

MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUST

June 2023

A time to remember



MSMT trustees unveil the new memorial at Eden Camp museum to the brave Italians who saved PoWs. On the left are Letitia Blake, Christopher Woodhead and Sir Nick Young. On the right are Rear-Admiral Angelo Viridis, of the Italian embassy, Signora Nicoletta Viridis, John Simkins and Anne Copley (see page 3)

EIGHTY years since the Italian Armistice, and those first tentative steps to freedom by thousands of prisoners of war in Italy! It hardly seems possible that, in the Monte San Martino Trust and, increasingly, in the eyes of the general public, we have been able to keep all those extraordinary stories of courage, adventure and determination alive and indeed fresh for all that time: both here and in Italy itself.

As this year's commemorative events are unfolding, let us take time to reflect upon and celebrate the achievements of our founder Keith Killby and the Trust he created as a means of saying thank you to the brave Italians who helped him and so many others:

- increasing numbers of students from Italy taking up our bursaries;
- our extraordinary archive of escape stories now digitised and accessible online;
- regular visits and walks in Italy (thanks to our friends in the Escape Lines Memorial Society);
- a new, evocative and permanent memorial to the helpers, at the Eden Camp WW2 Museum in North Yorkshire;
- several new books published, and more on the way;
- a dynamic partnership with the Parri Institute in Italy, as is explained on page 9;
- our flourishing website, Facebook presence, Zoominars, and newsletter;
- annual MSMT family lunches, attended by ever-increasing numbers.

And now, thanks to the persistence of trustee Anne Copley, we have an exciting partnership with the US National Archives and Research Administration (NARA), which will result over the next three or four years in the digitisation and indexing of virtually the entire archive of the Allied Screening Commission, so that it can be accessed online by families and researchers alike.

I had the pleasure recently of going to Washington with Anne (see her article on page 8) to tie up the final terms of our agreement with NARA. We watched as the first of the 924 boxes of files (tens of thousands of them in all) started on its journey through the process, and I think we both quietly teared up. It was quite a moment.

The first file was slim – just a bureaucratic form with an award of a few lire by way of compensation and a scrap of paper with some scrawled words in English and a signature. “Sig X gave me a hot meal and some tobacco. Boy did it taste good.” Just think of the stories behind those few words.

In September, as you will read on page 12, we head to PG59 Servigliano in Le Marche (itself now a national monument), where Keith Killby's own escape journey began 80 years ago almost to the day, as he scrambled through a hole in the wall of the camp to freedom. I'll be there – and so I know will the ghosts of all the escapers. I do hope you will come too.

Nick Young, MSMT Chairman

TREASURER'S REPORT

YEAR TO 31 DECEMBER 2022

AFTER the Covid-affected years we welcomed 34 students in 2022; it was good once again to be doing our core activity, which is to provide students with bursaries. We ended the year with a cash surplus of £5,213, mainly thanks to the generous donations which came in well above budget.

Donations and legacies were above budget; the last element of Keith Killby's legacy arrived and a large donation from the Swire Trust swelled our coffers.

The Trust portfolio was badly affected because of the situation in Ukraine and the knock-on effect that the invasion had on markets and prices. Due to the invasion and the uncertainty in the markets, our net assets at the end of the year stood at £2,899,957 (£3,282,450 in 2021), a 10% reduction in value. There was also a particularly bad dip during the short Truss premiership.

At the year-end, however, the portfolio value had improved and indeed returned to over £3m early in 2023. The move to include our funds in the Rathbones charity portfolio was completed in April and the commensurate reduction in charges was most welcome given the other challenges faced. The change means that our receipts from Rathbones are now quarterly rather than monthly but we had sufficient cash in our current account to ensure we could cover all our costs. Dividends from the fund brought in over £58,000.

Our portfolio with Rathbones has, for reasons mentioned above, not done well with total return of -9.5% under-performing the Charity Total Return Strategy Benchmark by 2.3% (benchmark -7.2%). We were also well down against our other target of CPI +3%, namely 14%.

We struggle on with the Bank of Ireland, with which we have had difficulties in managing our business, and as mentioned above managed to pay all our commitments from the current account. This stood at £104,362 at the end of December (£79,814 at 31 Dec 2021) and we therefore have enough cash in our current account to cover our running costs for 2023.

We are still in the process of moving our bank to CAF. There have been some significant delays on the way both from our side and from CAF Bank. But I am hopeful that the final piece of information is now with CAF and we should be able to proceed to opening the account in the next month or so.

Christopher Woodhead

Taking wing on social media

HAVING been student coordinator for almost three years it was a great honour to take over the role of administrator from John Simkins in September 2022. I am extremely thankful for the support and assistance offered by John during the past six months and will continue to draw on his knowledge of all things MSMT. He has now reverted to his former role as trustee.

2023 is already turning out to be a very busy year, with a record number of students visiting during the summer and important events taking place in York and Servigliano.

In summer 2022, the Trust engaged a digital communications company, Third Sector, to formulate a communications strategy and review the Trust's performance through our website and our social media platforms.

The review had various recommendations, including a facelift for our website. We expect a new design by George Mitchell, our IT consultant, to be in place by mid-summer, retaining all content already gathered but allowing easier navigation and a fresh look to attract new followers.

The review went into great detail about our social media presence. We currently have a Facebook page and YouTube channel but neither of these platforms is performing terribly well.

Over the past six months, I have endeavoured to raise awareness of the Trust through social media. This has been done by posts relating to special events, such as the annual lunch and the visit by Nick Young and Anne Copley to the National Archives in Washington, as well as through testimonials from our students.

We have already seen a 400% increase in engagement through Facebook, with many new followers. New video posts have been viewed over 1,000 times. I have also re-engaged our YouTube channel.

