

The Murchison commemoration was a demonstration of strong connections of Italians with Italy and their cultural heritage

Italian war dead remembered

MURCHISON—On 13th November 2011, about 400 Italians travelled to the Murchison Italian Memorial Chapel and Crypt to honour Italian Prisoners of War and Italian civilians who died during WW2 in Australia. Formalities aside, the Murchison commemoration was a demonstration that Italians in Australia still have strong connections with Italy and their cultural heritage. The Crypt behind the sacred altar holds the remains of 130 Italians who died whilst in captivity in Australia from 1940 to 1947. Many of the dead were soldiers whilst others were civilians, including one woman.

In past years, the event was attended by many thousands of Italians from across Australia. Many are now too old to travel and there is a risk that future Italo-Australian generations will lose the significance of this commemoration if it is not recorded, remembered and attended with the passing of time. Few post-war Italo-Australians realise how important this event is in commemorating our past together as Italians and not forgetting our heritage and wartime Italians who died in custody in Australia.

Amongst those who attended the Murchison commemoration were the last few ninety-year-old World War Two soldiers, former Italian military representatives from the Italian air force, infantry, navy and other units and their families



Carabinieri (on the left) and Alpini (on the right) in Murchison



and friends. The official guests ranged from student representatives from six local schools and their teachers, the Victorian Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Italian Vice Consul for Victoria and Tasmania, the Mayor of Shepparton and Chairperson of the Italian Community Council in Australia. Among those buried in the Crypt are a number of soldiers who were part of the 18,000 Italian Prisoners of War sent to Australia from 1941 to 1947, captured by the British in northern Africa. Others were Italian civilians who died in Australian internment camps before being released in 1944. Very little is known of how many of these men and one woman died, but it seems unusual that so many of the men drowned or suicided whilst in custody. Some seemed to die of natural causes, but there are

some deaths that have few official explanations even in official army documents. What was even more unexpected is that some of the civilian files of the deceased Italian civilians have 'gone missing' in Federal Police Archives, where they were transferred in the 1970s from the National Archives. The Italians whose names appear and then disappear once deceased, leaves a feeling of an unrequited death and a sense of souls not resting in peace. Another interesting facet of this period is the increasing number of Italian deaths that are currently being discovered as 'unrecorded' in official war dead figures in Australia. There have even been a few Italian and Asian women and children who died at Tatura Interment Camp which are not referred to in official army reports of deaths in custody.

Sadly, we may never know what really happened to many of these Italians, but what is almost certain from examining documents that are available in the National Archives of Australia is that many of these deaths were avoidable, especially the many drownings and numerous suicides amongst the Italian soldier Prisoners of War in Australian custody. This revelation of how many unnatural deaths occurred amongst young, healthy, fit, 'relieved to be out of the war-zone' Italian soldiers raises many questions about wartime conditions in Australia.

Some of the seriously ill Italian civilians living in Australia at the time could have been sent home to their families to die in their own homes. Would civilized nations expect to keep dying persons in mandatory detention during

wartime? Those who were seriously ill were not even the slightest security risk and would not have been so in their dying days.

The issue is one of sincere, humane treatment by the captors of imprisoned human beings regardless of their politics, religion, ethnicity, guilt, innocence or other traits. All 'enemy aliens' interned in Australia deserved to be treated humanely, whether or not the Nazis, Japanese or Fascists were doing so in their camps.

Carmelo from Box Hill, Melbourne said in 2010 at 103 years of age: "I said to the soldier during my time in the Italian civilian prisoner work gang when he was beginning to treat us Italians badly – 'If you say that you are better than the Nazis, Japanese and Fascists, then treat us much better than they treat their prisoners. Don't just preach how superior you are, yet exploit us and treat us with contempt!'"

As compatriots - 'paesani' - of the pre-war Italians who suffered the consequences of being the migrant pioneers for the post-war Italian mass migration, we owe those Italians who died in custody our presence during the annual commemoration in November at Murchison, Victoria as witness to their ultimate sacrifice during wartime.

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A campaign designed to educate home owners, handymen, women and renovators

Asbestos Awareness Website

Australia has one of the highest incidences of asbestos cancers in the world: 1 in 3 homes contains asbestos

During national Asbestos Awareness Week (21 – 27 November), the launch of a new website is the focus of a campaign designed to educate homeowners, handymen, women and renovators about the dangers of working with asbestos in and around the home, and the risks of being exposed to asbestos fibres while renovating or maintaining homes.

