



# The Monte Cassino Society

Furthering an interest in the Italian Campaign 1943–1945

NA15141

Winter 2016

## Welcome

*Welcome to the Winter newsletter. I trust everyone had a good Christmas and a happy New Year.*

*As most of you will be aware, as part of a Lottery funded project to compare the bombing and rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral with Monte Cassino Abbey, the pupils of Northleigh School were going to design a new website for us. I am happy to report that the website, complete with a new laptop on which to run it, has now been handed over. Our new web address [www.montecassinossociety.co.uk](http://www.montecassinossociety.co.uk)*

*At present, the website is very much a work in progress. I have to transfer all the information from the old site to the new one, and although I received the new laptop in November, work commitments have meant that I have, as yet, done little to it.*

*There is one major bonus with the new website, we now have a Facebook page! This means that any photos that may be of interest can*



*be posted to the Facebook page. I would ask that you post in albums, and give it a title and date. If you want, you can add a little about each photo. If you go to the website, there is a link to Facebook.*

*All that remains is to wish everyone a happy New Year and happy photo posting.*

*Phil Soady  
Son of the late Gerald Soady  
91st LAA, Royal Artillery,  
4th British Infantry Division*

## News

### Visit to Cassino 9th to 15th May 2016

Due to unavoidable cancellations, there are now limited places available on the May Pilgrimage. Sadly two veterans who had planned to join have had subsequent health problems meaning they have had to withdraw.

#### A brief reminder of the Itinerary:

Mid day BA flight from Heathrow to Rome and transfer by coach to the Edra Palace Hotel in Cassino.

Itinerary includes: -The British & Commonwealth War Cemetery in Cassino;  
Monte Cassino Abbey and Point 593;  
Tour of the Liri Valley & river crossing;  
Rocca Janula, Castle Hill;  
The Italian Cemetery;  
St Pietro Infine (ruined village never rebuilt)

Picinisco;  
Piano Delle Orme Museum;  
Ninfa Gardens;

Transfer by coach to Rome for return BA flight to Heathrow.

Half Board with two additional lunches, at Settimo Cielo following the visit to the Cemetery and lunch provided by the ladies of Picinisco during our visit.

Cost: Double/twin room £620—Single £720

If interested, please contact Paul Taylor, John Leach or Judith Coote as soon as possible. Contact telephone numbers on page 12

( Paul will be writing shortly to those who have paid deposits requesting the balance which is due end of January)

### Aim

To remember and further an interest in the experiences of all who took part in the Italian Campaign.

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## News (continued)



PIPES AND DRUMS OF THE STOKE ON TRENT BLACK WATCH ASSOCIATION BY OUR MEMORIAL

### Annual Memorial Service at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas

We are holding our Annual Memorial Service on the afternoon of Saturday 22nd May 2016. It will follow the same pattern as in previous years—a cup of tea/coffee on arrival, the Service beside the Memorial followed by afternoon tea in the marquee. We need to know approximate numbers attending earlier than the date of the next newsletter. If you are interested in joining us will you please complete and return the enclosed pro forma to Judith –contact details on page 12. ('Interest only', to enable us to advise the caterers at the Arboretum on likely numbers). Details of timings, etc. will be in the next newsletter.

Last year those requiring overnight accommodation used the Premier Inn Lichfield town centre. It was very comfortable and close to the Arboretum. We then met for a meal on Saturday evening at a local pub— hopefully we will be able to do the same this year. It is a good opportunity to meet with friends old and new.

### Field of Remembrance, Westminster Thursday, 5th November 2015

We had our usual plot and, as for the past couple of years, the British Legion restricted the numbers attending the opening service. In addition to the three ladies in the photograph, Phil Soady was on hand to set out the plot with our dedicated crosses. Sadly our Plot Master, Jim Knox, was taken ill at the last minute and was unable to attend. Dianne Preston deputised for him and writes -

*After the short opening service when we heard one of the rare occasions when Prince Harry was introduced as HRH Prince Henry, the Duke of Edinburgh led the way and just looked at me as if he was thinking what on earth is that, gave a little turn of the head, grunted and carried on. Do you think that has something to do with the fact that I fluttered my eyelashes!?! The Duke stopped and chatted to the gentleman next to me who was fronting the Atlantic Convoy plot asking him which ship he was on and when finding out it was a lease lend ship the Duke's response was "Did the B\*\*\*\*y thing float?" It was interesting listening to one sailor speaking to another.*

*Leading the way for Prince Harry was a lady who was picking out who Prince Harry was to speak to and I was introduced to him by name! He reminisced of the time he spent with the society at Cassino and how much he enjoyed speaking to the veterans. He told me this he has inherited—"from my Dad" - both find it hard to leave a group and what he wanted to do was to just sit and talk. He hoped he would be able to join in again in the future.*

*Prince Harry always comes over a pleasant young man on TV who loves to have a joke at his brother's expense, but aware the cameras and microphones are focusing on him. On a one to one basis, complete eye contact and just a chat with a charming young man.*



DIANE PRESTON, SUSAN DEADMAN AND MAUREEN STRINGER



## News (continued)

Those of us fortunate to have attended the 70th anniversary commemorations at Cassino will remember the time and interest Prince Harry gave to all the veterans attending the reception following the service.

The fact that he was in attendance was due to the intervention of the then Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Peter Wall who, when introduced to him, I took the opportunity to ask for his support in making the 70th anniversary service a memorable occasion. He certainly did that as it was at his instigation that a military escort and band attend, and more importantly, a member of the Royal Household. It was our good fortune that Prince Harry was that Royal personage. Without Sir Peter's intervention things may well have been very different as our Embassy staff in Rome were having difficulty getting funding from the Government.



BRIGADIER C.J. THACKRAY, JIM KNOX, GORDON CRUSE, MIKE ANSLOW, GEN. SIR PETER WALL, JUDITH COOTE, HENRY MCKENZIE JOHNSTON, THEO DAVIES & LT COL H. CORMACK

(Taken at a Land Army Dinner to celebrate the Battles for Cassino at the Staff College, Shrivenham)

## Remembrance Sunday Services Around the Country

### LONDON



This year our largest number to date represented the Society at the Cenotaph Service and March past. In all twenty gathered on Horse Guards Parade, several 'new' members joining those regulars who always support us. Special thanks to Debbie Hogan who is always first on the parade ground and collects our marker, Phil Soady who as photographer is never in the photographs! and Mike Anslow who does his best to keep everyone in step! A big thank you to Veteran John Hodgson, (South African 6th Armoured Division) who laid the Society's wreath.

Unfortunately this year we did not get a mention by the BBC—a pity as, along with the website, it is our only means of advertising the Society to a larger audience.

### PLYMOUTH HOE

As he has for several years, David Gaskin laid a wreath on our behalf at the Service on Plymouth Hoe. Unfortunately we do not have a photograph of David but thank him for 'crossing the Tamar' from his home in Saltash to represent us.

## News (continued)

### SWANSEA



For several years Veteran Theo Davies (6th Btn. The Queens Own Royal West Kents) has braved the weather to lay our wreath at the Swansea War Memorial. This year he was again there to pay his respects to lost comrades.

### DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN



In absolutely atrocious weather Helen Prescott, daughter of the late William Frank Sweetman attended the service at the War Memorial on the sea front at Douglas. Helen did make the local TV news telling the reporter she was not only remembering her Dad but representing the Monte Cassino Society. (Photo taken in the summer when Helen and her daughter visited Cassino).

### CHISLEHURST

Remembrance Sunday is a significant point for many people and no more so for Meridian Chapter, it is an honour and pleasure to have been aligned with Chislehurst Branch Royal British Legion for the past 9 years. This year we again gathered with other community groups at 'The Queens Head' in preparation for the annual parade and service at Chislehurst Cenotaph, it is always good to catch up with everyone again with a community spirit that so often seems to pass us by in our daily lives.