It was agreed that for the longevity of the Trust it is vital to reach a broader and younger audience, both in the UK and Italy. With this in mind I have made a strong recommendation that all students attending bursaries follow us on our social media platforms and share images and videos of their time here.

I also urge all supporters to "like and follow" our Facebook page and YouTube channel. You can find these by simply searching for Monte San Martino Trust on each medium.

We also plan to bring some of the PoWs' stories to life on our YouTube channel with actors recounting some of the moving accounts kept in our archives. As I have a connection in the entertainment world I have been able to call upon a few favours to ensure this is produced professionally and at little cost to the Trust.

I am also working with our Treasurer, Christopher Woodhead, to put in place a more accessible donation/subscription platform to support the continued work of the Trust.

Please watch out for further developments on our social media platforms and, should you have any questions, feel free to contact me on dkettle@msmtrust.org.uk.

David Kettle

A permanent reminder

THE Trust and its sister charity, the Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS), have fulfilled a long-held desire to establish a memorial to the brave Italians who rescued escaped PoWs. A stone, bearing a dedication plaque on Italian marble, was unveiled during a magnificent ceremony at Eden Camp museum in North Yorkshire at the end of April.

The museum, itself a former PoW camp that held Germans and Italians, has a rich collection of Second World War artefacts displayed in the prisoners' huts, and is the ideal place to honour the memory of the Italian helpers. Dedication of the memorial, which stands between an ELMS stone and the guard tower, took place as part of the ELMS service which coincides with the organisation's annual reunion at York.

The ceremony began with a march by the Corps of Drums and Bugles of the Yorkshire Volunteers and attendees were welcomed by Roger Stanton, director of ELMS. In his speech of dedication, Sir Nick Young, Trust chairman, recalled the challenges facing the 50,000 PoWs who escaped into the Italian countryside following the Armistice in September 1943.

"They had no maps, no idea which way to go, no suitable clothing with winter approaching, virtually no knowledge of Italian, and no idea how to disguise themselves so that they looked even vaguely like locals, in a countryside swarming with inquisitive farming families, fascist sympathisers and bounty-hunters and, increasingly, German patrols. Only around 10,000 made it home. Many were recaptured by the Germans almost immediately.

"The escapers approached small mountain villages for assistance, seeking help from tiny family farms and avoiding the larger farms which they feared might be fascist.

"The farmers who helped them were mostly share-croppers, a pernicious system which required them to share 50% and more of the meagre crops they grew with the landlord – or face immediate eviction. They had nothing and lived in conditions that seemed to many escapers medieval. But still they took them in, these *contadini* invited them into their homes and farms, shared what little food they had with them, treated their wounds and gave them a bed or a barn for the night.

"After the war, few if any of those brave Italians were formally recognised for their courage and generosity. If they were lucky, they got a piece of paper (an Alexander Certificate) to hang on the wall and a few lire by way of compensation. The Monte San Martino Trust was formed by our founder Keith Killby and other former prisoners to try and compensate for this lack of recognition.

"Now, at last, we and ELMS are proud to unveil, in the eightieth year since the Armistice, the first memorial in the UK to the *contadini* of the Italian countryside, and to the people in larger towns and cities who also played their part. We will remember them."

The occasion was honoured by the presence of Rear-Admiral Angelo Virdis, defence attaché, representing the Italian ambassador, and his wife Nicoletta. Bidden by Nick Young to "make himself at home, admittedly in a prison camp for Italians", Admiral Virdis told the audience: "We thank you for keeping the memory of the humanity of those who helped the prisoners. Young people have to remember the difficult path we had to follow to find freedom."

There were, in fact, 18 young Italians present, all students of a school at San Benedetto del Tronto, on the coast of Le Marche, from where many escapers were extracted by sea. Their visit was sponsored by ELMS, who had also invited students from a school in Spain's Basque country, which played an important role as the end-destination of escape lines from France. Among the Spanish students was the 17-year-old great-niece of Fiorentino, a hunter and smuggler who became a guide for the Comet Line and took more than 200 airmen and French and Belgian agents over the Pyrenees to safety.



The Corps of Drums and Bugles of the Yorkshire Volunteers perform at the ceremony at Eden Camp to unveil a memorial to Italians who sheltered escaped Allied PoWs. In the corner is the watchtower of the camp which itself housed German and Italian prisoners

Memorial inscription

In memory of those brave people of Italy who assisted British and Allied Escapers and Evaders during WW2 to return to Allied lines to continue the fight for freedom.

Many brave Italian people paid with their lives for showing such selfless kindness to strangers. We will never forget.

The ceremony continued with readings, performances by the Yorkshire Volunteers and a closing address from the Rev. Canon John Manchester, the ELMS padre. He paid a tribute to the brave men and women who suffered imprisonment and ill-treatment for the help they gave escapers and evaders. "These valiant helpers paid a terrible price but they emerged emaciated from the camps with their heads held high."

This important day in the life of MSMT was marked most appropriately at Evensong in York Minister when the Trust was included in prayers for all prisoners of war and those who put themselves in danger to help them.

Students make welcome return

It was a great relief, following the Covid-19 pandemic, to have the student bursary scheme fully back on track in 2022. Over the course of the year we welcomed 34 young Italians on four-week language study courses, drawing them principally from the regions of Emilia-Romagna, Le Marche, Abruzzo and Molise.

The programme was different from the past in two respects. First, for a London language school, we chose CES-Wimbledon rather than a school in central London as previously, partly on the grounds of cost but also because CES-Wimbledon is a sister school of CES-Oxford (Wheatley), which we continue to offer to students as an alternative to London. CES did not let us down in either case: the vast majority of students assessed both tuition and their accommodation with families (which is selected by the schools) as either “excellent” or “good”.

