

This does not mean that they have not revisited San Giorgio La Molara. Indeed, all but two have returned at least once to their home town, and some as many as four times. As Loretta Baldassar has noted in her recent study of Perth migrants from San Fior in the Veneto, the visit home becomes a 'secular pilgrimage', a visit to the home 'shrine', where there is not only renewed contact with family and friends left behind but a renewal of cultural ties and personal identity.¹² In the movement between two 'homes', the *sangiorgese*-Adelaidean – or the Adelaidean-*sangiorgese* – finds a bridge, continually constructed and perhaps illusory, between youthful past with its memories, and the reality of the mature-age present, between a village on a hilltop in Campania and a suburb on the Adelaide plains. The 'sanctuary' lies somewhere in between, in a hyphenated identity that the Italian migrant negotiates. Attachment to just one side of the double identity can create a sense of *absence* of the other. One *sangiorgese* from Adelaide remembers crying when he revisited San Giorgio, as he suddenly realised that he had become homesick for Australia. In San Giorgio he felt that he just could not cope.

For the *sangiorgesi*, as for other migrants in other places, the establishment in Adelaide of tangible signs of that double identity helps to come to terms with self on a day-to-day basis. Italians in South Australia, as elsewhere, have, from early post-war settlement, established clubs, associations and religious festivals as a vehicle for social and cultural affirmation, institutions that contribute to the maintenance of the collective memory, albeit frozen in time, of the village, province and region of origin. In 1978 migrants in Adelaide from San Giorgio La Molara established the San Giorgio Community Centre, which today is an important 'village' meeting place for the *sangiorgesi*. Twenty years earlier, in 1957, at the peak of post-war settlement, the *fešta* of the patron saint San Giorgio was established, with the support of the Capuchin Fathers, at the new St Francis of Assisi Church in the suburb of Newton.¹³ Today as many as 1,500 Italians, including second and third generation *sangiorgesi*, take part in the celebrations.

Like other Italian communities in Adelaide, the now-elderly first-generation migrants from San Giorgio hope that their culture and traditions will be maintained by their children and grandchildren. While this remains an aspiration, it is more realistic to think that the descendants of those who arrived in the 1950s will be willing

to acknowledge and come to terms with the heritage of their forebears and construct their own particular *sangiorgese*-Adelaidean identity. 'Return' visits of the younger generations can help achieve this and even result, if the visits are frequent or long enough, in a rediscovery of their ethnicity and the transformation of their identity.¹⁴ ■

Notes

¹ Today approximately 25 per cent of the Italian-born in SA come from Campania, 21 per cent from Calabria and 11 per cent from the Veneto. See Desmond O'Connor, 'Italians in South Australia', in James Jupp (ed.), *The Australian People*, 2nd ed., Cambridge U.P., 2001, p. 496.

² *Italiani nel Mondo*, XXVI, No. 15, 10 agosto 1970, p. 14. Australia-wide, in 1976 the most numerous Italian-born by region of origin were, in descending order, from Sicily, Calabria, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Abruzzo, and, in sixth place, Campania (Helen Ware, *A Profile of the Italian Community in Australia*, AIMA and CO.AS.IT, Hawthorn, Vic, 1981, p. 27).

³ Desmond O'Connor, *No need to be afraid*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town SA, 1996, p. 118.

⁴ Gianfausto Rosoli (ed.), *Un secolo di emigrazione italiana 1876-1976*, Centro Studi Emigrazione, Rome, 1978, pp. 43, 107-9. See also Federico Romero, 'L'emigrazione operaia in Europa (1948-1973)', in Piero Bevilacqua et al., *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana. Partenze*, Donzelli Editore, Rome, 2001, p. 398.

⁵ Romero, pp. 402-3.

⁶ *Il Popolo*, 13 agosto 1950, p. 6. Italy was hoping that 50,000 Italians would be admitted to Australia each year.

⁷ National Archives, SA, D4880/1&2, quoted in Desmond O'Connor, *No need to be afraid*, p. 118.

