million thanks to an appeal, energetically masterminded by the late Vanni Treves. I took great delight in witnessing such a huge expansion in our funds!

The cause is, and will always remain, very dear to my heart. My children Bella and Charlie have been captivated by the charity and want to participate in more trails.

It was not until after I became a trustee that I learnt about this little-known, yet tragic, period of history in war-ravaged Italy and of the extraordinary number of tales of sacrifice by the *contadini*. They have ever since made a deep impression on me.

It is reassuring that the Trust is in such capable and devoted hands and that these memories will be perpetuated.

Miles Skinner: I became a trustee in 2016 the year after I completed a challenge of running ten marathons in seven days on behalf of the Trust, raising over £18,000. I set out at Lucca, in Tuscany, and after 263 miles hobbled into St Peter's Square, with blood blisters the size of my toes!

I am the grandson of Stan Skinner, a former PoW at Sulmona, and my family have always been strong supporters of MSMT. My focus as a young trustee was to explore new ways to reach out to the "next generation" of supporters, taking advantage of social media. Engaging these channels is definitely the way forward if we wish to promote a strong sense of engagement. I am glad, for example, to see that our Facebook page is attracting great interest with its adverts boosting our online archive. The trustees' plan to develop a communications strategy to promote our projects is also very positive.

My wife and I have a new baby and, what with increasing work commitments, I have had to take a step back. But I remain an avid supporter and am very happy to be called upon to help.

A list of trustees can be found on page 12

Families reunited

A chance encounter at a MSMT lunch led to a joyous meeting between the daughter of an escaped PoW and the great-grandson of the family who hid him. **Federico Cosimati, Angela Aries and Chris Howgrave-Graham** tell how this came about

Federico: In September 2021, I was studying in Oxford on a MSMT bursary but my journey had deeper roots. It began when Lt. Col. John “Solly” Joel, who had escaped from PG21 Chieti, was hosted by my great-grandparents, Augusto and Mariarosa, and my grandfather, Fernando, at our family home in Cese, in Abruzzo, from October 1943 to March 1944.

Chris: At the lunch in 2019, I picked up Angela’s book, *Solly’s War*, and saw that Solly was sheltered in Cese, a few miles from where my wife Rossana and I have bought back the house she was born in at Tagliacozzo. The story resonated with me because both sets of Rossana’s grandparents, like many other people in Abruzzo, had hidden Allied soldiers at great risk to themselves while the area was under German occupation. Angela was standing next to me and after introducing ourselves I offered to find out whether the Cosimati family was still in Cese.



Rossana Howgrave-Graham, left, with Federico Cosimati and Angela Aries. Also pictured are Angela’s daughter and son and two grandchildren

Angela: My own enquiries had come to nothing so I was very pleased when Chris made the offer. When I was young, my father used to speak warmly of his time in Cese, peppering his conversation with anecdotes and the odd word or phrase in Italian. Solly felt a deep sense of gratitude to the Cosimati family and wondered what he could do to express this. He spotted a newspaper article about MSMT. He immediately expressed interest, contacted Keith Killby and lent his support. Since he died I have come to the lunches regularly.

Chris: Back in Italy we went to Cese to see what we could find out. At the village bar within minutes we were introduced to Osvaldo Cipollone, who together with his son Roberto had just finished a book on Cese and the surrounding area of Marsica during the German occupation. He told us about the Cosimati family and, yes, Vincenzina, Augusto’s elder daughter, still lived there as did other members of the family. This led to a happy meeting with Vincenzina. We also went to the house where Solly and other soldiers were hidden and where we were warmly met by Carmine, the grandmother of Federico.

Angela: Imagine what a pleasure it was to receive news that Rossana and Chris had met the one person who remembered my father well – Vincenzina. With my son and daughter, I made plans to visit Italy in 2020 but was thwarted by the pandemic. However, good news came last summer when Chris let me know that a member of the family had accepted the offer of a bursary.

Federico: At Oxford I immersed myself in a completely different reality from the Italian one. Oxford is small but full of stories, culture, people. I was welcomed by the Hess family (and their two fantastic dogs Byron and Togy) in a beautiful medieval-style house. The Centre of English Studies in Wheatley was minutes from home and I was able to meet students from many parts of the world. Thanks to the excellent lessons I improved both speaking and listening. I had a lot of free time, which allowed me to go to London where I had the honour and pleasure of meeting Angela and her relatives, as well as Chris and Rossana. It was a particularly touching moment. The present had crossed paths with the past. Our families, almost magically, were rejoined after seventy-eight years.

Angela: The meeting with Federico was very emotional. Sadly, Vincenzina has passed away but we are all eagerly looking forward to our next meeting with the family in Abruzzo, as soon as it becomes possible – or as Augusto would have said, “Dio volente”.

Federico: The trip was particularly precious for me. My grandfather’s stories came to mind and I thought he would be proud of these two families. Our roots cannot be ignored, they must be valued. This journey, beyond English, taught me just that.