The second change in the programme concerned the students’ arrival at their home stays. We were unable to continue meeting students at their incoming airport as we lacked a sufficient number of volunteers with the time disposable for this. Instead, our student organiser, David Kettle, gave each student precise instructions on how to travel to their destination – such as an address in a south London borough within reach of the school at Wimbledon. Almost all the students took this challenge in their stride and were supported on the day of their arrival – invariably a Sunday – by having access to a MSMT volunteer in case advice were needed. The volunteer also got in touch with the student after a few days to make sure that all was going well. David and Letitia Blake, Trust secretary, were always on hand to act as a “safety net”!

We are continuing to use this system in 2023. **But we urgently need more volunteers to assist in this way.** It provides the only means of connecting MSMT directly with a student and “bonding” with them in the hope that they will promote our cause in subsequent years. Please contact us at info@msmtrust.org.uk if you can help.

A highlight of the year was a picnic in London’s St. James’s Park on August 13th for any student then in England and for the volunteers. The fact that it took place on a boiling-hot day, making transport an unattractive proposition, kept the numbers down. However, five students participated, along with David and trustees Letitia Blake, Nermina Delic and Julia MacKenzie, and they thoroughly enjoyed the occasion. The event is being repeated this year.



Annarita Tantaro, Giada Cancelliere, Martina D’Abbondio and Emma Carboni at the student picnic in St James’s Park



AS is usually the case, some of our students in 2022 had a family connection to escaped prisoners of war. The bursaries were, of course, set up by Keith Killby, MSMT’s founder, precisely to honour the bravery and generosity of such families.

One student with a dramatic story to tell was Giulia Alfinito (**on the right of the picture, with fellow student Veronica Mancini**). Giulia went to the Wimbledon school and comes from Pratola Peligna, near Sulmona. The story concerns Robert Duncan, a soldier from Falkirk in Scotland, who was about 20 years old in 1944 when he was captured by the Germans and imprisoned in PG78, the PoW camp at Fonte d’Amore, Sulmona. Giulia reports:

“After a few months Robert managed to escape and he showed up at the mill where lived my great-grandparents and their daughter Elvira – who was to become the grandmother of my stepfather. He was in a terrible way and the head of the family, Luigi Lucci, immediately offered him food, shelter and help of any kind. The family had some land at Ancinale, about six kilometres away from the mill, and Luigi got Elvira to go there every day to gather produce for the family and their guest. Elvira had to hide it carefully inside a cart as there were a number of Nazi checkpoints along the roads. The entire family risked arrest if Robert were discovered inside the mill.

“One day, a friend of Luigi warned him that the Nazis were soon going to inspect the mill. The family hid Robert in a pile of straw on the upper floor. The Germans did indeed knock on the mill door after being tipped off by an informer. Fortunately for Robert and the family they didn’t find him. When the Allies reached Sulmona, Robert rejoined the troops and with tears in his eyes he thanked the family, promising he would never forget them.

“And that was indeed the case. He wrote to them from the end of the war onwards, periodically thanking them at Easter and Christmas. In his letters he said: ‘You saved my life. You gave me the chance to meet and marry my wife and have children and grandchildren. None of this would have happened if I had not received so much love.’ The letters continued and in 1979 Robert and his wife

came back to Sulmona and visited the family. He and his wife embraced Elvira and her sister.

“Following the death of Elvira, my stepfather kept up the correspondence. In his final letter, when he was over 80 years old, Robert said that he was not in good health. The next letter to come from Scotland, signed by Robert’s son, thanked the family for a final time and explained that Robert had died peacefully.”

CLASS OF 2023

THE Trust is proud to announce a landmark moment: one of our bursary winners this year is Riccardo Ceselli, the son of Manuela Cesoroni, who herself had a bursary in 1992. It is the first parent-child double act!

Manuela was an early beneficiary of the scheme, set up by Keith Killby in 1989. By now, more than 700 young Italians have benefited. We have awarded 47 bursaries for the year 2023, a record number. The majority will arrive in the months of July and August.

Manuela, from Tolentino in Le Marche, has kindly described her experience: “The month I spent in London in 1992 was one of the most important periods in my life, not just for the opportunity to improve my English but also for my own personal development. It gave me an insight into horizons so vast that my 18-year-old eyes opened wide with wonder!

“I got to hear about MSMT thanks to my English teacher who suggested that I and my friend Jessica Palmieri apply for the study awards.

“I met Keith Killby a few months before my departure and his reassuring words came as a relief to my mother who was a bit worried about me going abroad alone for the first time!

“Jessica and I left at the end of May and Mr Killby met us as promised at the tube station. I remember him giving us small notebooks in which to write new words, and he made us read a newspaper article, correcting our pronunciation (government!). He cooked a lovely Sunday lunch for us including a rhubarb dessert, which was very different from what I usually ate. He took us to the tube station to get a railcard and to view the house where we were to stay, suggesting we memorise the route from the station.

“I attended Central School of English in Tottenham Court Road, in a different class from my friend. Our family hosts were different too. Mr Killby had insisted we speak English as much as possible and suggested staying away from other Italians. The opportunity was there to make new friends and get to know people from Japan, Germany, Spain etc.

“One day I realised on reaching home that I had lost my railcard. I immediately called Mr Killby who calmly told me I had to go back to the station where I had acquired it and ask for a duplicate. I thought that he would accompany me but on the contrary he pushed me to deal with it myself, giving me the necessary information and leaving it to me to resolve the problem. That was a great lesson in life for me and I still remember it as a fundamental one for overcoming difficulties that crop up at work and in relations with other people.