Turnout this year was particularly good, especially from Meridian Chapter and other bike groups, I think most of us agreed that with no space left for parking anywhere, attendance was the best to date. Chapter Members Fred Blunden took the helm as Parade Marshal and Adrian Clark was Standard bearer - Fred Blunden and Road Captain Steve Uffindell also laid Wreaths on behalf of Meridian Chapter and 'The Monte Cassino Society'. The parade was headed by ex-armed services Meridian Members followed by the Scouts, Cubs, Brownies and other community groups including the main Meridian contingent and other bikers.



At the start of the service the following was read out:

"This year a new name was added to the War Memorial: Thomas de Quincey, his name was engraved in October this year and is the first addition since WW2 - He was a 2nd Lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade and was killed in 1915. His name was not engraved when the Memorial was built because for years his Mother refused to accept he was dead. His name was however inscribed on the Ploegsteert Memorial Belgium, his family being unable to intervene in that case. The reasons for his Mother's refusal are not clear, but her determination speaks of the pain brought by war - Pain on the field of battle and pain for those at home - physical pain and mental pain. May Thomas' name be the last name engraved on our War Memorial"



After the event the parade returned to the Queens Head for Tea, Cakes a pint or whatever the favourite tittle and a chat for an hour or so before drifting off for Sunday lunch.

Dave Mann

Assistant Director and Charter Member, Meridian Chapter



Thank you to all those who represent us at services around the country.

## News (continued)

### Desecration of Monte Cassino Memorial Sites

The following article appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on Friday 18th December. The previous evening I had been contacted by a reporter and gave the Society's stance on this terribly upsetting development. I had been warned of it initially by our own Perry Rowe and at his request had drafted a letter to Cassino Town Council and the British Embassy in Rome. Subsequently I was contacted by Damiano Parravano from the Gustav Line Association—he requested that I sign a petition against the development, which I duly did on behalf of the Monte Cassino Society. The development was closed down on 21st December after the Polish Embassy protested to the Italian Foreign Ministry. This is, however, not the end of the story.

The developers were forced to dismantle their Santa Village because the Township of Cassino ordered them to open the road to the Albaneta monastery. In fact they had closed the road from the Polish War Cemetery by a gate and the western and northern access to the area by other barrages. Obviously, opening the road they cannot ask people to pay. In their articles they say that they understood the importance of the area and they decided to dismantle Santa's Village leaving just a crib. However, they still want to build a brewery, a B&B, a cafeteria and some sort of farm house. More information can be found on the Gustav Line website - (google [The memorial places of Montecassino have been desecrated](#) for more information..

I would urge everyone to sign the petition—Salviamo l' albeneta di Montecassino—Save Albeneta on Montecassino

Judith Coote

# War veterans enraged by Father Christmas village on edge of Monte Cassino

Attraction that has fake snow and plastic penguins condemned as insult to thousands who lost lives

By Nick Squires in Rome

A ROW has broken out in Italy over the building of a "Father Christmas Village", complete with fake snow and plastic penguins, on the flanks of Monte Cassino, where thousands of British and Allied soldiers lost their lives during one of the toughest battles of the Second World War.

Veterans' groups say the tourist attraction, which includes a Santa's Grotto, a sleigh pulled by reindeer figures and a forlorn-looking donkey, is disrespectful to the soldiers who fought and died at Monte Cassino in 1944 as they tried to dislodge German forces from the ancient abbey on top of the hill.

Protesters say the attraction, which includes an "enchanted wood", may

even be dangerous, with the possibility that there is unexploded ordnance still buried in the ground.

"It's as if someone started putting up stalls, selling sausages and laying on games on the sands of Omaha Beach in Normandy," a coalition of local protesters said in a statement.

The Christmas village was built by a local businessman this month on a flat piece of land close to the Polish Cemetery of Monte Cassino, where more than 1,000 Polish soldiers who took part in the battle are buried.

It is also close to a track known as Cavendish Road, a path that was widened by Indian and New Zealand troops in order to allow Allied tanks to attack German positions during the campaign to take the hill.