Camps website

GOOD progress is being made on the first comprehensive study of Italy's prisoner of war camps, in the form of a new Italian/English website entitled "Italy and the Allies 1943–1945". To be presented in September, this is the fruit of a collaboration between MSMT and the Milan-based Parri network of Italian historical institutes and reflects the Trust's determination to stimulate research in the field.

Although the site's scope allows for the eventual analysis of all aspects of the Allies' presence in wartime Italy, the first phase focuses exclusively on describing the 61 camps and six hospitals used to intern Allied servicemen, who numbered 76,095 in September 1943 following the North African campaign. The Trust is contributing 25,000 euros to this phase as co-finance and Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri is building the site and collating the content.

At a recent meeting of the project board the Trust's representatives – Nermina Delic, Rossella Ruggeri and John Simkins – were given an insight into how Parri intends to structure the site and make it navigable (see image). There will be a different format for the camps depending on their size and the information available. In addition to interactive maps and photos, there will be a double level of navigation, with the camps accessible both through a list and through a search function using dates, places and numbers. Personal stories of some PoWs will also be included. Although information on the *contadini* who assisted escaped prisoners could be included at a later stage, the purpose of this phase is to give a comprehensive picture of the camps before the Armistice in September 1943 and the prisoner escapes.

The project is being overseen by Sara Zanisi, Parri's general manager. The researchers – Marco Minardi, Costantino Di Sante, Isabella Insolubile and Eugenia Corbino – are among Italy's leading experts on the history of the anti-fascist Resistance movement. Igor Pizzirusso, a digital historian, is designing the site, which will be in both Italian and English. Nicola Cacciatore is translating the Italian text into English, assisted by John Simkins.

Igor underlined at the meeting that a digital history project does not end when it goes online, it begins. It is a continuous project. The portal will give access to other sources of information, such as national archives and the Trust's digital archive of PoW memoirs, and will be of immense value to both family researchers and professional historians.

OUR STUDENTS

IT is with great pleasure that we have been able to offer 39 language study bursaries to young Italians in 2022, the highest number ever awarded, write *John Simkins and Letitia Blake*.

This is in marked contrast to last year when we welcomed only four students to England. We called them "the intrepids" as they had to risk travel during the Covid-19 pandemic and negotiate their way around social restrictions. It was an equally challenging time for our new student co-ordinator, David Kettle. We did at least break new ground by arranging a remote learning course for one student from Le Marche.

Twenty-two of this year's intake postponed their bursaries from either 2020 or 2021. The first arrival was in May while the majority were set to do their four-weeks' course in July and August, a convenient time for Italian university students. Several of the new applications came from the central and southern regions of Abruzzo and Molise, which have not always been well represented but where we now have solid links with teachers and residents who spread the word about the bursaries. Almost all the students coming from these regions recounted in their application forms how their families, living on the Front Line, had suffered from bombing and forced removal from their villages.

A dozen of this year's students come from Le Marche where the Trust has always been strong, given the links between Keith Killby, the Trust's founder, and Monte San Martino. The region of Emilia-Romagna is also well represented and there are two students coming from Lazio. This year's intake brings the total of students since the first arrival in 1990 to over 700.

Some changes have been made in the programme. The application form, which is now digital, has been overhauled but the main criteria remain that a student must be aged between 18 and 25, and will be favoured if coming from a family that helped an escaped prisoner. Instead of using a language school in central London we have switched to one in Wimbledon, sending students who opt for the London area to the Centre of English Studies (CES) there. The college is in the same chain as CES Oxford (at Wheatley) which we continue to use. We are confident that CES Wimbledon will also provide excellent tuition and house students in welcoming homes.

With regret we have abandoned the Greeting system, whereby a Trust volunteer met a student at an incoming airport and escorted her/him to the homestay. We could not arrange this for such a large number of students. Instead, they will be provided with travel instructions and, in case of difficulty on their day of arrival, will have the telephone number of a volunteer. A volunteer will also be in touch with the student during the course.

We see this as crucial in "bonding" the students to MSMT in the hope that they will be of value to us subsequently. We are grateful to those supporters who have volunteered for this and would love to hear at info@msmtrust.org.uk from anybody else keen to help.



Soldier, artist and partisan

David Ross has written a biography of his grandfather, Beppe Porcheddu, a celebrated Italian illustrator. Here he pulls together the many strands of Beppe's courageous life, which ended in his mysterious disappearance

My late father and mother, Major Michael and Giovanna Ross, were Trust supporters for many years. My father wrote a war memoir, *From Liguria with Love*. He described the help he and another British officer had from many Italians after their escape from Fontanellato. In particular, he wrote about Giuseppe (Beppe) Porcheddu and the risks he and his family took in sheltering them when they reached Liguria hoping to get to Gibraltar.

I reprinted the book in 2019 under the new title of *The British Partisan* adding information that was unavailable to my father. After the war he returned to Italy to marry Giovanna, one of Beppe's daughters. Although my father wrote much about Beppe's bravery in sheltering him, for understandable reasons, as will become clear, he was unwilling to tell the whole story of Beppe.