“I have learned that wishing another person well does not mean resolving his problems for him or substituting yourself, but in guiding him through his difficulties by fronting up to them himself. I often think of this myself while bringing up my children! Mr Killby then invited me and my friend to lunch the following Sunday at the house of a friend, Mrs Gavin [for a long time a MSMT trustee]. It turned out to be a really enjoyable day. Mrs Gavin gave us a fish dish and delicious “strawberries and cream”, which she explained was the tradition at the Wimbledon tennis championships. In the afternoon we visited Hampton Court together. Mrs Gavin encouraged us to enter the hedge maze, which was great fun!

“A few days before we went home Mr Killby invited us to his house for tea (cucumber sandwiches). We were able to talk about our experiences and to thank him for everything he had done for us.

“Seven years later, in 1999, I was able to meet Mr Killby again when I and other bursary holders were invited to a reception in Rome by the British ambassador, Tom Richardson.

“Mr Killby is a very special person for me. He taught me so much and knew how to generate good things from bad experiences like the war.”



Manuela, in London in 1992, and with her son, Riccardo, a bursary holder in 2023

Reports by John Simkins

My father and the Devil's Brigade

By Nick Young

THE last stage of my father Leslie's six-month escape journey was at Anzio, a few days after the British/American invasion force landed on the beaches (January 1943), and tried to establish a secure beachhead, in the face of 70,000 German troops determined to throw them back into the sea.

He and his fellow escaper, New Zealander Charlie Gatenby, were in the hands of their guides, two fiercely brave and determined Italian-Jewish partisans, Eugenio Elfer (23) and his sister Silvia (19). In several feet of snow and blizzard conditions, they (and Silvia's boyfriend Carlo) had been trudging through the Abruzzo mountains for five days, hoping to slip through an area crowded with German troops to reach safety with the Allied forces.

A recce from the town of Norma, perched on a cliff above the battlefield around the beaches at Anzio, showed the hopelessness of their situation. They were in the middle of some of the fiercest fighting of the war, with the German positions under bombardment from the beaches and the invasion fleet out at sea. In return, the Germans, spearheaded by the crack Hermann Goering division, were hurling everything they had at the beaches.

Somehow, Leslie's group made it through the German lines, at dead of night, and then on hands and knees through a German minefield, only to be spotted by a German patrol – which opened fire, killing Eugenio. Silvia was distraught, determined to stay with her brother's body and to find Carlo, of whom there was neither sight nor sound.

Leslie and Charlie urged her to carry on with them, to try to get to the Allied lines, just a few hundred yards away across the marshes, on the other side of the Mussolini Canal. They set off, crawling across no man's land. It was dawn on 7th February 1943. More shots rang out. Charlie scrambled into a ditch, hit in the arm. Leslie followed suit, on the other side of the road. Silvia gave a cry, and fell to the ground, hit in the throat.

They had been spotted again, this time by a US Army patrol. Shadowy figures in no man's land in the half-light of daybreak, in the middle of a pitched battle? You shoot first, ask questions later.

For years after I had managed to piece together the story of my father's escape, I wondered if it might be possible to track down that US Army unit and find a record of that fatal encounter at Anzio. It seemed a hopeless task, until I had a conversation online with Greg Bradsher, a senior manager at the US Archives in Washington. "Yeah, sure," he said. "All our Army units had to keep a daily diary. You just need to work out which unit it was and we can help you find the records."

Several days of research followed. The battlefield at Anzio was 30 miles long and was policed by numerous US and British Army units, at different times. It felt like trying to identify one goldfish, in a large pond full of goldfish, all swimming madly about. Out came detailed maps of the Anzio battlefield; book after book about the Anzio campaign; endless internet searches trying to pin down the details. Eventually, I had three units in the frame – but which was it?

I had a favourite, though. The First Special Service Force (FSSF), despite its rather dull and ambiguous title, had an extraordinary reputation as one of the fiercest fighting units of the whole war. "The Devil's Brigade", the Germans called them. If ever there was a unit that would indeed shoot first and ask questions later, this seemed to be it – and they were definitely at Anzio, on the beachhead perimeter line, in early February 1944.

They left a red arrow-head on victims

FSSF was the brainchild of an eccentric Englishman called Pyke – inventor, psychologist, stockbroker, statistician, war correspondent, educator, genius – who convinced Mountbatten in 1942 that a specially-trained airborne assault force equipped with fast-moving troop carrier/snow ploughs could wreak havoc in mountainous countries like Norway by destroying power stations, oil fields and other key installations.

The snow plough idea never took off, but the airborne assault force did, under the inspiring leadership of US Army Lt. Col. Robert Frederick who, in a few months, trained, to the most exacting standards of killing effectiveness and physical and mental toughness, a combined Canadian and American force of around 2,000 men. The Canadians put forward some of their best soldiers; many American units, it was said, took the opportunity to get rid of their most difficult "nuts".

They first saw real action in Italy in October 1943, when US Commander Mark Clark gave them the task of capturing two strongholds on the German "Winter Line" south of Rome, Monte La Difensa and Monte La Remetanea. This was after three previous attacks by other groups had failed. FSSF found a new route to attack the enemy from behind, climbing a 1,000-foot vertical cliff and overwhelming the Germans in two hours – as compared with the four or five days allowed for the attack. Next stop was Anzio, where they were drafted straight into the front line and told to guard the southern portion of the beachhead. For the FSSF, "guarding" meant mounting a nightly flurry of aggressive patrols into no man's land and even behind the German defences, capturing (or mostly killing) as many Germans as they could. They smeared their faces with black boot polish and left a red arrowhead sticker on their victims inscribed with the words "*Das dicke Ende*



kommt noch” (the worst is yet to come). The Germans moved their line back, certain that they were facing an enormous force of “devils”.