The land is owned by the Abbey of Monte Cassino, the 6th century retreat founded by St Benedict. It was a key strategic objective for the Allies as they advanced north towards Rome. An obelisk marking the sacrifice made by the Polish troops looms over the Christmas

Village, which includes an archery range, drinks stands and a sign proclaiming "Polo Nord" – the North Pole.

"This is a sacred place and should not be used for any commercial activities," Salvatore Avella, the president of a local heritage group, told *The Daily Telegraph*. "It should be respected. The men who fought here came from Britain, America, India, New Zealand, Poland, France, Morocco and elsewhere." The Christmas Village had blocked access to many war monuments, he said.

The Polish embassy in Rome has sent a formal letter of complaint to the Italian foreign ministry. The attraction offended "the dignity of the most important Polish monuments in Italy", it said.

The abbot of the monastery, Donato Ogliari, said he could see no harm in the area being used for an attraction that brought joy to children and their parents. Thousands of British and Commonwealth soldiers died during the campaign but their cemetery is in the valley below Monte Cassino, further away from the Christmas Village.

## Accounts

### OUR STANDARD

In the Summer of 2013 an idea was put to your Committee on two points:

- 1) Society's own ties and scarves
- 2) Our own standard

The ties we were able to provide but unfortunately the scarves proved rather expensive. The Committee were able to provide our very own standard. So in the next few lines I want to share with you -

#### **"The birth and travel of your standard during its first 2 years"**

In the Winter of 2013 I undertook the task of obtaining a standard for our Society. I thought it was going to be an easy task, well think again!

First I had to find a manufacturer of standards and, with the help of the Royal British Legion, I found and contacted a firm in Manchester. After a number of telephone calls, it was quite clear that this could not be done over the 'phone. So with Lyn (my wife) in tow we set off on our first trip to Manchester. This turned out to be one of many.



On arrival in Manchester we drove down a dirt track and in front of us was what I thought was a derelict building but in fact it turned out to be the workshop. The entrance hall was just as bad but once inside I was confronted by an amazing number of standards in various states of manufacture together with a large amount of rolls of cloth in every colour you could think of. At this I knew the task ahead was going to be difficult.

Introductions made, we got down to business. What size? what colour or colours? what design? what wording? double or single side, printed or sewn, colour of edging (if any). After about two hours of discussion we finally came up with a basic idea of design and colours and with these we set off back to Warwickshire.

Over the next few weeks two designs with colours were put to the Committee and agreed on what we have today.

A second trip up the M6 to Manchester to finalise the design and colours and the deal was done, on the understanding it would be ready by May 2014.

There then followed a few months of calm with the occasional telephone call to Manchester only to be reassured it would be ready for our trip to Italy in May 2014. With only ten days to go I received the call I was waiting for "The standard" was ready. Another dash up the M6 and there it was "Our Standard" - after a frantic six months the Society had its own standard. It looked great. Carefully wrapped, placed in the car, not the boot, back to Warwickshire. We were off to Italy.

The travels began. First stop Gatwick, standard wrapped and placed in the hold. Unfortunately they would not let me take it into the cabin, so you can imagine the relief when I collected it from the baggage hall intact.

Then on to the hotel. At this point no-one, not even the Committee had seen it. Our intention was that it would be seen for the first time at the 70th Anniversary Service in front of Prince Harry but having had many requests by members to see it prior to the Service, it was shown to all members at the evening meal the night before and it was greeted with great pride.

Monday 19th May 2014, a great day, our Standard was on parade for the first time not only in front of Prince Harry but also the rest of the world via the TV and press present but most important of all at Cassino War

Cemetery in front of all our veterans. I think that day our veterans had a great sense of pride. At this point I must say that I also had great pride and satisfaction in carrying the standard on behalf of the Society on such an occasion at the head of the parade and at all events during our visit to Italy.

You might ask, "Could things get any better than this?" I thought no, how wrong could I have been. The next sixteen months were a roller coaster with its ups and downs, joys and sadness.

During this time the standard has been present at eight out of thirteen funerals of our veterans at various locations around the country, and I have always been warmly welcomed and thanked.

