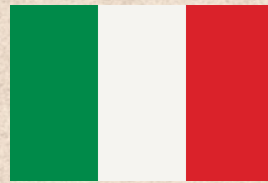
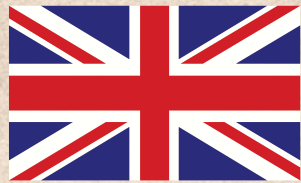




Registered Charity
No. 1113897



Servigliano 7 - 10 September 2023

80th Commemoration of the Armistice

Monte San Martino Trust
in association with
ELMS (Escape Lines Memorial Society)

WE SHALL NOT FORGET



The 80th Anniversary of the Italian Armistice



Eighty years ago this year, on the evening of Wednesday, 8 September 1943, prisoners of war in prison camps all over Italy heard an extraordinary cry: “Armistizio, Armistizio”.

The Italian Government had decided to stop fighting and, for the first time since their capture in North Africa, eighty thousand Allied prisoners were able to think about the real possibility of freedom and a return home.



For us today, who have enjoyed relative peace and freedom ever since, it is perhaps hard to imagine quite what an extraordinary moment that must have been.

Of course, with hindsight we now know that dream of freedom and homecoming still had to be fought for, but that it did eventually become a reality for some of the prisoners who heard the cry that evening was due, not just to their determination to get away while they still could, but to the immense bravery and generosity of thousands of Italian people, often poverty-stricken and afraid of Nazi/fascist reprisals, who helped them achieve their dream.



And it was those acts of bravery and generosity that more than seventy of the Trust's supporters, the families of escapers from the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, came together at Servigliano in September 2023, to commemorate, celebrate and remember at the site of PG59, a former prison camp now turned national monument.

Two of the Trust's Board members, Anne Copley and Nermina Delic (herself a former Trust bursary student), had organised an extraordinary weekend of talks from academics and escaper families, visits to key local sites, formal ceremonies (one attended by the British Ambassador and a member of the US Defense Attaché's office in Rome), and magnificent Italian hospitality, to celebrate the 80th Anniversary and to provide the backdrop for a weekend of stories and tears, discoveries and laughter – a weekend that none who were there will ever forget.



Anne Copley & Nermina Delic



Lord Llewellyn & Sir Nick Young

Supporters of the Escape Lines Memorial Society walked again the escape routes taken by prisoners (including our own founder Keith Killby, whose death five years ago we also commemorated), and joined us at some of the events.

In the next pages, we attempt to paint a picture of that weekend, to record our warm memories and undying gratitude, and to try and convey something of our own excitement at the thought of those cries of “Armistizio”, eighty years ago.

Day 1 - Thursday 7 September

On Thursday, 7 September, the 80th anniversary commemorations started bright and early as walkers of the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society, led by its director Roger Stanton, set off from Servigliano on a walk to Monte San Martino. This was the first of three walks by ELMS over the weekend, all of them conducted in uncomfortably hot weather.



Meanwhile, supporters of the Monte San Martino Trust – co-organiser of the celebrations with ELMS and Casa della Memoria of Servigliano – were arriving at Servigliano from far and wide for the first of the programme of talks. This was a presentation at the Casa della Memoria museum of a recently published book by the historian Isabella Insolubile (pictured left), *La prigionia alleata in Italia 1940-1943* (*Allied imprisonment in Italy 1940-1943*). The book was published by the Milan-based Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri, with a contribution from the Monte San Martino Trust.

Isabella was one of the researchers who created the website www.alleatiinitalia.it which was co-funded by Istituto Parri and MSMT.



The talk, which was translated simultaneously into English, was introduced by another of the website's researchers, Costantino Di Sante, director of the historical institute of Ascoli Piceno. It then took the form of a question and answer session, with Isabella responding to questions posed by the journalist Mario Calabresi, former editor of *La Repubblica* and *La Stampa* national newspapers.



Isabella made it clear that the assumption during the war that Allied prisoners in Italy would be well treated was often belied by the facts. Italy was ill-prepared to handle the thousands of servicemen captured in North Africa. Conditions varied widely among the prison camps but these were often poor and the Italian authorities on occasions disregarded international obligations and treated prisoners inhumanely, even to the point of committing war crimes.



After the presentation about 100 people gathered at the restaurant Re Leone for MSMT's Welcome dinner. It was a joyous occasion, with Nick Young, MSMT chairman, singling out supporters from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and the UK. The restaurant laid on a magnificent meal as supporters met old friends and got to know new ones – all of us with the common aim of honouring the brave Italians who sheltered ancestors who had escaped from PoW camps after the Armistice.

The night was rounded off, for those still there at the end, with a toast to Isabella Insolubile who was celebrating her birthday.

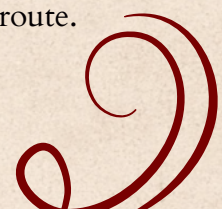
Day 2 - Friday 8 September



The eighth of September is the actual anniversary of the signing of the Armistice. On the Friday, the eightieth anniversary, the day started with everyone congregating at the gate of the park, the site of Camp 59, Servigliano. After a short introduction during which and for not the only time during the day everyone thanked everyone else, a plaque was unveiled by the British Ambassador, Lord Llewellyn, and Lt Juno representing the American Military Defense Attaché, commemorating the escape from the camp.



There then followed a tour of what remained of the camp, which is essentially just the walls, knowledgeably guided with explanations and photos by Anne Copley, who exhibited yet another skill alongside those of organising the whole weekend. There was an especially poignant moment as everyone gathered round the rather badly repaired but now famous hole in the wall where founder of the MSMT Keith Killby and many others escaped. A number of the visitors' fathers had indeed used this very escape route.



The assembled crowd were then shown the restoration project. In the corner of the site the last of the camp huts still remaining within the walls is being restored with as much faith to the original as modern building practice will allow. It was originally the canteen where the prisoners' meals were prepared.



We then repaired to the Casa della Memoria, part of the former old railway station and arrival point for most of the prisoners, to listen to speeches of introduction and thanks before hearing from Dennis Hill (pictured right), founder of the website Camp 59 Survivors, who told of his original interest – his father Armie had been in the camp – and research and the fascinating connections he has uncovered. And then in another of the day's very heartfelt moments, Steve Dickinson donated the diary of his uncle, Robert Dickinson, to the Casa, as a generous gift. But as Steve explained in his talk, it is the most appropriate home for the diary, partly written in the camp in 1942 and titled "Servigliano Calling".



Montelparo

We were then entertained to what was billed as a light lunch but which was, of course, nothing of the sort, while sitting in the cool courtyard of the town hall.

After lunch two buses set off for Montelparo to meet with the ELMS walkers. In one moment of light relief in a day of high emotion, we who were following in a car set off to follow the first bus which departed, did a tour round the town of Servigliano only to return to the very place it started and parked behind the other bus. At the second attempt we all left together and headed to Montelparo, to the site where Sidney Seymour Smith was murdered on 21 March 1944. Our guide, Anne, translated by Nermina and with sometimes helpful contributions from the local priest and others, described the tragic murder of Smith by the SS and the story of the commemorative plaque at the site in this country lane opposite a cross that had been placed there by the villagers. The mayor of Montelparo was present as were, most importantly, Luisella and Donatella Sgariglia (pictured right), two granddaughters of the Mazzoni family that had sheltered Sidney for seven months prior to his death.



After a quick visit to the nearby church of Santa Maria, dating from the 16th century, we returned to Servigliano for an excellent exhibition by the Parri Institute, followed by a talk by Paolo Giunta La Spada of his new book *Italia, 8 settembre 1943. Autobiografia di una nazione*, describing how 8 September was really a rebirth and the start of modern Italy. Like most events of the day, it ran over ever so slightly and there was therefore just time to get to dinner either at the Villa Funari hotel or the Pane e Vino restaurant back in the town square. Quite a few bottles were sunk to help recover from a very busy and intense day of sites, stories and emotions.