Was this the unit that my father and his helpers ran into?

When I set off for meetings in Washington with Anne Copley (see page 8), I had booked myself an extra day at the archives with my wife Heli. We had one aim in view – to scour the records of the Field Hospital at Anzio, to see if poor Silvia’s tragic death was referred to, and to examine the War Diary of the FSSF. We had dozens of boxes of requisitioned files awaiting us, with dozens more downstairs if needed.

It was a depressing day. Box after box yielded nothing at all, and I had ordered up several carts of further boxes. Closing time of 5pm was fast approaching, and we had only a few minutes left. Heli came to the last two boxes of files – “oh look,” she said, “these aren’t about field hospitals, they seem to be about an Army unit.”

She flicked through a few pages – February 1943. First Special Service Force, out on patrol. It was 10 to 5 – time was up, and the archives were closing.

I frantically peered over her shoulder, and there it was, waiting for us to find it, as it had been all day, an entry in a file on the bottom shelf of Heli’s cart:

*“0625 FSSF 3rd Regiment: Two British officers from Bedfordshire captured in Tunisia in Apr 43 escaped several months ago from German prison camp with one woman the sister of an Italian officer; were **lost in travelling** [my emphasis] and are now at 1st Bn, 3d Regt CP. Officers names are Major Young and Captain Gatenby.”*

We had no time to investigate further, although earlier entries for that day spoke of killed and captured Germans, fire fights, an enemy ambush foiled, and “situation normal: have been shelled by artillery and mortar intermittently since 0410.”

That night, I phoned Don Lee, part of the Elfer family now living in the States, to tell him what I had found. He was quiet for a moment or two. “Yes,” he said, “from now on, I will always refer to cousin Silvia as having been ‘lost in travelling’”.

Meeting the Cosimati

By Angela Aries

OUR wonderful weekend in Abruzzo last year began the moment we emerged from Ciampino airport into the brilliant sunshine. My daughter, Katherine, my son, James, and I, were finally to meet members of the Cosimati family who had sheltered my father, John “Solly” Joel, for six months during the war.

The much-anticipated visit was organised by Rossana and Chris Howgrave-Graham, who made us so very welcome at their home in Tagliacozzo. Their publicising of the Trust’s work resulted in two of the Cosimati great-grandchildren receiving bursaries to study in England in 2022, and led to emotional meetings in London, first with Federico and then Lorenzo.

The meeting with the Cosimati family in nearby Cese, where my father had stayed, was arranged for Saturday afternoon, to allow for the arrival of those travelling from Rome, or even further afield. We were invited into the house of Mario Cipollone, where we met grandchildren, their spouses, and the great-grandchildren of my father’s protectors, Augusto and Mariarosa Cosimati. It was amazing to see so many relatives gathered there to share experiences with us.

Later that afternoon, a number of us went to the original house in the centre of Cese to meet Carmine, the daughter-in-law of the Cosimati. We were so touched by her warm welcome as we stood there, in the very room where my father had sat and shared meals with the family.

After visiting Carmine in the old house, we returned to Mario’s for drinks and snacks, and a short presentation. Roberto and Osvaldo Cipollone described how they had collected accounts of events in the Marsica region during the German occupation, which they published in a book entitled *Padroni di Niente*. I was delighted to receive a copy signed by them both, in which they had written a personal message to our family.

Staying with Rossana and Chris gave Katherine, James and me a real feeling for the Marsica region. They took us to visit the Roman ruins of Alba Fucens and the surrounding mountains, as well as the beautiful hill town of Tagliacozzo itself. Chris even pointed out the spot where he thought my father and his fellow PoW friends, who had been held at the PoW camp at Chieti, had escaped from a train bound for Germany.

The impressions that remain of that very special weekend are those of incredible warmth, generous hospitality, and above all, friendship.



The sun shines on the Aries and Cosimati families: Angela is front left with her daughter, Katherine. Her son James and Chris and Rossana Howgrave-Graham are behind them

Digitising the Allied Screening Commission files

Anne Copley is happy to report that this has reached a momentous conclusion

It was back in September 2010 when I first heard of the existence of the fascinating ASC records, being 80,000 individual files detailing the help given by the Italians (almost exclusively the *contadini*) to Allied escapers. A conversation took place at my house in Le Marche between historian Filippo Ieranò and American Dennis Hill, webmaster of the site <https://camp59survivors.com/>, a repository of memories of those held at PG59 Servigliano. Filippo asked Dennis if he could make enquiries about access to the unique documents hidden away in the Stacks at the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

These files list the names of individual Italians and those they helped, together with the relevant locations. The documents contained within often include poignant descriptions of the relationships forged and concern as to what might have happened to those they now considered family. And that is to say nothing of the wealth of administrative documentation, also full of fascinating detail about the investigations carried out and the awards made. Dennis and I did make initial contact with the archives and a preliminary search piqued our interest but highlighted the difficulties of accessing the documentation.

It seemed clear to me that these documents ought to be made far more easily available, both to families researching their forefathers as well as academic researchers working in this area. Given the time and expense of travelling in person to Washington, the obvious answer was to look into a digitisation programme that would allow instant access online to all. Thus began a 14-year journey, together with the Trust, to reach an agreement with NARA on how such an undertaking could be brought to fruition.