Also joyous events- to name a few -

July 2014 Italy Star Association Service, Canterbury  
 Aug 2014 Armed Forces Day, Henley-in-Arden  
 Nov 2014 Royal Albert Hall, London  
 May 2015 70th Anniversary V.E. Day, London (weekend)  
 May 2015 Dedication of Standard, N.M.A. Staffordshire

All the above events have been reported in previous articles within our magazine by Judith, so I shall not dwell on them, but if I had to choose the one that I will remember the most and with pride, is walking down the stairs at the Royal Albert Hall in front of The Queen and millions on TV.



MIKE AT HEAD OF THE STAIRS AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

Carrying our Standard with me saying to myself, "Don't trip, keep in step. Don't trip, keep in step" and to be told afterwards that my late Father's name was mentioned by Huw Edwards. This is followed by the 70th Anniversary of VE Day when our Standard was one of only twenty standards invited to attend.

So, in the short time we have had our Standard it's been on parade in front of The Queen, Prince Charles and Prince Harry and seen world wide through TV coverage in some way or another. Not bad for its first two years!

Mike Anslow

National Standard Bearer

Son of the late D.E.H. Anslow, 5th Btn. Grenadier Guards

## WHITE CHRISTMAS

By Robert Stevens

Christmas 1942 found Bob's signal unit camped on the airfield at Bengazi, littered with the wrecks of stukas and other German aircraft, courtesy of the Desert Air Force.

The push against Rommel's Africa Korps from El Alamein along the north African coast had been long and hard. Their diet of bully beef sprinkled with sand was not very appetising to say the least. Their underwear clung to their bodies and smelled of stale sweat, their water bottles were empty.

So, at last there was a lull, and a chance to freshen up. The water wagons began to arrive. An empty petrol tin cut in half and filled with water

suffice to soak a shirt, a pair of socks, and underpants, and lay them out in the hot sun to dry.

Everyone's spirits began to rise. Bob sought out his best mate, Jack Potter, they wandered over to the HQ tent to look at daily orders. There was the usual duty roster. Bob noticed that he was on guard duty that night. The next paragraph read—tomorrow Christmas day there will be Christmas dinner laid on for all troops in the marquee being erected in the next field at 1 o'clock precisely, followed by men on duty at 2 o'clock.

They joined the queue at the cookhouse "What are we

## Accounts (Continued)

having tomorrow cook?" asked one man. "Roast turkey and all the trimmings?" "You'll have a tin of maconachies (meat & veg) and like it". Everyone laughed.

The rest of the day was spent relaxing, some were having a quiet smoke, playing cards, or writing home. Bob wondered how his family were coping with the air raids on London, his step-mother, and his sisters. The last letter he received from them was back at base in Tel el Kabir, before Alamein, in which they told him they were well, and thinking and praying for him. His thoughts were interrupted by a shout of tea up at the cookhouse, he got his mug and joined the others.

Bob's guard duty passed off without incident and he was up at reveille as usual. After breakfast Royal Army Service Corps vehicles began to arrive; the clink of bottles could be heard. Bob and Jack joined a number of squaddies watching the unloading, "Could be we're going to get a bottle of beer?" said Bob. "You won't get drunk on that siree" replied Jack in his broad Derbyshire accent.

"On parade" the voice of the sergeant major echoed in the still air, and the men fell in for a spell of drill, P.T., followed by a game of football, and so the morning passed.

At precisely 1 o'clock the men not on duty filed into the marquee with their mess tins and irons (knives and forks). Trestle tables had been laid out with benches on which to sit. Now it is tradition in the British Army that on Christmas day the officers serve the other ranks their Christmas dinner, unless combat duties at the time make it impossible to do so, and this was no exception. The officers warmed to their task, each man was served with a bottle of beer, this was followed by beef, potatoes and sprouts, the

first meat they had seen since disembarking from the troopship at Suez.

The meal was finished off with a pudding, cook's recipe—it was rather more than the troops expected.