⁸ M. Iazeolla, *San Giorgio La Molara - il dialetto, i proverbi, i modi di dire, le immagini*, Cassa Rurale ed Artigiana, San Giorgio La Molara, 1994, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 7.

¹⁰ These seven were: Grazio Domenico De Ionno, Mariano Marciano, Carmine Paradiso (20 Sept. 1927), Domenico De Ionno, Michele Mercorella, Vincenzo Pescheta and Donatangelo Trotta (11 Oct. 1927).

¹¹ Unpublished archival data compiled by Desmond O'Connor.

¹² Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home. Migration experiences between Italy and Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, Vic., 2001, pp. 223, 245, 323, 338.

¹³ Antonio Paganoni & Desmond O'Connor, *Se la processione va bene ... Religiosità popolare nel Sud Australia*, Centro Studi Emigrazione, Rome, 1999, p. 96.

¹⁴ Baldassar, *op.cit.* pp. 288, 331.



WHAT BECAME OF THE PASSENGERS OF THE RE D'ITALIA

In Search of
KINGS

TYPES OF ITALIAN MIGRANTS who arrived yesterday in Melbourne by the *Re Italia*, which berthed at 19 North Wharf with passengers and cargo from southern European ports.

Cover of the book *In search of Kings* by Tony De Bolfo. The article on following pages is an extract from the book.

THE QUARRYMAN FROM SALCEDO: ANTONIO GNATA

BORN IN SALCEDO, PROVINCE OF VICENZA, 30 JUNE 1905.

DIED IN STAWELL, VICTORIA, 30 MAY 1938

by
Tony De Bolfo

In 1994, Melbourne journalist Tony De Bolfo sought to discover what prompted his grandfather and two brothers to leave their homeland in northern Italy for a new life in Australia. He turned to his great uncle, the late Iginio De Bolfo – at that time the only surviving member of the original trio who undertook that arduous forty-six day journey aboard the steamship *Re d'Italia* [King of Italy], in late 1927.

But what began as a simple curiosity became an overwhelming obsession for Tony, and led him on his own unbelievable voyage of discovery. Working from the original passenger list of the *Re d'Italia*, and drawing on the research skills developed through his years in journalism, he set out to uncover the life stories of the 105 men, women and children who accompanied his forebears down the gangway, into the unknown.

Eight years later, Tony has completed a book entitled *In Search Of Kings*, which was released in November to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the arrival in Melbourne of the *Re d'Italia*. In it he discusses his recollections of the three De Bolfo brothers, he looks at what Italy and Australia were both like in the 1920s and he explores the story of the voyage and the history of the *Re d'Italia* and its human cargo.

The following article relates to the life of Antonio Gnata, listed 53rd in the *Re d'Italia*'s disembarkees list.

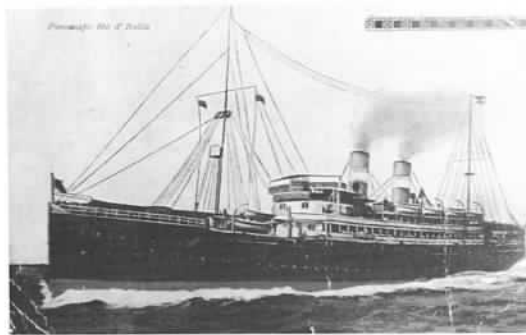
Of all the life stories of the passengers on the *Re d'Italia*, few are as sad or as tragic as that of Antonio Gnata.

Antonio was just twenty-two years old when he took his first steps down the battered gangway and onto North Wharf Melbourne in November 1927. But he would be dead barely a decade later, in circumstances so shocking that news of his untimely demise was never conveyed to his mother in the old country, for fear it would break her heart.

In fact, Antonio's ultimate fate would remain a mystery to his descendants for the next six decades. It seemed that the man's life story died with him, and it wasn't until I had completed three months' research in early 1998 that I could convey to Antonio's niece and nephew the terrible tale of what became of the quarryman from Salcedo.