Anne Copley and Nick Young at the NARA archives

My first point of contact was Greg Bradsher, Senior Archivist, who was unaware of this treasure trove awaiting discovery in the depths of his Stacks. Having become thoroughly enthused, he wrote several blogs drawing on the documentation found therein. These included the story of the making of the film “Onore al Merito”, produced by the Allied Screening Commission and shown at various venues in Italy to acknowledge the courage of those ordinary Italians who had taken such risks for the sake of the young men they came to think of as brothers and sons. With the help of Italian researchers, the Trust is now closing in on the current whereabouts of this film. Along the way, some discrete series of files were digitised, such as a list of American escapers, but there was a lot more to do.

Time passed and costings were produced. I researched the digitisation process and discussed with NARA how to make sure that the metadata (the “tags” attached to a document that bring it up when searched) were as comprehensive as possible so that someone looking for their forefather’s name would be able to find the relevant file without much difficulty.

Trustees agreed to fund the work to the tune of \$250,000, and it was hoped that NARA could be persuaded to find the balance. In fact, over time there had been a lot of movement in favour of digitisation generally within the organisation, and our continuing relationship meant that this particular project had risen to the top of the list and was being viewed almost as a pilot for the enormous amount of work that NARA would be undertaking. With a target of something like 500 million documents over the next five years, the ASC’s 1.5 million documents will only make a small dent in the overall workload.

With that in mind, the Trust will now be funding the digitisation of the 80,000 claims that were lodged with the ASC between 1944 and 1946. These files are the most personal, dealing with the individual stories of both Italians and their escapers, and therefore ones that our supporters and the wider community will find the most immediately useful. The rest of the documentation, administrative in nature and equally precious historically, will be absorbed by NARA as part of its day-to-day digitisation project.

Nick Young and I had an excellent visit to the archives in Maryland in March this year with a fascinating tour of the building, including the new digitisation suites under construction. Nick told the story of his father’s escape and the help that Leslie Young received from the two Elfer children, a brother and sister both sadly killed while guiding him back to Allied lines. He entranced all the technicians who heard the story, since it is unusual for such a personal connection to be made with the documentation they will be working on; it was worth making the trip if only for that reason.

Very useful discussions were had as to the administrative and legal matters involved. It only remains for those to be reduced to signed legal agreements before the work can start in earnest on bringing access to wonderful material which will, for years to come, provide insights into the relationships between the Italian *contadini* and their Allied brothers drawn from all quarters of the world.

An excellent legacy project of which the Trust can be justifiably proud.

A fruitful partnership in Italy

A collaboration with the prestigious Parri institute is helping enormously to lift the Trust's profile within Italy and encourage research into the Allied presence in wartime Italy.

Based in Milan, Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri coordinates a network of Italian historical institutes and its researchers are among Italy's leading experts on Italian contemporary history including the resistance movement.

What has been achieved so far?

In November 2022, the institute unveiled the first fruit of our partnership, an Italian/English website entitled "Allies in Italy", which the Trust co-funded by granting 25,000 euros. Bringing together existing and new research under one roof, the first phase focuses on the fate of 76,000 Allied prisoners of war and is a study of 61 PoW camps and six hospitals. By including the smaller camps, in addition to well-known ones such as Sulmona, Chieti and Fontanellato, the portal presents a much fuller picture of the PoW landscape than was previously available. Each entry gives the site's operational timeframe and the name of its commanding officer, explains whether it was an internment, work or transit camp, and whether it held officers or other ranks.

The portal also includes a map and 40 profiles of escaped PoWs, some of which – but not all – are in the Trust's digital archive. The website (www.allieatiinitalia.it) is suitable for families wishing to research an ancestor's war as well as for academics.

The presentation took place at the Casa della Memoria in Servigliano, in Le Marche, and was introduced by its director, Giordano Viozzi, who outlined plans to partly restore PG59 Servigliano. One of the speakers, Rossella Ruggeri, who along with Nermina Delic and John Simkins, represents MSMT on the project board, said: "Parri's offer to create a website concentrating on the Allied presence from 1939–1947 was a great opportunity for MSMT. The variety of often unpublished material makes it a complex undertaking but the Parri institute is in the best position to question, select and collate new and existing sources."

Sara Zanisi, Parri's general manager, then introduced a discussion panel. The researchers said that, although much is known about the aftermath of the Armistice in 1943, little is known about the camps and the relationships between the prisoners and local citizens. Their work tried to address such questions.

What plans are there for further collaboration?

MSMT has agreed that funds left over from the grant (3,000 euros) should go towards publication by Parri of a book on the prisoner of war camps and the treatment of PoWs, written by the academic Isabella Insolubile, one of the researchers working on the new website. The book will be presented on September 7th in Servigliano by Isabella, interviewed by Mario Calabresi, former editor-in-chief of *La Stampa* and *La Repubblica*. Translation into English of the book is being considered.

As for the website, Parri always saw the PoW research as just the first phase of a rounded study of the Allied presence and further development of the site would play a role in the three-year project plan that Parri has submitted to Italy's Ministry of Culture. A proposal for further research into PoWs has already been approved by the country's National Research Committee.

MSMT is open to considering a request for further co-funding provided the research covers the PoW story, particularly the help given by the brave Italians who sheltered escapers.

Parri are extremely interested in the Trust's project to digitise the NARA archives (see page 8) as the huge depositary of records from the Allied Screening Commission would open up riches for researchers.

Are Parri and MSMT involved in any other way?

Parri are throwing their weight behind plans by MSMT, the Escape Lines Memorial Society and the Casa della Memoria at Servigliano to celebrate in September the 80th anniversary of the Armistice and the ensuing escape of PoWs (see page 12). Parri's president, Paolo Pezzino, will be present at the opening of the institute's exhibition entitled "*Un altro viaggio in Italia*", a German/Italian collection of stories, memories and places in wartime Italy. The German ambassador has also been invited.