After the meal the Commanding Officer stood up "I think we owe a vote of thanks to the cooks who prepared this Christmas dinner with the equipment available to them, also to the men of the Royal Army Service Corps because without them we would have probably ended up with bully without the beef. This last raised a smile. "On a more sober note" he went on, "I salute the men who are unable to be with us today, those who gave their lives, and those lying wounded at base hospital, I think we owe them a minutes silence". Everyone stood up, after a minute, sat again. Then something happened that Bob was to remember for the rest of his life.

A young Scottish lad stood up, saying that he had been tuned into American Forces radio and he had taken down the words of a new song by the American composer, Irving Berlin and sung by a certain Bing Crosby, a popular crooner at the time. It was called 'White Christmas' and with the CO's permission he would like to sing it. The CO nodded and the boy, because he really was just a boy, started to sing.

'I'm dreaming of a white Christmas' - he had the voice of a soprano, the words came crystal clear in the hushed silence of that marquee. Have you ever seen grown men, soldiers at that, trying to hold back the tears welling up in their eyes? Bob felt a lump in his throat, his eyes were moist.

'And may all your Christmases be bright'. The Scottish soldier sat down to a thunderous round of applause. Christmas Dinner 1942 was over, the men trooped out of the marquee with the knowledge that tomorrow they would be on the move once more.



- Cornish Times, Thursday, December 24, 2015

This cutting is from my local newspaper. The article was submitted by my local Royal British Legion branch.

This was not our first visit to El Alamein. A few years ago my husband Geoff and I made the trip from Alexandria, along the coast road to the War Cemetery and Museum at El Alamein. On both occasions we took a tour from our cruise ship.

On the earlier trip, back on board ship and leaving port, I got into conversation with a very nice lady. We were reminiscing on the day—it

had obviously affected both of us. Somehow the conversation got around to our Fathers' war service and we found both had served in North Africa and in Italy. I mentioned the Monte Cassino Society and we promised to keep in touch.

That lady was Doreen Belcher who has worked tirelessly for the Society since that time. Doreen is a wonderful fund raiser as anyone who has joined our pilgrimages to Italy can testify. Who could refuse to buy a raffle ticket with such amazing prizes!!!??!!

Seriously, we might still be raising funds for the memorial if it wasn't for the intervention of Doreen. The Curator at the Arboretum advised raising the funds before embarking on design and build, and money was still trickling in. Doreen stepped in, headed the Memorial Sub Committee, found a monumental

mason who agreed to build it—and even went to the quarry and chose the stone. She liaised with the builders throughout. It is entirely down to her efforts that the Memorial was built and dedicated much earlier than it might have been and it has meant a number of our veterans no longer with us had the opportunity of seeing the memorial and knowing they would never be forgotten.

Judith Coote

Daughter of the late Gerald Soady, 91st LAA, Royal Artillery

## News round-up

Stories from Looe and Polperro

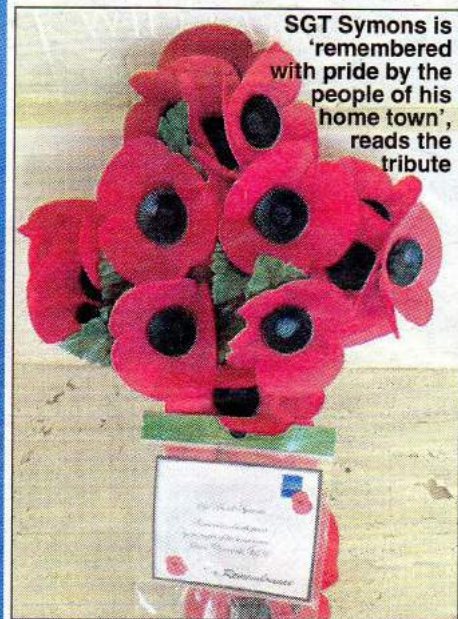


JUDITH Coote lays a poppy tribute to Sgt David Garfield Symons at the El Alamein War Cemetery



SGT Symons' name and those of his crew on the El Alamein memorial

## Tribute to hero taken to Egypt



SGT Symons is 'remembered with pride by the people of his home town', reads the tribute