Australia has one of the highest incidences of asbestos cancers in the world and with as many as one in three Australian homes containing asbestos, the week-long campaign, "Think Smart, Think Safe, Think asbestosawareness.com.au - it's not worth the risk!" features the launch of the Asbestos Education Committee's new website. The website, asbestosawareness.com.au was developed by the Asbestos Education Committee to ensure homeowners have access to important information about where asbestos might be found in and around the home and how to manage it safely.

In a study by Professor Anthony Johnson et al into "The prevalence of self reported asbestos exposure during home renovation in NSW residents" in 2008, showed: 60.5% of do it yourself (DIY) renovators reported being exposed to asbestos during home renovations, 53% reported their partner and 40% reported their children were also



Professor Nico van Zandwijk

exposed to asbestos during home DIY home renovations. 58% of DIY renovators cut AC Fibro Sheeting (the most common activity resulting in asbestos exposure), 37% of DIY renovators reported using a power tool to cut asbestos products and non DIY renovators were less likely to be exposed or have their families exposed.

The study concluded that asbestos exposure was common during home renovations – particularly in DIY and found a significant number of people were planning further renovations in the next five years.

During Asbestos Awareness Week (21 – 27 November), and particularly in the lead up to Christmas when people are undertaking home maintenance and renovations in preparation for the holiday season,

the campaign aims to educate Australians about the risks of being exposed to asbestos fibres.

Many Australians may unknowingly be putting their health and the health of their children, and neighbours at risk because they don't really understand the dangers of working with asbestos or know where it might be found in and around their home.

If a home was built or renovated in the years leading up to 1985, it most likely contains asbestos and while if left undisturbed it does not pose a health risk, during renovations or the demolition of these homes, asbestos fibres can be released into the air and be inhaled leading to asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

In launching the campaign, Professor Nico van Zandwijk, an international leader in asbestos diseases research and Director of the only national Asbestos Diseases Research Institute said, "We want Australians to ask themselves this very important question; 'Could my home contain asbestos and could I be putting my health and the health of my family at risk by disturbing asbestos? Importantly, if people find asbestos in their home, we're telling them; Don't cut it! Don't drill it! Don't drop it! Don't sand it! Don't saw it! Don't scrape it! Don't scrub it! Don't dismantle it!

Don't tip it! Don't waterblast it! Don't demolish it! And whatever you do... Don't dump it!", said Professor van Zandwijk.

"We're urging homeowners and renovators, particularly young couples who often enjoy the challenge of doing the work themselves and who are working within tight budgets, to think smart, think safe and visit asbestosawareness.com.au before commencing any home maintenance or renovation work, to learn about the dangers of working with asbestos so they can protect themselves and their families from asbestos dust and fibres.

Professor Nico van Zandwijk said, "The real issue with asbestos related diseases is that the patients being diagnosed today, were exposed to asbestos 20-40 years ago and so by educating families about the risks and preventative measures they can take today, we aim to reduce the number of Australians diagnosed with asbestos related disease in the future".

"During Asbestos Awareness Week, our message to all Australians who might be thinking of renovating, removing asbestos or working with asbestos in and around the home is to think smart, think safe, think asbestosawareness.com.au or you may put yourself and your loved ones at risk of developing asbestos related diseases later in life", he said.

It's Royal Doltone at Jones Bay Wharf, Pyrmont!

It was a true royal affair at Doltone House, Jones Bay Wharf Pyrmont last night where Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark attended a black tie gala dinner hosted by the Embassy of Denmark. Guests including Master of Ceremonies Matt Preston and NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell, enjoyed a decadent menu designed by recently named world's best Chef, Rasmus Kofoed.

An entree of smoked salmon & snow crab followed by a main of pork with juniper berries and crackling accompanied by parsley potatoes, pickled fungi with cider vinegar. The meal concluded with a selection of cheese and a stunning liquorice and red berry dessert. This is the second visit to Doltone House Jones Bay Wharf for Crown Prince Frederik having attended a gala dinner in 2009 for the World Masters Games. Managing Director and owner of Doltone House, Mr Paul Signorelli, had the privilege of personally greeting and escorting the royal couple from their vehicle into the venue. 'What an honour to host the Prince and Princess of Denmark at our venue. We've enjoyed working with the events team to the lead up of this special event' said Mr Signorelli. The couple continue their 6 day visit following their attendance at a Danish Environmental conference held earlier in the day.