Parri researchers Costantino Di Sante, Isabella Insolubile and Nicola Cacciatore and digital historian Igor Pizzirusso unveil the new website

MSMT ANNUAL LUNCH

THE past and present came together at the annual lunch of the Monte San Martino Trust on November 16th 2022, with a battered book of Italian grammar taking centre-stage.

The Trust's 136 guests at the RAF Club in London witnessed an emotional moment. Nearly 80 years after the book's "liberation" from Fontanellato PoW camp, it was handed over to Graham Day. Graham is the son of Jimmy Day, whose name was inscribed on the book's flyleaf.

The circumstances surrounding the book's return are extraordinary. In September 1943, after the Armistice, the 600 PoWs at PG49 Fontanellato made a mass escape. In the hours before the arrival of the Germans, the town's citizens entered the camp to take away what they could – and one lady salvaged Jimmy Day's grammar book. The lady's nephew, Pietro Bettati, was always determined to reunite the book with the Day family. The Bettati family had been one of many Fontanellato families who aided the PoWs in the early days after their escape and Pietro is a long-time supporter of the Trust. He was helped in his mission when by chance he came across Alessandra Alexandroff, who was visiting Fontanellato. Alessandra is the daughter of Michael Ross, who had made an earlier failed escape attempt with Day.

Knowing that Pietro and his family would be present at the annual lunch, Alessandra and her brother David Ross made sure that Graham Day and his sister Jill would also attend.

In making the trip to London, Pietro, his wife Maria Grazia, daughter Alessia and her fiancé Francesco Vecchini were part of a strong contingent of Italians at the lunch. Among them was Lorenzo Cosimati, who was half-way through his bursary course at CES Wimbledon. In all, 40 guests were attending the lunch for the first time, a reflection of the Trust's growing reach. Nick Young, the Trust's chairman, welcomed the Italian ambassador, Inigo Lambertini, and his chief of staff, Niccolò Biscottini. Sig. Lambertini, who has served Italy on four different continents and who took up his post in London in October 2022, said that his aim was to strengthen ties between Italy and Great Britain and that "nowhere could one find ties of friendship stronger than those with the Monte San Martino Trust". He added: "It was emotional for me to be here today." Nick Young then summarised Trust activities over the previous year, highlighting the immense achievement of finally posting all the PoW memoirs in the Trust's possession onto its online archive.

He concluded by telling the story of the grammar book and handing the microphone to the guest speakers, starting with supporter Jane Davis. She told how the discovery of a postcard sent to her father, Lance Bombardier Bernard Burles, in 1946 prompted her to research his wartime experience; he was a PoW who escaped from Sulmona camp. The postcard was sent by Minnie Mazzocchi Alemanni, who had hidden him.

In 2022, Jane succeeded during a visit to Italy in tracing Minnie's grandson, Marco Mazzocchi Alemanni, a former EU Italian ambassador, who also addressed the meeting. He said that Jane Davis's enterprising initiative had enabled him to learn about the Trust's work. "I am impressed by the humanistic spirit of brotherhood that informs it. I equally find it impressive that the Trust is not just looking backwards but to the future as well, thanks to your generous programme of bursaries.

"As Italians, we owe eternal gratitude to the Allied forces, of which so many were British, who liberated our country. We bow to the memory of those who perished and of those who survived. If some of my fellow-countrymen helped in the survival of the latter, this was just a partial contribution to the redemption of a people who, for too long, had remained mostly indifferent to dictatorship."

The lunch concluded with a message of best wishes from Luigi Spinazzi, mayor of Fontanellato, and with Letitia Blake, the secretary, thanking trustee Christine English for her impeccable organisation of the event.



Pietro Bettati, centre, hands over the liberated grammar book to Graham Day



Ambassador Lambertini addresses the meeting. To his left are Helen Young and guest speakers Marco Mazzocchi Alemanni and Jane Davis. In the foreground, right, is Annie de Meo

The lunch in 2023 will be held at the RAF Club on Wednesday November 22nd. Invitations will be emailed in September.

War and romance on the front line

ON May 23rd, Roy Quinton, (right), a long-time supporter of the Trust, celebrated his 100th birthday. He talks to John Simkins about his front-line service during the Second World War, how his gift for languages led to him working as an interpreter in Italy liaising with partisans, and how he met his Italian wife Irene.

John: When did you join the army?

Roy: I lived in Sutton, in Surrey, left school at 17 and joined a training regiment in Wiltshire before being posted to the Pembroke Yeomanry in 1941. I was then sent to 406 Battery Royal Artillery. At Liverpool we were put on a Dutch ship without knowing where we were going (I was sea-sick). At Gibraltar we were told we were going to North Africa and we landed in Algiers after an 11-day journey. The next day we boarded a smaller vessel to go to the seaport of Bone. It was known as the “death run” and we were battened down in the hold. Fearing suffocation, we forced ourselves on deck and I took cover under a lifeboat during a machine gun attack. From Bone we made our way to Tunisia and supported infantry attacks until the Germans surrendered at Tunis in May 1943. During this time I perfected my French and was used as an interpreter. We were ordered to return to Algiers and crossing the Atlas mountains my motorbike broke down. I was saved from freezing to death in the night by a truckload of Afro-American troops. All the other lorries, hundreds of them, had just driven past!

We stayed in Algeria until after the battle for Sicily. We were transported to Taranto in September 1943 and, once we had arrived in Italy, I said to myself: “If I survive the war I want to learn Italian well.” I taught myself to read, write and speak within 10 months.

John: Were you involved in the fighting in Italy?

Roy: Yes, I took part in all the battles for Monte Cassino, supporting infantry. We were ordered to remove our 8th Army flashes and sew on American 5th Army flashes. I had been trained in Signals and my job was to maintain communications, which meant repairing wires during pauses in German shelling.