After my parents died I went through family papers which had remained undisturbed for years. They were to prove invaluable in shedding a light into the dark corners of Beppe's life and character. Although much had already been written in Italy on Beppe, who became one of Italy's foremost artists and illustrators, little was known about his anti-fascism and his support of the partisans. I thought my family should know more about their great-grandfather and so I started writing.

In 1917 and at the age of 19, Beppe volunteered to join the Italian Army and fight the Austrians and Germans in the Italian Alps. As a young officer in the 3rd Regiment of Alpini he was nearly killed by an Austrian grenade. After several operations he made a miraculous recovery but could only walk with the aid of a stick. Despite a degree in architecture Beppe was drawn to art. He soon achieved major acclaim and aged 27 he was knighted by the King for services to the arts. His father, Giovanni Porcheddu, had also been knighted for his contribution to construction in Italy, which included the rebuilding of the bell tower in St Mark's Square, Venice, that had collapsed in 1902.

Beppe married Margarita (Rita) in 1924 near his home city of Turin but later, with the rise of Mussolini, his anti-fascist views resulted in the family having to flee to France to avoid arrest. Beppe and his family returned to Italy in 1939 and to the Italian Riviera where Beppe was less well-known.

During the war he became a key figure in the clandestine partisan resistance. He helped in the arming and organisation of the local partisans and his villa became a key meeting place. At great risk to himself and his family, it was also there that Beppe sheltered my father and another British officer, George Bell. Beppe remained under suspicion, however, and he was arrested and interrogated by the fascists. A lack of evidence led to his release and, despite the dangers, he continued his partisan activities. When the war ended Beppe returned to his art.



"Acrobats" by Beppe Porcheddu, 1943, watercolour on maple
Pictures in Ross Family Collection



Beppe Porcheddu in 1922

I never knew my grandfather, but he and Rita visited my family in November 1947 shortly after I was born. My father and mother were then living in Austria where my father was working with the United Nations War Crimes Commission.

Shortly after visiting my parents, Beppe returned to Italy alone to prepare for an exhibition of his paintings in Rome. On 27 December 1947, while in Rome, he disappeared. His passport and walking stick, without which he could not walk far, were left in his room. Aged only 49, he was never to be seen again. This extraordinary and inexplicable tragedy was to cast a long shadow over the family.

Beppe had lived through the momentous times of the first half of the twentieth century, which were dominated by two world wars. These events undoubtedly shaped his character. His experiences were much in evidence in his art and I have included many coloured plates in the book. Beppe put his life in danger many times and perhaps eventually it took its toll.

Beppe Porcheddu, Soldier, Artist and Partisan is published by The Choir Press

MSMT LUNCH 2021

THE pent-up demand from MSMT members for a get-together, following the cancellation of the annual meeting in 2020, was evidenced by strong support for the lunch held on 10 November 2021.

Ninety supporters enjoyed this overdue celebration at the Royal Overseas League in London. Among them were 20 guests who were attending the annual lunch for the first time. But there were also many who form the core support of the Trust. In his welcome address, Nick Young, the chairman, mentioned several including three generations of one family – Pam Rogers, the widow of Major-General Norman Rogers, a PoW at PG49 Fontanellato, her daughter, Emma Adams, and her grand-daughter, Ruth Jones. (*See page 11 for an interview with Pam Rogers.*) The lunch was organised faultlessly, as ever, by Christine English and Letitia Blake.

After holding a moment of silence to remember those who have passed away, both in wartime and during the past two years, Nick Young hastened to reassure supporters that the “camp entertainment committee”, as he termed the Trust’s key workers, had by no means been idle during the pandemic. Among the activities he mentioned were the three successful webinars, including one on the little-explored topic of the 8,000 Italian PoWs in Italy (*see page 9*).

Another huge success has been the digitisation of the Trust’s archive of PoW memoirs. Over the past five years the Trust’s archive of 190 stories has been uploaded. The focus is now on collecting memoirs of the Italians who hid PoWs on the run. “It is not just the derring-do of the escapers that gets recognised but the bravery of the Italians who helped them,” said Nick Young, who then referred to the 1.5 million pages of records collected by the Allied Screening Commission, which was responsible for identifying these helpers after the conflict.

“The Brits were going to burn this archive, which is held at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, DC, but the Americans stepped in to house it,” he said. “It is a living and breathing memorial and part of a growing Trust effort to research this extraordinary story.” (*For more information, see below.*)

Anne Copley, a trustee, then gave the keynote speech, reporting on PoWs who were not officers but came from Other Ranks (ORs). Her talk distilled the research for a book that she is writing on the subject and which will help to balance the picture of Allied PoWs. This has been skewed by the fact that the vast majority of PoW memoirs were written by officers.

The annual lunch in 2022 will be held at the Royal Air Force Club, Piccadilly, on Wednesday 16 November.

THE long-term project of digitising the Allied Screening Commission (ASC) archive of 1.5 million documents relating to assistance given by Italians (overwhelmingly the *contadini*), which is now held in the Washington archives (NARA), continues to progress, although slowly, given limitations imposed by the pandemic. Here is a reminder of what this archive contains:

A goldmine in Washington

Immediately after the Second World War, the British set up the ASC with a brief to investigate and reward these acts of heroism. For some two years files were produced containing an assortment of documents including reports from investigating officers; letters, photos and other documentation from the *contadini* (or someone writing on their behalf); and letters from the PoWs asking about progress for their specific Italian families.

The haul ranged from official reports and administrative correspondence through to personal accounts from both the PoWs and their Italian saviours. The British were planning to destroy all these documents, but by good luck the Americans decided to preserve them (possibly with an eye to the developing Cold War) and they were shipped off to Washington (NARA), where they have remained, hardly touched for the past 70-odd years. They were assumed lost until the 1980s when a British academic, Roger Absalom, discovered their whereabouts.

The archive contains some 80,000 claims by Italians for the help they provided, ranging from a few meals to many months of sheltering individuals within their own family. Some 60,000 of these received payment in compensation, though far too little given the risks that they had run. Many of the others made clear that they did not want payment, only news of what had happened to “their boys”.

Currently these files can be searched only by the name of the Italian who made the claim. Thus non-Italian descendants of escapers are unable to access this valuable resource unless they have an Italian name to pin it on. Digitisation will increase access both by widening the search parameters and by making all the documentation immediately available to any enquirer.

The trustees have signed off this project in principle, and Nick Young is writing to NARA to confirm we are moving forward. I have spent some time familiarising myself with the process of digitisation so that proper discussions can start with commercial digitisation companies in the U.S.A. who will undertake this work. That will involve a visit to Washington, which it is hoped will take place towards the end of this year.

Meanwhile, if anyone wished to get a flavour of the documentation in the archive, they might like to look at a book by Janet Kinrade Dethick, in which she has translated many copies of ASC claims housed in an archive held in Turin. A report by Janet can be found in the Research section of the Trust’s website and her book, *As if he were my brother*, is available on Amazon.

The retiring Senior Archivist at NARA, Greg Bradsher, is currently writing a history of the ASC and the Trust is hoping to help play a part in bringing it to publication.

Anne Copley

They did not close their doors

Nick Young interviews historian **Pierluigi Felli**, pictured below. In the background are the ruins of La Rocca, a medieval castle at Corvaro, in Lazio



I FIRST met Pierluigi Felli in 2017, in the town of Corvaro, about 70 miles north-east of Rome. My father spent two months there in the winter of 1943–44, while he was on the run from Fontanellato prison camp. The de Michelis family took him in while he was recovering from pneumonia, hiding him, first in their basement, and then in a shepherd’s hut in the mountains.

Pierluigi is a local friend of the de Michelis family. Inspired partly by my father’s story, he is writing a book about Corvaro and three other hamlets near the town of Borgorose during the Second World War, with a particular focus on the many escaped prisoners who passed through, and the brave people who helped them on their way. His book is entitled *Non Chiusero le Porte (They Did Not Close Their Doors)*.

Nick: Pierluigi, it’s great to have a chance to talk to you again and thank you so much for giving up your time. First, can you tell us about your life interest in this subject.

Pierluigi: For some time, I have been researching the period in which the municipality of Borgorose, where I live, was occupied by the Germans (September 1943–June 1944). I inherited this interest in history generally from my mother who was a literature teacher. It is so important for all of us to remember the courage of people who risked their lives to save others.

Nick: Tell us about the area.

Pierluigi: Borgorose is in the province of Rieti, in the central Apennines, on the border between Lazio and Abruzzo. There are 17 hamlets in the area, which is rich in both natural beauty and historical interest. Today it has about 5,000 inhabitants. From October 1943, Borgorose, which at that time was largely arable, was occupied by the Germans. It was just north of the main German defences, the Gustav Line, and about 70 miles north of Cassino, in an area designated by the Germans as “remaining occupied land”, to distinguish it from “areas of active operations”.

Nick: How many PoWs passed through the area, and how many families would have been involved in looking after them?

Pierluigi: About 100 PoWs were assisted in Corvaro, according to the partisan commander Giovanni de Acutis. About a dozen more took refuge in Sant’ Anatolia, two in Santo Stefano, and two in Cartore, all hamlets within the municipality. On the basis of five Alexander Certificates, and various personal testimonies, 22 local families who helped them have been identified. Don Filippo Ortenzi, Corvaro’s parish priest, played an important role in assisting the PoWs, as did the Elfers (the Jewish fugitives who helped

your father, Nick). In 1994, the Jewish community of Rome gave a certificate of gratitude to two families in Corvaro who also saved Jewish fugitives from Nazi-Fascist atrocities.

Nick: With so many German soldiers around, including a garrison in Corvaro, this was incredibly dangerous work?

Pierluigi: Absolutely, yes. An ordinance by Field Marshal Kesselring provided for the shooting of anyone who helped or hid PoWs. The Germans killed two unarmed civilians in the area (torturing one of them), took five hostages, set fire to houses and cottages in round-up operations, and commandeered livestock, food and housing. In Corvaro, in January 1944, following the capture of a PoW, the German garrison commander announced that there would be reprisals against the five hostages if people continued to help and hide PoWs.

Nick: Why did Italian families take these risks, do you think?

Pierluigi: The people who helped the PoWs knew they were risking their lives, but still they didn't close their doors. These were gestures of great humanity, of civil resistance, and of opposition to the war. Don Ortenzi, arrested on a charge of having invited some prisoners to his rectory to listen to the BBC, only avoided being sentenced to death by the German military court because, as he wrote in his diary, they could find no evidence, even though he had in his wallet a list of the prisoners, with a map showing where they were being hidden.

Nick: Presumably informers were a danger too?

Pierluigi: The presence of local informers cannot be discounted. It is hard to explain the raid looking for Jews in Corvaro in November 1943, or the round-up of PoWs in Sant' Anatolia in December that year, or another Corvaro raid in January 1944 (just after your father left), in any other way. Similarly, it was suspicious that a non-commissioned fascist officer and a German colleague were found snooping about in Corvaro asking about PoWs in early 1944. The fascist officer was caught and murdered by some Yugoslavian fugitives, and this led to Don Ortenzi and four other people being taken hostage.

Nick: Are these stories well known locally, or have they been largely forgotten?

Pierluigi: Of course, the families of the helpers knew these stories, and word has spread to some extent in the wider community. In 2016, there was a Day of Remembrance event in Corvaro, organised by a local cultural association; and there was another in 2019 organised by the middle school in Borgorose. Now we hope that the school can find candidates for the Monte San Martino scholarships, and that this will help to arouse even more interest in these stories that bring honour to our area.

New MSMT book

THE Trust has published a translation into English of first-hand accounts by Italian *contadini* who hid Allied servicemen who had escaped from PoW camps in the central eastern region of Le Marche.

The English title is *A People's Courage, Civil resistance in German-occupied Italy*. It is available from Amazon to download on Kindle, price £8. The original Italian book, entitled *Antigone nella Valle del Tenna*, is by historian Filippo Ieranò, who kindly gave permission for the translation.

Publication of the book is in line with MSMT's determination to focus as much on the brave families who assisted escapers as on the prisoners themselves. In the book, first published in Italy in 2002 and reissued in 2017, Filippo Ieranò first describes the historical background to the Armistice in September 1943 and discusses various aspects of the PoWs' relationship with their saviours.

He then presents graphic testimonies recorded by members of the helper families in the Tenna Valley, all of whom were young children in 1943. The witness statements are chilling descriptions of the danger that the families risked, with Germans and Fascists constantly searching for escapers from PoW camps at Servigliano, Sforzacosta and Monte Urano.

The author maintains that the civil disobedience of the *contadini* in refusing to hand over the prisoners was just as valid a form of resistance as that shown by armed partisans. That is why, for the Italian title, he referenced Antigone. In Sophocles's play, Antigone defies Creon, the Theban ruler, and in doing so breaks an unjust law.

The book has been translated by three trustees, Anne Copley, Christine English and Letitia Blake, and by John Simkins, the Trust's administrator. It is the second book under the MSMT imprint, following the publication in 2020 of *Bugle Call to Freedom*, a translation of *L'Orizzonte del Campo*, by Marco Minardi, the story of the mass escape from Fontanellato. Translated by John Simkins, this is available as a paperback through bookshops and Amazon.

Also available on Amazon, but only in Italian, is a new book that focuses on 13 women in Le Marche who were caught up in the tumultuous events that shook Italy between 1920 and 1970. Entitled *Donne della Resilienza* (Women of resilience) it is written by Francesco Bertazzi, with a contribution from MSMT supporter Giuseppe Millozzi, who is an expert on the story of anti-fascism in Le Marche. The book brings into the limelight women who acted bravely within their households or on the farms when PoWs on the run sought sanctuary.



Filippo Ieranò with books he has written

The unremembered PoWs

AN unexpected but beneficial consequence of the pandemic has been that the Trust, in its efforts to keep in touch with supporters, has produced a series of webinars. The third of these, which can all be watched on our YouTube channel, took place in October 2021 and tackled the subject of Indian PoWs in Italy.

The event grouped three guest speakers from three different time zones (U.S.A, Italy and India) and was attended by people from 10 different countries.

The circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of 8,000 Indian soldiers, all of whom had been captured fighting for the Allies in North Africa, have only recently begun to be researched.

The first presentation was by an Italian historian, Costantino Di Sante, who has investigated Italian archives and unearthed fascinating photographs. He described the conditions under which the Indians were held and discussed whether there were differences between their treatment and that of other Allied prisoners. He explained that the Italians, under the impression that some Indians would be hostile to British interests in India, were keen to make use of them for propaganda.



Indian PoWs interned at a barracks in Tripoli in 1943 before their transfer to Italy

Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma, fondo Fototeca

Dr Annu Matthew, our next speaker, was born in the UK and raised in India and is an artist and professor of art at the University of Rhode Island. She outlined her interest in the 2.5 million Indian soldiers who fought for the British in the Second World War and who are largely forgotten in history. She played a clip from her video work “The Unremembered”, which uses historical film footage projected onto the gravestones in the cemeteries in Italy where the Indian casualties of that campaign are buried. This has led her to researching the stories of Indian PoWs in Italy and to her artwork using archival photographs of those soldiers.

The third contributor, Samar Salvi, tackled the subject from the more personal perspective of the story of his grandfather. Lt Ramchandra Salvi, who had been captured at Tobruk, subsequently escaped from PG91 Avezzano and for months was sheltered by four courageous families in the village of Villa San Sebastiano in Abruzzo. Samar told of his excitement in locating the village in 2010 and finding members of those families and of his subsequent visits and continuing friendships.

OBITUARY: Eric Batteson, 1919–2022

There is a remarkable 12-minute video on YouTube, made in association with the Casa della Memoria at Servigliano, that recounts the wartime exploits of Trust supporter Eric Batteson, who died in January aged 102.

Eric had been captured in Libya and was eventually taken to PG53 Sforzacosta in Le Marche. There he found there was nothing to do, and that the accommodation was on layers of wooden beds. At the Armistice in September 1943, the Italian guards left, leaving the gates open. Eric went out at nightfall, not knowing where Sforzacosta was.

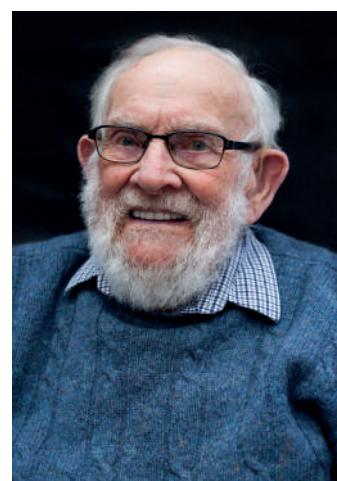
With three companions he headed for the mountains and found refuge at the village of Colleregnone, at first in a barn and then, when the snow came and the villagers could no longer bring them food, in the village itself.

Four families volunteered to hide the men; Eric stayed with the Buratti family and became a close friend. There was only one bedroom, and Eric slept in the attic. “He used to grate cheese and whistle,” one of the family recalled.

After five months he set off for the coast, hoping to take a boat and sail down to rejoin the Allies. But he was betrayed and recaptured at Porto San Giorgio, spending the rest of the war in tough conditions at a PoW camp in Hanover.

Eric returned to Colleregnone in 1948 and then again in 1995; thereafter he made constant visits to find his old friends.

Eric leaves four daughters, three of whom live in Chester. The family stays in close touch with the Burattis.



Dad's wartime puzzle

Jane Davis unearths the past

MY father, Lance Bombardier Bernard Burles, never spoke of his time abroad and his escapes in Italy remained a mystery to us. I did know that he signed up to the Essex Yeomanry in September 1939, married my mother the following month, and that he fought in Palestine until his capture in June 1941 in Cyrenaica while serving with 104 Regiment of the Royal Horse Artillery. He was then a PoW at Sulmona, in Abruzzo, until 1943. He escaped twice, the second time much more successfully than the first. He was an artist, loved buildings and was at one time destined to become a priest, but instead he met my mother and post-war became an architect.

I had always vowed to myself that I would, when retired, fill in the gaps. I also wanted to say "thank you" to the Italian people: somebody had sheltered him during his successful escape. In hindsight I was naïve, I had assumed he had stayed around Sulmona. So I booked two return flights to Rome, a hire car and accommodation in Sulmona, joined the Sulmona and Valle Peligna community group in November 2021, and waited.

In January this year, by then retired, I started to piece the puzzle together. I found a report in the National Archives that referred to a friend of Dad's who had been nominated for a medal. It mentioned "Casa Marce", but no one had heard of this place. While flicking through my father's copy of Iris Origo's book, *War in Val D'Orcia*, I found a postcard from Minnie Mazzocchi Alemanni to him in 1946. The postcard was of a house, just outside Todi on the way to Casemasce, in Umbria, where my father was hidden. He had eventually ended up there after jumping off a train that was taking him north from imprisonment in Sulmona to Germany.

In February, I realised that Mazzocchi Alemanni was the complete last name, not a middle and last name, and I searched Facebook. I found someone who I thought might be related. I contacted her, apologising, and asked if she knew the family. She was Minnie's great-granddaughter. From then on, the search sky-rocketed. I was put in contact with Minnie's grandson, Marco Mazzocchi Alemanni. He invited us to Rome to meet him and arranged for the house at Todi to be opened up for us.

Thanks to the Sulmona Facebook group I had contacted a local historian, Mario Salzano, who through the mayor's office had arranged for PG78 Fonte d'Amore at Sulmona to be opened. The puzzle was taking shape.

I flew with my daughter Emily to Rome, speaking very little Italian. We met Marco and his lovely wife Fiella over tea and told our stories and shared photographs, piecing everything together. He remembers accounts of the two English gentlemen who were housed by his grandparents. The following day we drove to Todi, found the house and met Margherita, a neighbour, who remembers Minnie well. She showed us the trap door leading to the basement where my father and his friend lived. They ate with the family when possible and worshipped in the family chapel. This was an emotional day.

We then headed to PG78 where we met Mario and some of the expats who support the Morrone Foundation which has been set up to preserve the camp. We toured it on a beautiful April morning, the juxtaposition of the weather and the place making it difficult to imagine what life would have been like. However, Patti Chandler, an MSMT supporter, filled in some of our missing knowledge: her father had also been interned at the camp and the two men attended the same Sulmona reunions.

In Iris Origo's book there is a mention of "two Englishmen" visiting her house, one of whom was my Dad. He eventually met up with the Allies at Todi in June 1944.

Although we filled in much of the puzzle, more questions arose, which unfortunately will remain unanswered. I am so grateful to the Mazzocchi Alemanni family and the many people who helped me on my journey of discovery.



Marco Mazzocchi Alemanni and Jane Davis

OUR ARCHIVES

Italians who assisted PoWs on the run after the Armistice in September 1943. The volume of material is inevitably less than for the PoW accounts, but to honour the courage of Italians remains an important part of the Trust's story. Any MSMT supporters who would be interested in assisting in this task are asked to contact info@msmtrust.org.uk.

Sterling efforts by the Trust's IT consultant, George Mitchell, have increased digital access to, and interest in, the main Trust website, as well as the specific archive website. Since starting to target WW2 affinity groups on Facebook there has been a considerable rise in engagement with the archive website. Facebook advertising of new uploads of PoW stories has received widespread recognition. For example, a recent upload of an account by Peter Jordan of his father's story received nearly 500 "likes". This is proof that the work involved has been worth the effort!

Research is to play an important part in MSMT's strategy, and one of its pillars will be the digitised MSMT archives. As for the original manuscripts, following a hiatus during the pandemic, discussions are underway again with Cambridge University: we are working on a contract enabling their transfer as a long-term donation to the university.

OVER the past five years, diligent volunteers led by Nicola Waddington, the MSMT archivist, have edited, transcribed and prepared almost 190 PoW stories for uploading to archives.msmtrust.org.uk, writes Christine English. Our emphasis is now on the collection of names and memoirs of

‘His belief in a simple life never left him’

Pam Rogers is one of the few Trust supporters who was married to a former PoW. Here she talks to **John Simkins** about her husband Norman’s illustrious career and about the impact on their family life of his experiences at Dunkirk, in Italy and at D-Day

John: How did you both meet?

Pam: In 1953, I was a junior doctor at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham where Norman was a Senior Registrar on a surgical unit. I applied to work on it and realised after being accepted that Norman had not been in agreement with this. He said I was female and not hoping to be a surgeon. Eighteen months later we were married and he was correct, I did not become a surgeon.

John: How soon were you aware he had been a PoW in Italy?

Pam: Six months after we married we went on holiday to Florence during which he talked about his experiences after escaping from Fontanellato and especially the memory of crossing the River Arno on a guarded bridge within sight of a tram terminus. Sadly, after walking ten miles we did not find the bridge. Throughout the journey he talked of the kindness of the Italians and how his survival had depended on this.

John: How did his wartime experience affect him?

Pam: In different ways. The retreat to Dunkirk made him aware of the burden of possessions. Families struggling along the roads, unwilling to leave their belongings behind, hindered progress and made them more vulnerable to air attack. This had a lasting effect on his philosophy of life.

Being a PoW had two effects: First, in the camp, he had enjoyed talking to others with different interests and was fascinated by their lectures. The Italian that he had learnt as a boy from the drivers of the Fiat buses in Alexandria, when he went to school, was improved by his daily talks with the visiting Italian camp doctor. This was extremely useful on his walking journey to freedom as the interpreter of the escaping pair, while A. A. Jones helped with directions.

Secondly, on the journey he was overwhelmed by the generosity of the Italian peasants who, despite having nothing, offered their hospitality, food and drink knowing the danger to themselves. Being a bachelor they offered their daughters if he would stay! Walking through the hostile countryside he was alert to all movement around him. This wariness lasted most of his life although it lessened. Six weeks with A. A. Jones in extraordinary circumstances created a permanent bond of friendship.

Normandy and D-Day gave him an intolerance to loud noise that lasted all his life and even included his children crying. In battle, he recognised the value of the cohesion a regimental “family” provides. The importance of the family remained with him. Physically, the shrapnel injury to his leg left him with a limp and persistent ache, worsened by the need to spend long hours at an operating table.

John: How did all this affect family life?

Pam: Norman did not want to talk about the war because the emotions belonged to his previous life. Only with time did that world blend with our life together and he reminisced freely. The kindness and generosity of the Italian peasants left a lasting impression. His belief in a simple life with few possessions never left him. He always thought I could make ravioli on the kitchen table! His experiences gave him a lot of character but there were “down” moments. He wondered if the death of his friends and colleagues had been worthwhile.

John: What did he think of treatment for PTSD?

Pam: He called it “nonsense, we were young and fighting for our country”. He was stiff upper lip and remained so.

John: Tell me about your own career.

Pam: As an army wife with three children there was little opportunity to work except at Catterick Camp, Yorkshire, where I helped out in a practice looking after army families. After Norman left the army, he became a civilian surgeon to BMH Iserlohn Germany. I became a civilian RMO there to 5th Squadron 26 Engineers. I witnessed the loneliness of the young wives while their husbands were away on exercise and realised how much the wives missed their mothers, especially when their children became ill. I learnt about the troops, their knees after long marches, and the hoped-for yellow “excused” slip.

On return to London, while Norman was Clinical Superintendent at Guy’s Hospital, I ran their Nurses Health Service and set up the Occupational Health department. I transferred to run a similar service at the Maudsley Hospital and Institute of Psychiatry in London and then the Littlemore Hospital in Oxford. My interests were “care for the carers” and the rehabilitation of addicted doctors.

Life has been fascinating.

Major-General Dr Norman Rogers: fact file

Born in 1916, educated in Alexandria, Egypt, and at Imperial Service College, Windsor

Graduated from medical school in 1939, commissioned into Royal Army Medical Corps

Evacuated from Dunkirk, mentioned in despatches

In 1941 attached as RMO to 4th Royal Tank Regiment. Captured at Gazala

Transferred to Italy, eventually to PG49 Fontanellato

After Armistice in September 1943 walked 600 miles south with Captain A. A. Jones, reaching American Lines at Venafro. Repatriated.

In June 1944 landed in Normandy on D-Day + 3 with 1st Battalion Black Watch. Twice mentioned in despatches. Wounded in leg and evacuated. Upon recovery rejoined battalion.

Returned to civilian life as a surgeon after the war, before rejoining RAMC in 1956. After retiring from the army worked as a consultant surgeon until 1986.

Died in 2011, aged 94

80th anniversary celebrations

THE Trust is planning a range of activities in 2023 to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Armistice with Italy, the event that triggered the

escape of some 50,000 Allied servicemen from Italian prisoner of war camps.

A key month will be September, as it was on the 8th of that month that the Armistice was announced. In both 2013 and 2018 Trust supporters were entertained in magnificent style by the town of Fontanellato, from where 600 prisoners escaped. Next year, however, the Trust plans for the celebrations to take place at Servigliano, in Le Marche.

Camp PG59 Servigliano has been declared a national monument by the Italian parliament, which has given impetus to the rebuilding of part of it. There is a museum in the former railway station, managed by the Casa della Memoria Association, which tells the story of the camp, one of the largest in Italy. It was from there that Keith Killby, the Trust's founder, escaped after the Armistice along with 2,000 other prisoners, either through a hole knocked in the wall or by passing through the gate.

The celebration in September will coincide with a Freedom Trail organised locally and supported by the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society and MSMT. The trail there usually takes place in May (as it has done this year) but for 2023 it will be from 6–11 September. The trail, run over four days, starts and ends each day in Servigliano and goes to picturesque hillside villages, including Monte San Martino itself, that played an enormous part in protecting Allied servicemen who had escaped from one of the three camps in the region, Servigliano, Sforzacosta and Monte Urano, which between them housed 22,000 PoWs. Ceremonies of remembrance take place in the villages. The celebrations will include talks and an exhibition and will be well supported by local schools and civic leaders.

We appreciate that some Trust supporters will be disappointed that we are not returning on this occasion to Fontanellato but the events at Servigliano will give members who do not know Le Marche an opportunity to get to know this beautiful region in central eastern Italy. To get a taste of its secrets, go to <https://www.turismo.marche.it/en-us/>

More information will follow. Meanwhile, we would be grateful if you could let us know at info@msmtrust.org.uk if you might be interested in attending the celebrations at Servigliano.

ANOTHER important element of next year's celebrations will be the dedication of a Memorial Rock commemorating the people of Italy who assisted Allied escapers and evaders.

Installation of the rock is a joint initiative by MSMT and the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS) and it meets the two charities' long-held objective of having a permanent reminder of the courage and generosity of the assisters. The ceremony will take place at Eden Camp Modern History Museum near Malton, North Yorkshire, during the annual ELMS reunion from 27–30 April.

The rock will be placed between the ELMS memorial and the guard tower. **Pictured right**, with Rog Stanton, director of ELMS, it is English limestone and was donated by Coldstones Quarry in the Yorkshire Dales. The dedication plaque will be Italian marble.

Eden Camp is a theme museum, presenting the sights, sounds and smells of the Home Front and the Front Line in the Second World War. It is sited on a former PoW camp. MSMT supporters who would like to attend this event will be given full details in due course.



Registered Charity
No. 1113897

MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUSTEES

Cavaliere Ufficiale Sir Nicholas Young (chairman);
Hon. Letitia Blake (secretary); Christopher Woodhead (treasurer);
Anne Bewicke-Copley; Omar Bucchioni; Justin de Meo;
Nermina Delic; Christine English; Ian Laing CBE;
Julia MacKenzie; Christopher Prentice CMG.

OFFICERS

John Simkins (administrator and newsletter/website editor)
Antonio Millozzi MBE (representative in Italy)
David Kettle (UK student co-ordinator)

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

www.msmtrust.org.uk; archives.msmtrust.org.uk
info@msmtrust.org.uk

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