A MEMBER of Looe's Royal British Legion (RBL) laid a tribute to a Second World War airman from the town during a trip to Egypt. Judith Coote visited the El Alamein War Cemetery and laid a cross of poppies in memory of Sgt David Garfield Symons, on behalf of the people of Looe. Sgt Symons was part of a Wellington bomber crew who failed to return from a raid on Benghazi on the night of June 12, 1942. The crew have no known grave, but their names are engraved on the walls of the North African memorial. Looe RBL spokesperson Dave Welch said Mrs Coote was given a vote of thanks at a recent meeting for her efforts in remembering the town's war casualties. Mrs Coote's father fought at Monte Cassino in Italy during the Second World War, and she is a founder member of the Monte Cassino Society, a group dedicated to furthering an interest in all who took part in the Italian campaign.

## Subscriptions/Donations

Subscriptions for 2016 are now due. (Please ignore if you paid towards the back end of 2015). Please make cheques payable to **THE MONTE CASSINO SOCIETY** and send to Judith Coote –address on page 12. Due to the cost of postage, we will not issue a receipt unless you request it.

All Monte Cassino Society income is spent on Remembrance—the cost of a plot in the Field of Remembrance, wreaths & crosses—and the cost of printing and posting newsletters. We have also in previous years subsidised the cost of holding services at the Arboretum as it is very expensive to organise and run an event worthy of our veterans.

In the eleven years since the Society was founded not a single request has been received for expenses nor any expenses paid.

## Letters

In October Jim Morgan, (Royal Corps of Signals attached to 4th Indian Division ) wrote to the Ministry of Defence requesting funding for the few remaining World War 11 veterans to again return to the places they served. The following is the reply from Mr G Krishnasamy, Defence People Secretariat (dated 7 December) and Jim Morgan's subsequent reply

7 December 2015

Dear Mr Morgan,

Thank you for your letter of 21 October regarding a scheme that will allow Service veterans to return to the sites where they served, particularly on the occasion of important anniversaries. Your letter has been passed to this branch of the MOD, as the area with responsibility for Service Personnel issues, and I have been asked to reply. I apologise for the time it has taken to respond.

Please be assured that the Government recognises the heroism and courage of those who served and died at the Battle of Monte Cassino in the Second World War which claimed some 50,000 Allied lives. We should never forget the sacrifice of those who fought so valiantly for our freedom. Your loyal and dedicated service is still appreciated today.

It may be helpful if I explain that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) does not fund visits by veterans to return to sites of Remembrance. The long standing MOD policy on official commemorations is that only certain specific anniversaries of events of major importance receive MOD sponsorship at public expense.

As you are aware, funding is still available from the Big Lottery fund, Heroes Return 2 scheme, as long as veterans travel before 31 December 2015 and haven't benefited from this scheme since 1 January 2013. In addition, "Remembrance Travel" the travel arm of the Royal British Legion, already arranges pilgrimages and tours to battlefields, war cemeteries, and memorials. For further information you may wish to call them on Tel: 020 3207 2321

I hope this is helpful, and thank you for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,



Mr G Krishnasamy  
Defence People Secretariat

Dear Sirs,

16th December 2015

Many thanks for your letter dated 7th December in response to mine of 21st October in which I suggested that the MOD might consider putting in place a scheme which would offer financial assistance to World War II veterans to return to the battlefields where they served more than 70 years ago. As the next significant anniversary for both those who served in Southern Europe and in the D Day landings will not be until the 75th in 2019, my suggestion was that this should be an ongoing scheme for perhaps one such opportunity in the interim for properly organised groups of a given number. The government has already shown its appreciation of our service through its "Heroes Return" schemes by which many of us have been able to return to pay our respects to those who were not fortunate enough to return as we did. We have been profoundly grateful for these opportunities which have great significance for us and it is gratifying to note that the government will, in all probability, continue to follow its policy by offering similar assistance in commemorating future anniversaries. It is a sad fact of life (and death) that few of us, now well into our nineties would be able to take advantage of such assistance in 2019. Although mine was just a suggestion by one individual veteran, I thought it might receive some sympathetic consideration by the Minister for Veteran Affairs to whom it was addressed. Did he ever see it?

It was just a thought—no more than that. Thank you for taking the time to acknowledge it. I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) Jim Morgan—Formerly 2601189 Signal Morgan A.J. 1942/46

The following was written by Pat Rigg to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Gallipoli Campaign

## GALLIPOLI

So very far away,  
The Dardanelles, Suvla Bay,  
Another time, another day.

Did they know where they were going  
When they sailed away?  
When they left to fight for their nation,  
Were they told their destination?

Gallipoli? Where's that?  
Not a clue. No idea. Don't know.  
But I do understand it's our duty to go.

The Hellespoint? I've heard that word.  
Going there? Me? Seems absurd.  
Asia Minor? Doesn't seem right.  
Men from South Shields going there to fight.

A world so far from our River Tyne,  
From ship-yard, dry-dock, pit-head, mine.

Does the sun always shine across the sea?  
Will the Hand of God watch over me?  
Will He bring me safely home one day,  
Back to friends and family, from far away?

From beaches, shores, landings, losses,  
Sea, sand, casualties, crosses,  
From mountains, valleys, cliffs, rock,  
Snipers, shells, shrapnel, shock,

To a life of nightmares: blood-red water,  
The Dardanelles, disaster, slaughter?

We had no idea what lay in store,  
When off we went, to fight in war,  
Off, with rifles, pack and kit,  
To do our best, to do our bit.

We can truly say we played our part,  
As we bury the memories deep in our heart,  
Memories of men who will breathe no more,  
Left for ever on that distant shore,  
Soldier, sailor, brother, mate,  
Precious lives claimed by unstoppable Fate.

From Australia, New Zealand,  
The fighting men came,  
From Britain, France, India,  
We honour each name.

At Gallipoli, thousands fell,  
One hundred years on,  
Remember Them well

## Books



Lorn Macintyre is a novelist, short story writer, poet, researcher and scriptwriter, whose credits include a television documentary on the story of the monastery of Montecassino. His webpage is at [www.lornmacintyre.co.uk](http://www.lornmacintyre.co.uk). His fiction can be purchased through [www.priormuir-press.co.uk](http://www.priormuir-press.co.uk) and through [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).



Born in Glasgow to Italian café owners, Angela Boni, brilliant graduate in Italian, and student of the Fascist professor Ernesto Grillo, celebrates her twenty-first birthday before preparing to go out to see relatives in Italy and to work for an aristocratic landowner. Her aunt and uncle live on a small farm under the protective shadow of the Benedictine monastery of Montecassino. Angela has an idyllic life among the mules which her uncle Benigno, a mountain guide, uses. In the gatherings with wine and song she becomes attracted to Augusto, a passionate enemy of Mussolini's Fascist regime and a committed Communist. Angela's sojourn is supposed to be for a year, when she returns to Glasgow in September 1939 to prepare a doctoral thesis on Dante supervised by Professor Grillo. But the outbreak of war keeps her in Italy, and as the Germans fortify the area to prevent the Allied army pushing north to Rome, Angela becomes one of many refugees in the monastery, under threat from the guns of both sides. This is a dramatic story of love, dedication and faith in the face of terror and destruction, which also examines the psychology of the German General Senger who was involved in the Montecassino campaign, and who had to reconcile the many deaths caused by his orders in the ferocious battles with his devout Catholicism.

## New Members

Julie Bluck, Grandfather was with the 8th Field Park Company

Sue Boulton, Daughter of George Bunday, East Kent Regiment

Carol Fielding, Daughter of Peter Roschet, Royal Sussex Regiment

Patrica McGeever, Daughter of James Dale, Leeds Rifles and Royal Tank regiment

Chris Shouli, Daughter of John Gordon Jones, REME

Ben Wood, Grandson of John Gordon Jones, REME



## The Monte Cassino Society

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