I inadvertently stumbled onto the story of Antonio Gnata in January 1998, at the western suburbs home of a good-natured man named

John Dal Sasso. I had found John's name listed in the White Pages and called him to ask if he bore any connection with another of the listed passengers, Antonio Dal Sasso. John confirmed a connection, but said it would be best for me to talk to his father, Tony Dal Sasso. So we all met at John's home on a warm summer's night.



Postcard illustration of the passenger liner *Re d'Italia*, c1927.

Tony, who turned out to be Antonio Dal Sasso's nephew, is a real character. A post-World War II migrant with a happy disposition and general love of life, Tony delighted in telling tales of the glorious days of his Italian youth, over an ample glass of his home-made vino.

During a break in discussion, Tony turned to the list of passengers I had brought with me and pored over the names. To his excitement, he discovered the name of another relative, Antonio Gnata.

Tony told me that his mother, Ida, was the sister of Antonio Gnata and that Ida later married Antonio Dal Sasso's brother, Giovanni, in Italy. In other words, Tony was a nephew to the two Antonios who made the voyage on the *Re d'Italia*.

He could shed little light on what fate befell his maternal uncle, other than that he believed a man by the name of Gnata had been buried in the cemetery in the western Victorian town of Stawell many years ago. He suggested I contact his sister Maria Busana in Wonthaggi, for further information.

I called Maria, who was interested to learn of Antonio's given name, 'because he was always known as "Nini", to distinguish him from his father'.

'He served with the Alpini around the time of the First World War, and my mother told me he was a very nice man', Maria said. 'He worked here with other people from the same town of Salcedo. From what I understand, he had a bit of money saved up which he lent to people, but when he got sick and needed the money the people couldn't repay him. He was good enough to give them his heart, but he wasn't able to get it back'.

Antonio Gnata was born on 30 June 1905 in Salcedo, in the province of Vicenza in northern Italy. He was one of eight children reared by his father Antonio Gnata senior and mother Giovanna Lucia. His siblings were Luigi, Maria, Orsola, Erminia, Ida, Caterina and Amedeo.

Upon his arrival in Melbourne, Antonio was reunited with Amedeo, who had himself migrated to Australia three years earlier on the steamship *Regina d'Italia* (Queen of Italy). Amedeo, who assisted with younger brother Antonio's passage, had settled in the eastern Victorian town of Traralgon, where he split redgum for railway sleepers in and around the Gippsland area.

But the Gnata brothers' time together would be all too brief, for less than a year after Antonio's arrival in Australia, Amedeo set sail for Italy aboard the steamship *Orama*. Eight years later Antonio applied for the readmission of both Amedeo and a close friend and fellow miner from Salcedo, Vittorio Azzolin — but his application was rejected. This disappointment would later have a profound effect on the lonely Italian.

Antonio spent his first six years in Australia as a quarryman at a number of Victorian sites such as Boorara, Whitfield and Pyramid Hill and also in Berrigan in New South Wales, in the employ of Charles Snell of Oakleigh. He also worked seasonally as a cane cutter in the northern Queensland town of Giru, and in March 1934 became a naturalised Australian.

Maria's assertions of her uncle's generosity are supported by an immigration memo of August 1937, which reveals the fact that Antonio also attempted to secure passage for his old Italian friend Azzolin. The memo reveals that Antonio had lent another fellow countryman, Vittorio Livardo of Myrtleford, fifty pounds to assist him in a tobacco-growing venture, and further states: 'He maintains his people in Italy by periodical remittances and has therefore not accumulated any appreciable assets'.

Maria, a kindly woman who migrated to Australia with her mother in 1953, said that when she arrived in the country she had endeavoured to learn more of Antonio's death through those who knew him here, 'but nobody said much'. She always believed that Antonio, who never married, had died in the late 1920s, and that his furniture was sold to pay for the burial. 'But no-one would tell us where he was buried, and [his death] was bad for our family, especially for my mother's brother Amedeo, who had returned to Italy a few years before'.

'When Antonio died the other family members never told his mother, because she was blind and it would have destroyed her. She always said, "When is he going to write to me?" and until the day she died they used to read her letters that they had made up'.

'I did hear that he may have been buried in the Stawell Cemetery, which I visited more than thirty-five years ago on my honeymoon to Warrnambool and Peterborough. But some chaps working there said they had no idea where the grave was, and I never found that grave'.

Maria suggested I contact a man by the name of Antonio Quaresima, who had known Antonio Gnata and might be able to shed more light on the subject. In April 1998, I paid a visit to Antonio Quaresima at his home in a northern suburb of Melbourne. He told me that Antonio Gnata died in a quarry accident at Stawell between 1930 and 1940, but said he knew nothing else. However, I had the distinct impression that he knew more than he was revealing.

I then turned my attentions to the Stawell Cemetery as Maria Busana had done thirty-five years before. The cemetery was not listed in the phone book, so I sought assistance from the caretaker at nearby Ballarat Cemetery who referred me to the Northern Grampians Shire Council in Stawell proper. A man at the council



Charles Snell's quarry at Wild Cat Hill in Stawell, Victoria. Photograph taken c1930 , around the time that Antonio Gnata was working there. (Courtesy: the family of Fred Tilley)

then directed me to Mr Barry Werry, who had in his possession the records of Stawell Cemetery.

On the evening of 24 April, Barry revealed that Antonio Gnata, born in Italy and late of Scallans Hill (or 'Wild Cat Hill') in Stawell, died there on 3 May 1938 (a date which later proved incorrect, as Antonio actually died on the morning of 30 May). Barry confirmed that Antonio's burial was conducted at Stawell Cemetery, at grave number 4863a, although a headstone did not mark the site.

About a week later I made contact with Ellenor Musumeci of the Stawell Biarri Genealogical Society, in an effort to determine how Antonio had died. Ellenor confirmed that the Society had access to the local newspapers of the day, including the relevant edition of sixty years ago, and told me that she would investigate.

In early May, Ellenor called to say that she had discovered what had happened to Antonio, warning: 'Do you really want to know?' I told her that of course I needed to know, and a day or two later, Ellenor forwarded me a copy of the following item from the *Stawell News*, dated Wednesday, 1 June 1938.

GRIM TRAGEDY MAN KILLED AT QUARRY HEAD BADLY MUTILATED

An awful tragedy occurred at Mr C. S. Snell's quarry at Wild Cat Hill on Monday morning, the victim being an Italian named Antonio Gnato [sic], who had been engaged as a 'powder monkey' at the works.

At about 10.30 a.m. Mr Charles Holmquest had occasion to go to the quarry, and looking down he noticed the body of a man lying on a ledge about 16 feet from the surface. Holmquest called to the man, and receiving no response, concluded that there had been an accident and went and informed Mr Tilly, the manager of the works. Mr Tilly proceeded to the spot and saw that a tragedy had occurred, and communicated with First Constable T. Hunter and Dr Gibson, who proceeded to the scene.

The body was raised to the surface and the gruesome fact was revealed that the head had been blown to pieces and only a small portion of the chin remained on the trunk. Death had occurred about an hour previously.

Pappa & mamma



Daddio Pappa & mamma
Si Vedremo nel l'altro
Mondo... Bacci Andate.

Vostro Amatissimo

Luigi G. Gnata

Nulla mi potrà trattenere
Il Destino mi Vuole.

On this page: the suicide note written by Antonio Gnata – 30 May, 1938, the day of his death – to his mother and father in Italy; a portrait photograph of Antonio Gnata, believed to have been taken in his home town of Salcedo in the province of Vicenza in 1926, the year before he left for Australia; and a photograph of the Gnata family in front of the family home in Salcedo c1926. Pictured are [from left] Luigi, Ida, Giovanna Lucia Gnata [nee Crosara], Antonio Gnata (snr), Caterina and Antonio. Absent are Antonio's older brother Amedeo, who had already left for Australia and three of his five sisters – Maria, Orsola and Erminia – by then all married. It was to Giovanna and Antonio (snr) - his parents – to whom Antonio Gnata wrote his final letter, but Giovanna would never learn of her son's fate. (Photographs courtesy: Marcello Dal Sasso and Virginia Lovison of Fara, Vicenza; documents courtesy: Public Records Office, