

MONTE SAN MARTINO TRUST

Miles ... and miles!

June 2015

Shortly before 5pm on Saturday 2nd May, Miles Skinner ran – or, rather, hobbled – into St Peter's Square in Vatican City. After 263 miles, his left leg was buckling and he had blood blisters almost the size of his toes.

He had just completed the amazing feat of running the equivalent of ten marathons in seven days, starting at Lucca in Tuscany. In doing so, he has raised over £18,000 for MSMT.

On the way to Rome, he tackled sharp ascents in torrential rain, covered as much as 48 miles in a single day, and got bitten by a dog. "I'm so tired... exhausted," he said upon arrival. "But it was worth it."

As can be read on page 3, Miles was supported every step of the way by the magnificent Skinner family and by companions on foot and bicycles.

Miles is guest speaker at the annual MSMT lunch in London on Tuesday November 3rd. Please come!



Reaching a turning point

This year marks quite a turning point in the life of the Trust, as we near the successful conclusion of our £1m 70th Anniversary Appeal. For a small charity such as ours to raise £1m in less than four years is a staggering achievement – and as a former charity chief executive myself, I should know! That we have done so is entirely due to the efforts of my friend and colleague, Vanni Treves. He is the most modest of men, almost irritatingly so, but he is a star and deserves our deep gratitude and praise. His report is on page 7. The successful Appeal means that, without wishing to seem complacent, we can look upon our medium-term future at least as relatively assured. Indeed, we could carry on as we are for many years to come without breaking into a sweat. But as chairman, with the support, thank goodness, of a dedicated and hardworking group of fellow-trustees, I am pleased to say that our ambitions are more exciting than that, and you will find (on page 2) a report of our recent “strategy away day”, at which we agreed to consider a range of initiatives that we think will lay the foundations for the Monte San Martino Trust of the future – and for the next generation of those who in a very real way owe their existence to those brave *contadini* in Italy.

The discussions are not yet concluded, because we want to hear what YOU think of them – and, indeed, if you have any better ideas of your own that you would like to put forward. This is not an idle request – please email or write to the addresses shown at the end of the report as soon as possible with your thoughts.

Meanwhile, this year brought for me another of those moving encounters which has made my involvement with the Trust over the years so special. Out of the blue, two brothers got in touch via our website (www.msmtrust.org.uk) and asked to meet me. Tony and Peter Elfer are second cousins to Eugenio and Silvia Elfer, two Italian partisans who guided my father through the German lines and minefields to the American line at Norma, near Rome, in February 1943 – and died in the process, killed by “friendly fire”.

Not only was it an enormous thrill to meet them, and to thank them for what Eugenio and Silvia did – but I was also able to put them in contact with another branch of the Elfer family in America, which they didn't know existed!

Nicholas Young, Trust Chairman

Planning for the future

On a fine Spring day in April, MSMT trustees, full of optimism, gathered for a Strategy Meeting. This was something more than the usual annual meeting. It was the right time, we felt, to examine all aspects of the Trust's work and consider how, if at all, that might change over the next 10 or 20 years. The great success of the financial Appeal, the recent 70th anniversary celebrations of the Armistice, the gradual passing from the scene of the PoWs, the increase in membership – all these factors made our discussion timely. But there was no sense of Armageddon – quite the opposite: the Trust, and its student bursary programme, are as healthy as ever.

The Italian Ambassador, Pasquale Terracciano, kindly provided a meeting room at the embassy, where we were looked down upon by a stirring portrait of Garibaldi. His Excellency spurred discussion by giving us an excellent lunch, at which we were joined by Signora Terracciano and First Counsellor Limoncini, and encouraged us with his conviction that the bravery of the PoWs and the *contadini* who saved them will resonate in Italy for a long time. Thus fuelled, we got down to work. No decisions were taken: we want to open up the discussion to you, our supporters, on the topics outlined below.

The Trust's Future: As the PoW story becomes ever more distant, how does the Trust keep its relevance? Our donors have given money on the understanding that we will continue giving bursaries for young Italians, if not literally in perpetuity, then at least for as long as our collective act of gratitude has significance for our supporters, and that remains our determination. There is a strong feeling, too, that we owe it to the Italian people to keep the story alive and educate younger generations. It is suggested that the Trust needs more traction from within Italy: an organisation backing up our Italian administrator, Antonio Millozzi, that spreads the word among schools and produces publications. An Alumni Association of former students would also be useful. In a wider sense, our Trust fits into a network of Anglo-Italian relationships and our continuing survival will help to keep that strong.

Our Students: Currently our bursary applicants come from just a few pockets, principally the Marche, Sulmona and Fontanellato. We need to build, or refresh, links with schools in other areas where PoWs were on the run, such as Bologna, Modena, Laterina, Chieti, L'Aquila. Although we are not minded to increase the number of bursaries much above the present total of 20 to 25, so as to preserve capital, we do not get a large number of applicants for what are, after all, valuable bursaries (each one costs £2,000). We also want to retain the personal touch with our students so that they are fully aware of the Trust's work – either greeting them on arrival in the UK or being in contact if they choose to make their own way to their language school.

Archives and Commemoration: We believe we should do more to make our treasure trove of memoirs and books accessible to historians, programme makers and family members of escapers. Currently it is stored at the house of our founder, Keith Killby. It needs a professional archivist to put it in good order for its eventual removal to a custodian where it can be looked after and made use of – possibly the Imperial War Museum. As for commemoration, should there be one big memorial sited somewhere in Italy, or a number of plaques in different places? Another possibility might be to endow a research lectureship. We also think it important to maintain our presence on Freedom Trails, as this helps to spread the message among Italians, especially the young.

We would be grateful for your ideas! Please email John Simkins, Administrator, at info@msmtrust.org.uk or write to him at 3 Summerfield, Ashted, Surrey, KT21 2LF

Sir Tom Richardson has stepped down as a trustee after 11 years' service.

Tom first became acquainted with the Trust during his term as Ambassador to Italy from 1996 to 2000, when he hosted a party in Rome for trustees, helpers and students. He became a trustee himself shortly after his retirement, and is also the honorary president of the British-Italian Society.

The Trust is very grateful to Tom for all his help and for his deep knowledge of Italy. Tom said: "I'm sorry to be leaving, but I'll continue to follow the affairs of this wonderful charity which has done so much to repay the debt of gratitude that all former PoWs from Britain and other nations must feel towards the brave Italians who helped them after the Armistice, often at real risk to their own lives."

"The Trust is a very living and concrete expression of our gratitude, and thanks to the enormous success of the Appeal it can go on doing what it does so well for many years to come."

MILES SKINNER'S MARATHONS

Running on empty

Miles Skinner's recent and amazing achievement of running ten marathons in seven days, from Lucca to Rome, had its genesis a year ago after the death of his grandmother, Jo Skinner.

The run was to be in tribute to Jo and her late husband Stan, a PoW at Sulmona. Jo had asked Miles, a strong marathon runner and now aged 29, to get involved with helping MSMT, which the family has always strongly supported. Clearly, the run needed to be in Italy – but where?

We hit upon the Via Francigine, a pilgrimage track that winds down Europe to the Vatican City and which, thanks to the Francigine Association, is well waymarked and has inns along the way. Conveniently, the stretch from Lucca, in north Tuscany, to Rome is 262 miles long, equivalent to Miles's goal of ten marathons. Despite entreaties to take more time, he was adamant he would do it in seven days.

Accommodation was booked with the help of sloWays, the Francigine tour operator, and a brilliant support team enlisted to accompany Miles and provide painkillers, pills and potions. In the back-up vehicle were his mother Dominique and sisters Charlotte and Chesca. Also present throughout was his aunt Corinne de Aranda, soon to be joined by her husband Pedro and son Juan. Miles's great-aunt, Baroness Chalker of Wallasey, reinforced the team in the later stages.

And then there were the athletes. Miles's right-hand man, who ran or bicycled from start to finish, was Mike D'Arcy, a Territorial soldier with the SAS. Frequently with them on a bike was Carlos de Aranda, and on the final two days they were joined by Miles's friend Anthony Doolittle.

All set then for the start on April 26th... Miles merely had to run. But what a run! It required more than one marathon a day, so the stages varied from 30 to 48 miles. The first four days were through very hilly Tuscan countryside, with spells of torrential rain

that sent water sloshing into Miles's trainers. Sometimes the grass was knee-high and streams had to be forded. The eight-mile climb to Radicofani at the end of Day 4 was a killer.

The rain, as Dominique says, was just one of several unlucky blows. On one occasion one of the cyclists got detached and had to be searched out, and the de Aranda car had a flat tyre.

Most unlucky of all, on Day 5 a dog bit Miles on his right calf, causing him to shift his balance and bringing pain to his left knee. Upon reaching Montefiasconi that night, his leg was hurting badly. It continued to plague him, sometimes forcing him to go backwards downhill. By the time he reached Rome he could barely drag the left leg along. He had huge blood blisters and was so run-down he had picked up a sore throat. All this on top of cortisone injections before the trip to calm down a shin injury.

However, Miles still managed a mile every ten minutes on the last day. "Saturday was the worst day, my knee was hurting so much," he says. Two police motorcyclists escorted him for the final ten miles from La Storta, ensuring he didn't have to stop at red lights. Miles says: "My fear was that, if they took us on a short-cut I might not do as much as 262 miles. But luckily we got lost a few times on earlier days, which meant that in the end we did 263 miles."

That is not the only big number. Thanks to Miles's friends and his colleagues at CBRE, he has raised over £18,000 for MSMT. We are extremely grateful.

Miles has no doubt that the run would not have been possible without his fellow-athletes and the wonderful Team Skinner. "They were an ever-dependable rock, fuelling, motivating and keeping me sane – not to mention navigating and taking away logistical headaches."

But, he adds, "Mum reiterated a number of times, 'Never again!'"

John Simkins

*Miles's daily blog of the run is at www.msmtrust.org.uk
There is still time to support his fund-raising at
<https://www.justgiving.com/Skinner2015>*



The athletes, from left: Anthony Doolittle, Miles Skinner, Mike D'Arcy and Carlos de Aranda



Team Skinner: from left, Pedro, Juan and Corinne de Aranda and Dominique, Chesca and Charlotte Skinner

Another chapter for ‘My War’



Frederick Lax, in Cyprus

*Lt Frederick Lax was never able to return to the village in the Marche where he was sheltered by Italians. But this September, his son **David Lax**— who is named after one of them — hopes to meet their descendants. Here he tells how this has come about.*

OVER the past year, my sister Elizabeth and I have been gathering together into an illustrated document the various photographs and handwritten papers our father, Frederick Lax, had left us after his death a few years ago. The texts consist of incomplete writings from the 1940s about his experiences as a lieutenant in the Green Howards during the Second World War, family photographs – some taken in Cyprus, North Africa and, in particular, in Italy – and a complete text entitled *My War* written by our father in the late-1970s.

Among the photographs are several taken in Garulla, in the Marche, of the families who sheltered Dad and three companions during the winter of 1943-44, but regrettably without the families’ names. The other three officers were Lt Bill Ramshawe, Capt. Bill Glover and Capt. Sam Allcock.

Fortunately Dad had included in his writings details of the Guglielmi extended family who provided him sanctuary, and in particular the name Davide Guglielmi, after whom I am named.

Dad did revisit Montalbo and Fontanellato, two of the places where he was imprisoned, but never returned to Garulla. My wife Carole and I decided we needed to

make that visit, with the hope that we might make contact with descendants of the Guglielmi family, with a view to thanking them for what they had done for Dad and the others, and to understand better what risks the families there had taken.

We had heard of MSMT from a BBC Radio 4 documentary and decided to approach it. The response from Letitia Blake, the secretary, was beyond anything we could have hoped for. She forwarded our request for assistance to MSMT helpers Ian McCarthy and Giuseppe Millozzi. It transpires that Garulla is only a few kilometres from Amandola, where Giuseppe lives, and not far from Ian’s home at Servigliano, and Monte San Martino itself.

Ian has already contacted a granddaughter of one of the families who assisted my father, and we are extremely grateful for his help and that of Giuseppe and the Trust. We have arranged to stay with Giuseppe in September this year, when we hope to meet the families in Garulla.

Patti Chandler, whose father was a prisoner of war at Sulmona in the Abruzzo, has taken part in the making of a documentary about the partisans, PoWs and Italian people in the Peligna valley during the Second World War. Patti, who is the producer of *Sulmona Newsletters*, reports here on her involvement in the programme.

The documentary was made for RAI Storia, an Italian television channel, and tells the story of events in and around Sulmona and the Peligna valley. It is based on the book *Partisan Kids* by Pietro Faiella and Pierlorenzo Puglielli and tells of the bravery of the young partisans in helping the Allies. The director was Silvia Giulietti of OVERCOM, Rome.

The interview with me took place at the Melia White House Hotel, London.

It was an interesting choice of venue as, during the Second World War, the building, due to its distinctive shape, was used by the aggressor’s pilots as a compass to help them find their bearings. Consequently, it was never bombed. I gave an account of my father’s time as a PoW in Campo 78, from him being captured on the African Desert to being hospitalised in Sulmona with a kidney stone; being assisted, while in hospital, by two ladies working there at the time; and then his transportation to Germany. I covered my involvement with the reunions of Campo 78, Sulmona, which were held each year at the Union Jack Club, Waterloo, London.

The regular Freedom Trail based on Sulmona is a significant part of the story. I spoke about the link between these reunions and the Monte San Martino Trust.

The documentary, in Italian, was first aired on 2nd January, 2015, and was well received in Abruzzo and beyond. It is one hour long and gives a very good account of the movements, towards the north of Italy, by the Allies, and the assistance given to them by the Italian people.

The latest Sulmona newsletter can be viewed at <http://www.msmtrust.org.uk/news/partisan-kids/>

Sulmona and the story of the Partisan Kids

Journey into the past

One glance at Lawrence Thurgood’s stunned expression, as he reached for a Grappa at the hotel bar in Servigliano to steady himself, gave the clue to how he felt. After a series of coincidences and lucky breaks, he had just met the Martorelli family, who sheltered his father, Robert, while on the run in 1943 before making it back to Allied Lines.

The possibility of a reunion had been unthinkable to Lawrence early last year, when he re-read Robert’s account of his escape, first published in a company magazine in 1948. But he did some research on Google and established that Robert’s PG53 had been at Sforzacosta in the Marche. Still online, he then matched up a skyline near the villages of San Lorenzo and Sant’ Angelo, mentioned by Robert, with one of the photos Robert had left in a shoe box. There were also photos of Italians, but without their full names.

From this point onwards, events moved surprisingly swiftly for Lawrence. He came across MSMT and through us learned that the Tenna Valley Freedom Trail was shortly to take place and that there was just time to join it. The base, at Servigliano, was a few miles south of where Robert had stayed hidden.

Lawrence (pictured right) takes up the story:

“What a coincidence! And so my adventures began. I was told: ‘Contact Roger Stanton if you want to go. He runs the WW2 Escape Lines Memorial Society, and can help you with flights, etc.’” A guy called ‘Roger’ running an Escape line Society ... Really!

I found that everything was fully organised; all I had to do was book the flight. Roger even organised my transportation from my house on Tyneside to his in Yorkshire, then on to the airport. He and MSMT also had a contact, Ian McCarthy, in Servigliano. Ian traced the family who had helped my father, using the photos. There were two members of the original family still alive and still at the same farm.

So, a couple of days into the Trail, at a rest stop after a particularly gruelling hike, with a cold bottle of coke in one hand and a half-finished gelato in the other, I was told by Ian: ‘Right, we’re off to visit the family now!’ I quickly guzzled the coke and wiped away the residue of gelato from around my mouth as I followed him to his car. Thirty minutes later, I found myself walking down a narrow, white-gravelled track towards a small farm, situated atop a valley, which fell away to my left, with that very same skyline from that 1948 photograph as a backdrop: the same track my father must have travelled many times.

We were welcomed at the gate and invited in. In the farmhouse I was introduced to Giovanna, the little girl who was standing on a chair in one of the photos, and Romolo, now aged 95, who was one of the sons of Luigi, whose name was on the back of a photo. Romolo, who remembered my father well, said I was sitting in the same spot where my father had slept.

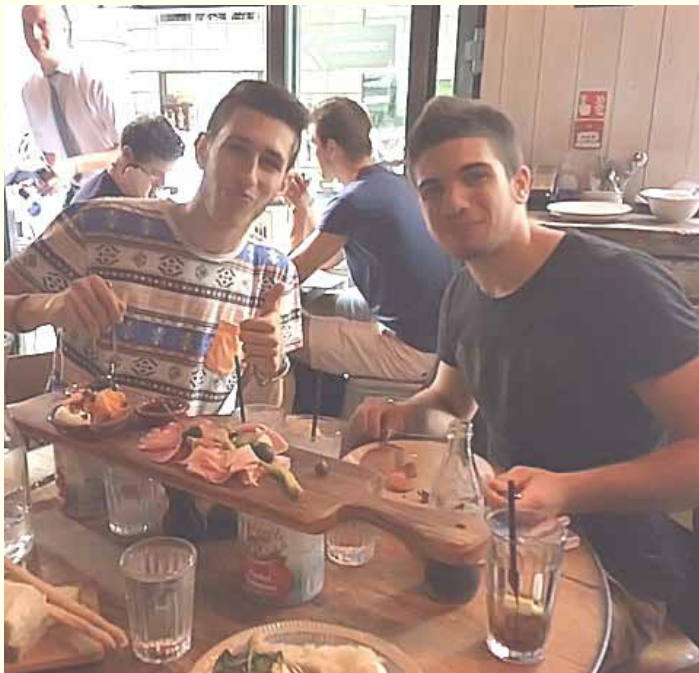
A few more locals appeared, presumably to see the Inglese person. For a while to me, it seemed like ‘surround sound’ Italian, with everyone talking at once while Ian translated. However, time was short as I was then to be whisked off to the prison camp that Dad had left behind all those years ago. As I was leaving, Romolo asked if I would like to return for lunch on the Sunday, an invitation that I readily accepted. It had been a whirlwind day for me, one that I will never forget, thanks to MSMT and ELMS.

On returning to the farm for Sunday lunch, along with Ian’s wife Gabriella, who kindly offered to help out with translation, Romolo showed me a farm that had belonged to a man called Vincenzo. According to Dad’s memoirs, he had stayed there on a number of occasions. The farm was still owned by Vincenzo’s descendants but was only used in the summer. Over an excellent lunch we got to know our histories a little better. Unfortunately, time again was our enemy, as I had to return to the hotel for the Trail’s last-night dinner.

So ended my short adventure into my father’s past, a past that seemed to have given me a helping hand, with coincidences and timing at every turn connected with my journey, from the day of my first contact with the Trust. It was good to see that the ‘kindly, warm-hearted, hospitable host of Italians’ mentioned by my father over 70 years ago, had remained the same.”

Another participant on the 2014 Tenna Trail, Georgina Stewart, tells her own, equally emotional, story of discovery at www.msmtrust.org.uk. See *The house where Donald hid*, under Escape Stories.





Matteo Salvi, left, and Emanuele Nini: great-grandsons of Tony Gregson's rescuers

THE STUDENTS

TWENTY-FOUR young Italians came to England on one-month MSMT bursaries in 2014. Eight chose to go to CES-Oxford House, in Wheatley – more than usual. The others studied at Central School, in London, a long-standing partner of MSMT, as is Oxford House.

The students came mainly from Italian regions that are associated with PoW camps, such as Fontanellato and the Marche. Nineteen were met by MSMT volunteers and escorted to their accommodation.

Eighteen of the 24 students responded to a questionnaire about their experience and awarded high marks in each of the five categories: reception; accommodation; tuition; contact with our Italian representative; and contact with Edward Gretton, our UK student organiser.

A handful of the students were descendants of Italian families who sheltered PoWs on the run, including Matteo Salvi and Emanuele Nini,

great-grandsons of Francesco and Elena Loro, who in 1943 found Major Tony Gregson hiding in their manure heap after escaping from a PoW camp at Bologna. During their stay, the boys met up with Teddy Keen, Gregson's grandson.

Typical of the appreciative comments expressed by students was this one: "I was afraid because it was my first travel I did alone. Edward Gretton told me not to worry, it would be all right. In my first week I realised it wasn't all right, it was just PERFECT! I sent my last email to Mr Gretton with a big thank-you!"

The Trust seconds that thank-you to Edward for the great care he has taken.

For 2015, we have awarded 26 bursaries, with five of the recipients electing to go to Oxford. We shall meet any of the students who choose to be met on arrival. Those who make their own way to their homes will have contact with a named volunteer throughout their stay, as we are anxious not to lose the personal touch and to inform students fully about the work of the Trust, with a view to maintaining a relationship.

We need more Greeters. Once again, we appeal to any of our supporters who can meet students (at Luton, Heathrow or Gatwick), or be their contact to get in touch with us at info@msmtrust.org.uk.

VISIT TO CHIETI AND SULMONA: Brian Lett, a former MSMT chairman, is leading a party of 15 to 20 people on a visit to Chieti and Sulmona PoW camps from June 24th-26th. The group, which includes a family from the USA, will meet up at the Parco Paglia hotel in Chieti on the evening of June 24th. Brian, whose extremely readable and meticulously researched book on the Chieti camp, *An Extraordinary Italian Imprisonment*, was published last year by Pen & Sword, is making arrangements with the camp commandants for the visit.

Immediately following the Chieti trip, from June 29th to July 6th Brian Lett is leading a group of walkers on the Rossano Freedom Trail. Details are on www.msmtrust.org.uk in the Freedom Trails section and anyone interested should contact Brian immediately at hbglett@aol.com. The trail will follow the ex-filtration route of SAS Operation Galia in 1945. Brian warns that walkers must have mountain experience, but he plans to change the Trail to the easier Pontremoli-Levanto route if there is not a group of sufficient experience and fitness.

AWARDS FOR ITALIANS: In another initiative, Brian Lett is appealing to all MSMT supporters who know the names of Italians who sheltered their fathers to contact him at hbglett@aol.com, so that he can check if these people were awarded a medal for their efforts by the Allied Screening Commission or A Force. The awards, and their citations, were made after very careful examination of each and every case. The eventual presentation of the medals was blocked for "political reasons".

Brian has obtained the full list of awards granted to Italians for helping the Allied cause, which include a George Cross, and also the Screening Commission's list of those who died while doing so. The number who gave their lives exceeds 200. Brian is hoping to connect as many as possible of the names on the lists to people, or their descendants, who can still be contacted.

Our Appeal – nearly there!

Vanni Treves, Appeal Chairman, says the enormous generosity of individuals, families and Trusts has put the £1m target in sight

THREE and more years ago, when the Appeal doors opened, we set a target of £1m. That seemed a suspiciously arbitrary round number; but it was agreed because, together with the funds we already had in reserve, we could feel

confident that the return from it would fund 20 – 25 bursaries for as long as it is willed. Anyway, it was a daunting target for a small charity run by volunteers. We doubted if we could ever reach it; yet now we can be certain that, by the end of this year, reached it shall be.

As I write this, together with money pledged, we are within £50,000 of our goal. The response from literally hundreds of individuals, families and charities has been simply wonderful. The gifts have ranged from £25 to £25,000 and more, and many have been repeated. They have often been accompanied by heart-warming messages.

I will not mention individual donors, many of whom are descendants and friends of PoWs saved by the *contadini*, or with homes in Italy near where the *contadini* lived and gave the PoWs shelter. But among the many national trusts that have supported us especially generously (and all the more so because our Appeal doesn't fall within their usual priorities) have been: the Swire Charitable Trust; the Garfield Weston Foundation; the J Paul Getty Charitable Trust; the Eranda Foundation; the Rothschild Foundation; the 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust; the Ronson Foundation; the Gibson Family Charities; and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

So encouraging, too, has been the support of Ambassador and Signora Terracciano and their staff at the Italian Embassy. Last October, they again hosted a delicious dinner at the Embassy, when Frederick Forsyth read to the Ambassador's and Signora Terracciano's guests a resonant story set in wartime Siena. We all came away, as on other Trust occasions, with that warm certainty that the bonds between the two countries have never been stronger. So thank you, and thank you again! We know that, in the span of history, what we commemorate is barely a pin-prick. But now, all those, and they are many, who care about the Trust's origins and purpose can be certain that a flame lit in adversity will continue to burn for as long as human memory of the *contadini's* extraordinary bravery and generosity of spirit endures.

TREASURER'S REPORT

IN MY first year as Treasurer, I am pleased to report the continued steady growth of the Trust's assets. When I took over from Nick Gent as Treasurer, the finances were already in good shape and continue to remain so.

The Trust's financial position has grown through a combination of growth in the value of donations and sound returns on investments.

The assets of the Trust are now valued in the region of £1,390,000; of this sum, about £100,000 is held in cash and the balance in the investment portfolio. At the same time last year, our investment value totalled £1,100,000. The rise in asset value is attributed to the generous support to the Appeal launched in 2011 and the returns achieved on our investment portfolio.

Our Appeal Chairman, Vanni Treves, continues to raise substantial donations and this has contributed significantly to the receipt of funds, with qualifying donations attracting Gift Aid, at 25 per cent. The total amount raised under the Appeal is now £937,000. This is a most creditable achievement through the tireless energy of Vanni Treves.

We continue to be well placed to provide for the 24 annual bursaries to Italian students, which cost the Trust approximately £2,000 each. We are getting closer to achieving our objective in building the value of our investments to finance the expenditure of the bursaries and running costs on a permanent basis. As the trustees are unpaid, the expenses of the Charity are mostly compliance-related.

The investment decisions taken by Rathbones, our investment advisers, are designed to achieve long-term capital growth on a medium-risk basis. Whilst the FTSE 100 index reached a new high in March 2015, breaking through the 7,000 barrier for the first time since 1999, there are continued uncertainties that will affect the financial markets and we shall continue to sustain a careful approach to investments. When inflation is taken into account the index still needs to rise 30 per cent to regain its peak in real terms.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all the generous supporters who help provide the means to finance the annual bursaries.

Justin de Meo, Treasurer



Justin de Meo

Big, happy 'family'

A record number of supporters of the Monte San Martino Trust gathered for the annual luncheon at the Royal Overseas League, London, on November 19th 2014, to celebrate a very successful year.

The events held during the previous 12 months had sharply raised the profile of the Trust, attracting new supporters, strengthening ties between the descendants of escaping prisoners of war and the brave Italian families who sheltered them, and boosting the fund-raising Appeal.

Among the 134 members of the Martino "family" present at the lunch were four PoWs – Keith Killby, the Trust's founder, Major Mick Wagner, Major Michael Lacey and Frank Unwin. There were also two descendants of Italian families who had protected PoWs (see page 9). Other guests included: Edoardo Napoli, counsellor at the Italian embassy; Sir Stuart Etherington, chief executive of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations; and Francesco Trivelloni, deputy mayor of Fontanellato, home to the prison camp from where a mass escape took place in 1943.

In his opening remarks, Sir Nick Young, Trust chairman, said he hoped to see increasingly strong links with Italian families that helped prisoners, commenting that he himself, as a son of a PoW escapee, owed his life to Italian people. He then acknowledged the work on behalf of the Trust by Francesco Trivelloni and by Vanni Treves, a trustee and chairman of the highly successful fund-raising Appeal. "He has no friends left," he said, alluding to the ferocious diligence of Vanni Treves, whose efforts were recognised by the award of Cavaliere Ufficiale conferred on him at the Italian Embassy in October.

After the main course, Nick Young introduced the speaker, Anne Copley, a Trust supporter and in her other guise an employment lawyer. She lives partly in Oxford and partly at Montefalcone in the Marche. She has done considerable research into the history of PoWs and Italian families in the Marche, where the prison camps of Servigliano, Sforzacosta and Monte Urano were based. As she pointed out, PoWs among Other Ranks wrote fewer accounts of their experiences than did officers, and her talk was built around two artefacts that help redress this imbalance (see panel).

At the conclusion of Anne's talk, and after dessert, guests watched an edited version of a film interview of Ray Ellis made a few years ago by Anne and her son. Ray, who died in 2014, escaped from Sforzacosta in August 1943, shortly before the Armistice with Italy, and was hidden for about a year by a local family, named Minicucci, before he eventually made it through the lines to safety with the Allies.

After the film, a thoroughly enjoyable occasion was concluded by warm applause for Christine English, a trustee and the main organiser of the luncheon, and by a toast to the Italian people.

The MSMT's annual luncheon in 2015 will be held at the Royal Overseas League on Tuesday November 3rd. Invitations will be sent out shortly and we hope that as many supporters as possible will be able to attend. The guest speaker will be Miles Skinner, who recently achieved the seemingly impossible task of running ten marathons in seven days on behalf of the Monte San Martino Trust, finishing in Rome.

We are keen to communicate with supporters by email as much as possible, to keep costs down. If we do not have your email address, and you are happy to provide it, please forward it to info@msmtrust.org.uk



This photo taken at the Luncheon shows Steve Dickinson (left) and Major Michael Lacey, who were both connected with one of the two stories that guest speaker Anne Copley told, with the aid of historic "props".

The first prop was a diary entitled "Servigliano Calling", which now belongs to Steve. He is the nephew of Robert Dickinson, a bricklayer from Lincoln who served with the Royal Artillery and was known to his mates as "Brickie Dick". Robert was captured in North Africa and held at Servigliano camp. During his imprisonment, he produced a diary, with bindings made out of old Red Cross cocoa tins (which even now have a distinctive odour) and bearing the logo "Macaroni ad infinitum".

After the Armistice, Robert escaped and was hidden by an Italian family. Before leaving them to join the partisans, he hid the diary in the house. Sadly, he was killed in a skirmish, but the diary was sent back to the Dickinson family.

The opportunity to meet Michael Lacey was both moving and unexpected for Steve. Robert was Michael's Signalman, and the two men were captured together. After the war, Michael followed up all his men and was aware that Robert had not made it safely home.

Anne then told the second story, with the aid of a photo handed to her by Alfredo Antognozzi, from Montelparo in the Marche.

The photo was of a young woman, who according to Alfredo was an actress named Doris and the sister of an escaped prisoner from Sforzacosta known as Antonio, or Anthony, Swinger. Antonio was sheltered for eight months by the family of Alfredo's uncle, Gino Antognozzi, aged 17 at the time.

Anne's account of how she eventually tracked down the current members of the Swinger family – several of whom came to the Luncheon – can be read at <http://www.msmtrust.org.uk/news/a-diary-and-a-photo/>

Our Italian 'cousins'

One of the main aims of the Trust is to track down descendants of Italian families who helped prisoners on the run, and to welcome them into the Martino 'family'. For that reason, we were especially pleased that two current members of brave Italian families were present at the annual Luncheon in November 2014. Here are their stories.

Anna Maria Orlandi (pictured right) is the grand-daughter of Luigi Orlandi, who – as the only English speaker in Reginaldo, a village in the Abruzzo – took the lead when the villagers sheltered Daniel "Jack" Hobbs and his three companions in the autumn of 1943. Jack – the father of Robert Hobbs, who was at the Luncheon together with his wife Cynthia and Anna Maria – had escaped from Monte Urano in the Marche. During his brief stay at Reginaldo before crossing the Allied Lines and reaching safety, Jack, an armourer by trade, mended the villagers' clocks and shotguns.

Jack kept a diary, which contained two names – one of them that of Luigi, whose English had been learned during the 11 years he had spent in the USA. After Jack died in 1989, Robert read the diary and eventually set about tracing the Orlandi family.

In 2007, when the Hobbs family made its second visit to the Reginaldo area, he succeeded. By then Luigi had died, but Robert met members of the family, was given the same wine to drink that his father had drunk in 1939 and was handed his father's razor. Since then, Robert has frequently returned to the village. Last year he arranged for a plaque to be put up commemorating the bravery of the villagers. A book in Italian about escaping PoWs in Abruzzo, including Jack's story, has recently been published.



Alessandro Bellazzi, left, and John Davison

ALSO at the Luncheon was **Alessandro Bellazzi**, the grand-nephew of Giovanni Bellazzi, who sheltered George Norman Davison. Norman served with the Royal Artillery and was captured in Libya and imprisoned first at Servigliano, in the Marche, and then at a labour camp at Sforzesca, near Vigevano, in Lombardy. He escaped after the Armistice and was hidden by the Bellazzi family. Vigevano residents then arranged for him to be helped across the border at Lake Como to Switzerland in 1944.

Back home, he turned his wartime diary into a manuscript shortly before he died in 1986. The manuscript was discovered in the attic by his son, John Davison, and published under the title *In The Prison of His Days*.

At first the Davison family had no success in tracing the Bellazzi family. Then, Dennis Hill of the Servigliano Camp 59 Survivors website, put him in touch with Anne Copley, who suggested that John should send a copy of the book to the Vigevano Resistance memorial site.

John says: "A few weeks later I received the shock of my life in the form of an email from *L'Informatore*, a Vigevano newspaper, with pages from the paper containing full details about the Bellazzi family and others who had helped my father. 'Storie mai raccontate - stories never told before'".

Giovanni had died but his daughter Mariella owns a pharmacy in Vigevano. The newspaper editor walked into the pharmacy one day and asked her if she was Giovanni's daughter. To hear that her father had been involved with the Resistance and had hidden Norman came as a total surprise to Mariella.

The Bellazzi and Davison families then began a close friendship. Mariella was further overwhelmed with emotion when John Davison visited Vigevano in 2010 and, while thanking her family, gave her some money. It was, he told her, the spare money left over from the sum that Giovanni had given Norman to buy railway tickets from Milan to Como – all that time ago.

The Trust was so pleased that John, his wife Lesley and daughter Eleanor, were able to attend the lunch together with Alessandro, who had flown over from Italy. "Although we only met four years ago it seems to me as if I have known them for many years, like old family friends," says Alessandro, who also stays in close touch with the Trust and sent us a moving message of friendship on April 25th this year, the 70th anniversary of Italy's Liberation.

Pilgrimage to Matelica

Mike Davidson tells how research into his father's adventures as a partisan led to his family's participation in a ceremony on April 25th, Italy's Liberation Day

Towards the end of April, I and five other members of the Davidson family were honoured to take part in a moving ceremony of commemoration that helped us learn more about my father's time as a partisan – a chapter of his life that he rarely discussed. The event, which took place in the hills near Matelica, in the Marche, on April 25th, commemorated partisans from the area who lost their lives during the war.



From left: Liddy and Ian Davidson, Kate and Mike Davidson and Sandy Williamson-Noble listen to Danilo Baldini

My father, Douglas Davidson, who served with 44th RTR in North Africa, was shipped to Italy after his capture in June 1942 and incarcerated in Camp 70, near Fermo. Following the Armistice in 1943, the PoWs in his camp were embarked on trains for Germany. He and several others escaped near Bologna; he made his way south and in mid-October joined a group of partisans.

When he died in 1993, he left many questions unanswered. I and Ian, my brother, and Sandy, my sister began researching his partisan involvement. We located PG 70 and also the approximate area where his group had been based, near Matelica.

In May 2014, during the Tenna Valley Trail, my wife, daughter and I took a “day off” and travelled to Matelica, hoping to strike lucky. And we did! We were directed to the library where we were told that

someone would come who could help us. In came Gino Colonnelli, a local academic who has written about the Resistance and partisan activity in the area. He gave me a copy of his book, containing photos of my father we had never seen and describing exactly where Gruppo Roti had been based: an old monastery in the nearby mountains. We promised to return in 2015 on April 25th, Italy's Liberation Day.

On April 24th, we met Gino as arranged in Matelica. We also met Danilo Baldini, the son of Guiseppe Baldini, one of the Italian leaders of the group. An English expat, Douglas Allum, kindly acted as our translator. Our visit to the abandoned monastery was sobering, as we tried to imagine what life must have been like as they lived through the harsh winter of 1943-44.

At the ceremony the following day, at which I, Sandy and Ian and our spouses were all present, Danilo insisted on “presenting” us to the Italian audience as the first English people to attend this event for over 30 years! Over dinner that evening we reflected on our experiences. We had discovered so much, but there are still huge gaps in our knowledge of my father's activities. The search continues!

OBITUARY: Wanda Newby

THE TRUST regrets to report the death in February of Wanda Newby, aged 92, whose meeting with travel writer Eric Newby is memorably described in his book *Love and War in the Apennines*. They came across each other in a hayloft where Eric, who had a broken ankle, was hiding after escaping from the PoW camp at Fontanellato. She had already spotted him, and vice versa, from when the girls of the town would walk or ride past the camp and wave at the prisoners – an event that prompted the sentries to fire at the windows to deter the men from looking out.

After being smuggled into a hospital, Eric received a note from Wanda, in her typically forthright tone: “Get out! Tonight 22.00, if not Germany tomorrow 06.00.” She persuaded her father, an anti-Fascist, to drive him into the mountains but, after five months at liberty, Eric was recaptured and taken to Germany.

Eric returned to Italy after the war while working for M19, which was helping those who had shielded escaping prisoners. He managed to track down Wanda, who was working for the Allied Screening Commission. They got married in Florence in 1946.

Wanda's Slovenian family, named Skof, had been moved to Fontanellato by Mussolini's Italianisation programme, as she reported in her own book *Peace and War: Growing Up in Fascist Italy*. After the war, she became Eric's invaluable companion while researching his books, her combative personality coming over clearly in the narratives.

Wanda and Eric, who died in 2006, were firm supporters of MSMT.

OBITUARIES

The Trust is sad to record the deaths of the following PoW escapers and MSMT supporters

Rivers Scott, right, who died on May 22, 2014, aged 92, escaped to safety in Switzerland and, in later life, became a distinguished literary editor.

Educated at Eton and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read history, he was commissioned in the 17th/21st Lancers, a tank regiment, after the outbreak of the Second World War. He saw action in Tunisia at the battle of Kasserine Pass in February 1943, where he rescued a gunner from his blazing tank. Captured by the Germans, he was originally going to be sent to a German camp but he swapped with another prisoner who wanted to be with his friends, and so went to Fontanellato camp, near Parma, instead.

This saved his life. Those sent to the German camp were killed, while the 600 PoWs at Fontanellato were allowed to march out after the Armistice, in September that year.

Rivers then spent three months on the run, sleeping in barns and learning to speak Italian from peasants who sheltered them. His companion, a fellow officer, had been a vintner and they kept their spirits up by recalling menus at the Savoy and imagining what they would eat and drink each evening. After internment in Switzerland, he was appointed interpreter to an Australian transport officer, then became ADC to General “Monkey” Morgan at Caserta.

After the war, Rivers learned French in Paris and ran a schools' magazine in English and French for three years, before joining the *Times Educational Supplement*. This was the start of a career as a literary editor and publisher that saw him gain a reputation as not only a consummate professional but as a most likeable man. Tributes from colleagues attest to his modesty, congenial company and unshowy erudition – and to his considerable skill at disarming difficult contributors.

Among the publications that Rivers worked for were the *Daily Telegraph*, where he became literary editor in 1962; *Now!* magazine; the *Mail on Sunday*; and *The Tablet* (Rivers had converted to Catholicism as a young man). He also had a spell working for Hodder & Stoughton and, in 1981, he started up a literary agency, Scott Ferris Associates. He also wrote introductions for reprints, reviewed crime fiction, ran a newsletter about new books translated from German, and contributed reviews to the Catholic press.

Rivers's wife, Christina, pre-deceased him. He is survived by their five sons and by Gloria Ferris, his business partner, with whom he lived in Wales in his final years.

Rivers was a stalwart supporter of MSMT and often attended its annual Luncheon. He is greatly missed.



Peter Stern, who died in April 2014 aged 94, was commissioned in 1941 and posted to 1st Field Squadron RE, 1st Armoured Division. He embarked for Egypt with the 8th Army and was in Tobruk at the surrender in June 1942. He attempted to escape in a 15cwt truck with three or four sappers, but was captured by the Italians 10km outside Tobruk.

During 1942-43 he was a PoW at PG 21 Chieti and was latterly a member of a tunnelling team. In September/October 1943, he hid with others in a tunnel while the Germans evacuated the camp. He escaped with Major Bill Gordon and two others to the mountains and joined a small party of SAS Commandos who commandeered a fishing boat. They sailed to Termoli, on the Adriatic coast, where he unexpectedly met his brother Michael who was there with the 1st Army.

He was repatriated to UK and in 1944 was posted to 505 Field Coy RE, 50 (N) Division. He landed in Normandy on the night of D-Day. He then served in northern Germany and Brussels until he was de-mobbed in 1946. Peter spent most of his post-war career working on irrigation and water supply development overseas.

In 2009 he visited Chieti with his wife Judy and family. He found the school building where the escapees had stayed and met a man who as a youngster had helped escaped prisoners.

THIS PAINTING, entitled *Farewell Stelae* (oil on linen), is by artist and MSMT supporter Susan Wilson. It goes on show during an exhibition of her work at the Pinacoteca Palazzo Ricci, in Monte San Martino, from July 12th to October 20th.

In addition to paintings of flowers and seasonal landscapes, the exhibition includes work, such as this, that is related to the long journey of Susan's father, a New Zealand soldier, as he and his comrades fought their way up Italy in the Second World War. The campaign took them from Taranto, via Cassino, to Venice, where, to the irritation of the British, the Kiwis stayed in the Albergo Daniele.

When stationed in Senigallia, Susan's father withdrew money from his soldier's account and bought a ring, proposing to her mother who was far away in Wanganui, running a hospital maternity unit.

Susan says that *Farewell Stelae*, a portrait of herself wearing her father's medals, was made on the death of her father, the Rev. C. R. Wilson, in 1992. It captures the idea of Greek Funerary Stelae, where the bereaved wave to the departed. There are three of these, one of which is in the New Zealand Portrait Gallery. She adds that her first real insight into her father's experiences came in 1987, when she and her parents made a harrowing visit to Cassino, where so many New Zealand soldiers died. During their trip to Italy, the memories weighed heavily on her father.



Last year Susan took part in an exhibition coinciding with the 70th commemoration of the battle at the Biblioteca Comunale in Cassino. She delivered this painting and four etchings of Cassino. On her way back there to collect the work, she called in on the Millozzi family at Monte San Martino. Giuseppe Millozzi, son of Antonio, the Trust's co-ordinator in Italy, immediately asked her if she would exhibit there. Susan is a Member of Faculty at The Royal Drawing School, London, and her work is in many private and public collections.

ELMS NEWS

Nick Young and Christine English of MSMT attended the annual **Escape Lines Memorial Society (ELMS)** Reunion in York over the weekend of 24th-26th April. The meeting was the usual combination of happy reunions and memories shared with friends, lots of fun and a moving service of commemoration and wreath-laying held at Eden Camp.

This year the meeting was enhanced by the participation of a group of 20 Italian students and their teachers from the Tenna Valley, in Italy, with their costs supported by ELMS and MSMT.

The students were delighted to meet some escapers and their helpers, as well as others from younger generations who are helping to keep the memories of these brave people alive. Grateful thanks to Roger Stanton and the ELMS Committee! Inspired by their visit to the UK, the Italian students with their teachers and parents then joined walkers on the final day of the highly successful **Tenna Valley Freedom Trail**, which ran this year from May 6th to 11th. This was the third such Trail based on Servigliano in the Marche. Eighteen walkers went out from the UK, and were joined by local people.

Expertly organised by the ELMS committee as usual, the events included displays by the Northumbria Army Cadet Force band as the walkers visited and laid wreaths at villages where escaping prisoners of war were sheltered. Warm thanks go to the present-day inhabitants of these villages for their kind reception. A full report can be read at <http://www.ww2escapelines.co.uk/>. The Trail is a joint ELMS/MSMT event and Trust members are warmly encouraged to join it in 2016, from May 11th-16th.

ELMS events: Family Day at National Memorial Arboretum, August 9th; ICI Londres, December 12th/13th (service at St Clement Danes Church, Dec 13th); York Reunion, 29th April to 1st May 2016.



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KEITH KILLBY, MSMT founder, was recently interviewed by Ben Macintyre, the author and columnist on *The Times*, for the authorised wartime history of the SAS. Keith, who served with the Medical Corps and joined the SAS, was captured during a raid on Sardinia. The book's publication and a related three-part TV programme on BBC2 are projected for autumn 2016.

MSMT board: Sir Nicholas Young (Chairman); Justin de Meo (Treasurer); Hon. Letitia Blake (Secretary); Vanni Treves, CBE, (Appeal Chairman); Omar Bucchioni; Christine English; Caroline Gavin; Nicholas Gent; Ian Laing, CBE. The Administrator and newsletter/website editor is John Simkins

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