John: How did you meet your wife?

Roy: Fighting all the way up Italy we reached Perugia, in Umbria, in June 1944. Our guns had fired so many shells they needed recalibrating. During a 10-day stay my fate was sealed. I saw a young woman peering out of a kitchen window; she waved timidly. I heard music coming from inside the house and I was desperate to play the piano again. Four frightened faces looked out and they let me in. I knocked out some Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers on the piano! I found plenty of reasons to go back there and got to know one of the girls, Irene, whose father was freight manager at Perugia railway station.

John: How did you become an interpreter?

Roy: I was being used unofficially as an interpreter for all sorts of things. In the Rimini area, I liaised with local battalions of the 36 Garibaldi partisan brigade. The partisans did sterling work and I became friendly with them. During a rest period I went to Rome with a recommendation to meet a man whose real name turned out to be Palmiro Togliatti [leader of the Communist Party and Minister of Justice in the provisional government]. Orders came to push on to Faenza and after its capture in December 1944 I was pulled out of the line to become an official interpreter. When the Germans surrendered in May 1945 I was sent to Taranto to question soldiers of the Fascist Republic of Salò.

John: You also worked with the Allied Screening Commission?

Roy: Yes, that was after I had worked with a Field Security Unit in Milan, where I had to inspect conditions for imprisoned senior Fascists and check out Italian women planning to marry British soldiers. At the ASC in Rome I helped investigate the validity of claims from Italians who had hidden Allied PoWs. This was under the command of Lt. Col. Hugo de Burgh [formerly senior British officer at Fontanellato PoW camp]. He was a lovely man. To my amazement he arranged a honeymoon in a hotel in Rome’s fashionable Via Veneto at army expense for me and Irene after we got married in Perugia in June 1946!

Roy returned to England to be demobbed, followed shortly afterwards by Irene. They raised a family of three sons and Roy worked for the Inland Revenue until retiring in 1978. He then set up a taxation service and invested in rental property. In 1994, Roy took over the chairmanship of the now disbanded Monte Cassino World Veterans’ Union from Lt. Col. Brian Clark, MC, GM, due to the latter’s illness. In consequence Roy received the honorary citizenship of the city of Narni, in Umbria. He is chairman of the Italy Star Association.



80th anniversary celebrations

THE countdown is well under way for a magnificent celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Armistice with Italy, which will take place at Servigliano, in Le Marche, from September 7–10.

A rich and varied programme of events to commemorate the ensuing escape of Allied PoWs, and the bravery of the Italians who hid them, has been created by the three organising parties: MSMT; the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS); and Casa della Memoria, which is responsible for the upkeep of the former PoW camp at Servigliano, PG59.

The commemoration honours escaped PoWs and their Italian helpers at camps throughout Italy but the decision to concentrate festivities at Servigliano reflects the growing interest that PG59 is attracting within Italy itself, as well as abroad. Last year, Italy's parliament decreed that it was a site of national interest and work starts soon on its partial restoration.

During the First World War, the camp held Austrian prisoners and, at its peak in WW2, there were 2,000 Allied servicemen who had been captured in North Africa. The Armistice on September 8th 1943 led to a mass break-out, negotiated with the commandant by the camp leader, Dr Millar. The escapers included MSMT founder Keith Killby, whose SAS companions made a hole in the wall, still visible.

The escapers poured into the hills of the Tenna Valley where they were received with outstanding courage and hospitality by the *contadini* (peasant farmers). Their bravery is commemorated every year by a Freedom Trail, organised by ELMS and supported by MSMT, which passes through picturesque neighbouring villages, including Monte San Martino itself. Usually this takes place in May but this year it runs in September to coincide with the anniversary.

Each body is organising a variety of events, some of which will coincide while others will be separate, offering a "pick 'n mix" selection for attendees. There will be day-walks from Servigliano, led by ELMS director Roger Stanton, and on Friday 8th MSMT will join ELMS in the afternoon for a brief walk to Montelparo to commemorate the murder there of escaped PoW Sydney Smith. A visit to the Trust's eponymous village of Monte San Martino is also planned, alongside wine-tastings and other social events.

Interesting presentations hosted by Casa della Memoria will include a talk by Dennis Hill, from Bloomington, Indiana, whose father was held in PG59 and who curates the website <https://camp59survivors.com/> in his memory. Another talk will be by Steven Dickinson, whose uncle kept a diary while at the camp and who subsequently joined the partisans and lost his life. MSMT's partner in research, the Milan-based Parri institute, is staging an exhibition.

The British ambassador will join the celebrations and the American and German ambassadors have been invited. About 50 MSMT members plan to attend, including from Australia and the USA (a considerable number of Americans were held at PG59). Members of ELMS and a strong contingent of local Italians will also be present.

There is still time to sign up if you have not yet had the opportunity. If you wish to do so, please email the MSMT trustees on the project committee, Anne Copley at acopley01@gmail.com or Nermina Delic at ndelic@msmtrust.org.uk. They will be pleased to send you full details and put you in touch with ELMS should you wish to participate in the Freedom Trail.

A People's Courage

Gripping testimonies by Italians who sheltered escaped prisoners from the PoW camps at Servigliano and Sforzacosta in Le Marche can be read in *A People's Courage, Civil Resistance in German-occupied Italy*. It was published by MSMT in 2022 and is available in paperback at bookshops and in both paperback and Kindle versions through Amazon. The stories were collated by historian Filippo Ieranò, who recorded the memories of *contadini* who had been children during the war. The original book, *Antigone nella Valle del Tenna*, was translated by MSMT trustees.



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