Day 3 - Saturday 9 September

Saturday, 9 September, was another day of beautiful weather and started with a visit to the hilltop village of Smerillo where we met the ELMS walkers who had toiled up from the valley below. After refreshments at a café, we gathered on a terraced area outside one of the churches with stunning views over the surrounding countryside. Chairs appeared as if from nowhere – the planning of these events was extraordinary. We heard a presentation from Marco Ercoli (pictured right), whose grandmother Letizia del Gobbo had sheltered two American PoWs from PG59. Anne Copley and Ian McCarthy read an English version of Marco’s account of the visit in 1990 by one of the two Americans, by then a Baptist minister, to the village and the family.



It revealed that the young man had heard the call of God when hiding in the rocks below the village during a German raid. Dennis Hill then told us how despite strenuous efforts, the families of the two Americans have not been traced because the exact names of the PoWs are not recorded. We all left hoping the descendants can be found; they will receive a warm welcome in Smerillo if they are. Our visit concluded with a trip to the cemetery to see the grave of Marco’s grandmother.



Anne Copley

After a vertiginous drive down the hill, we had a delicious lunch at the Osteria del Lago on the shores of Lago San Ruffino. Connections with PoWs are never far away, and Luciana Sciamanna, restaurant manager, said that the story of the PoWs was particularly meaningful to her because her father had been a PoW in Germany. And of course, as participants sat down and began talking all sorts of connections were uncovered. Two women realised they had last met when they attended the same school together some fifty years ago.



Our afternoon outing was to the village of Monte San Martino, a place of particular significance as it was here that our founder Keith Killby first found refuge after he escaped from PG59. The Trust takes its name from the village. In the course of our visit we saw Largo Keith Killby, a piazza next to the church that was named after Keith in 2019, who was an honorary citizen of the village. Given that Keith received help from a *contadino* family here, it was particularly appropriate that we had a presentation in the town hall on *contadino* life by historian Gianluca Vagnarelli. Drawing on his oral interviews with peasant farmers, he told us about the *mezzadria* (sharecropping) system that was still in place when the PoWs were given shelter. The farmers had to give half of their produce to the big landowners but we heard how some individuals made small acts of defiance against the system, which only finally came to an end in the 1980s.



On our return to Servigliano we had a series of presentations at the Casa della Memoria. Giuseppe Milozzi introduced a film he had made that dramatised the events leading to the escape of the prisoners from PG59 and this was followed by the documentary *Zella Mission*. It recounted the escape of a group of senior British officers (who had been held with British generals in PG12 near Florence), who were hidden in houses and villas across the Marche before being taken on boats by Italian fishermen to the Allied lines. The son of one of the fishermen spoke eloquently of his father's bravery and modesty in relation to these dramatic events.



The theme of the Italian helpers was continued by historian Filippo Ieranó (pictured above on the left), who discussed his book *Antigone nella Valle del Tenna* (translated and published by the Trust as *A People's Courage*), which contains interviews with Italians who helped the PoWs in the Tenna valley that he recorded some twenty years ago.

Another side of the story was given to us by Eric Hunt, a retired US Sergeant Major who has researched the life of Manuel Serrano, known as "The Partisan from Brooklyn". Eric and Manuel have a Puerto Rican heritage in common, which led Eric to investigate Serrano's story. A tough, colourful character, he led a partisan group after his escape from PG59 and his exploits behind enemy lines were profiled in *Yank* magazine in 1944. After the war Serrano had some small parts in Hollywood movies (and Eric showed us a wonderful film clip of him dancing), moved to Europe and ran a bar in Naples frequented by the *glitterati*.

After the full day of events, participants made their own arrangements for dinner, joining with new friends and renewing links with those they had met at previous Trust events.



Day 4 - Sunday 10 September



The next morning, as is traditional on a Sunday during the annual Freedom Walk, supporters of MSMT and ELMS gathered at the war memorial in Servigliano's Piazza Roma to lay wreaths and to remember the Fallen. In hot and sunny weather, and in the unfortunate absence of MSMT chairman Nick Young, sidelined by his knee injury the previous day, his speech honouring the brave Italians who sheltered escaping PoWs was read out by another trustee, Ian Laing. Speeches were also made by Roger Stanton, chairman of ELMS, Marco Rottoni, Mayor of Servigliano, Michele Rocchegiani, Prefect of Fermo, and Francesco Verducci, the Senator who piloted the bill through the Italian parliament recognising Camp 59 at Servigliano as a site of national interest, and Paolo Giunta La Spada, Scientific Director of Casa della Memoria.

After Major Boris Spence, of ELMS, had read Laurence Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen', a trumpeter played the Last Post. Wreaths were then laid at the memorial by Stephen Sims (ELMS), Nermina Delic (MSMT), Paolo Giunta La Spada (Casa della Memoria) and Linda Veness and Rona Crane, representing MSMT members from Australia and Wales.

After the ceremony, a party principally composed of ELMS members left by coach to visit the former PoW camp PG70 at Monte Urano, near Fermo, and also Casa Brugnioni, a safe house where the escaper Ken de Souza was sheltered.

Just as it had done on Friday, Bar Lu Ministru provided an excellent buffet lunch in the courtyard of the town hall.



For about the first time in the celebrations, attendees (other than those who had gone to Monte Urano) had a few hours in which to draw breath. Not in the case of organiser Anne Copley, however, who was again on duty at 4 p.m. in the Casa della Memoria museum, minding the bookstall and superintending a loop of videos. These told the stories of three escapees, Frederick Lax, Ray Ellis and Eric Batteson. Lax had taken part in the mass escape from PG49 Fontanellato, near Parma, and on his way south to rejoin the Allies he and his brother officers were hidden in the Marche village of Garulla by the Guglielmi family. Eric was taken in by the Buratti family in Montegenco, and the film tells amusingly of the tricks played on him by the other young Italians who took advantage of his poor knowledge of Italian. The final video was an interview with Ray Ellis, who escaped from PG53 Sforzacosta, at Macerata, and was taken in by the Minicucci family.

After four fascinating and action-packed days, the celebrations reached their finale at a dinner comprising MSMT and ELMS members and Italian residents in Chiostro da Zenà, the cloisters of a former convent across the road from Piazza Roma.

Seated along two tables running the length of the cloister, supporters reflected on the events of the past few days and took the opportunity to chat to people they had not yet come across. Letitia Blake, MSMT's secretary, deputising with aplomb for Nick Young, presided over the finale. She gave heartfelt thanks to Anne Copley and Nermina Delic, who had worked so hard to organise the MSMT programme. Anne then thanked those on the ground at Servigliano who had done so much to make the celebrations a success through months of preparations.



These included Paola Orazi, Hannah McMahon and Stuart Leech, all residents of Servigliano, who were responsible for booking all meals, both in the restaurants and with Lu Ministrù, which provided the two lunches in the town hall courtyard. Paola was chief negotiator and menu decider. Stan Leech, Stuart and Hannah's son, was responsible for the excellent hand-drawn and colourful map of Servigliano which people took home as a souvenir.

Gemma Norris, from Amandola, was responsible for transport, and negotiated deals for the minibuses, as well as picking up all transport enquiries from attendees.



Bringing the dinner and the final event of the celebrations to a close, Letitia invited Pietro Bettati, who had come from Fontanellato, near Parma, with his wife Maria Grazia, to say a few words. Pietro thanked MSMT for the student bursaries which his three children had been awarded in the past. On behalf of the Mayor of Fontanellato he emphasised the town's close links with MSMT that recall the mass escape of PoWs at PG49 and expressed a wish for a reunion in the near future.

Antonio Millozzi from Monte San Martino, who attended the farewell dinner, was a close friend of Keith Killby and helped him to set up the Trust in 1989. In 2013 he was awarded an Honorary MBE for his tireless work as the Italian representative of the Trust. His son, Giuseppe, is on the Board of Trustees of the Casa della Memoria and has published a book about the three PoW camps in the Marche.



Keith Killby & Antonio Millozzi

VIEW THE CELEBRATION VIDEO BY CLICKING
[HERE](#)





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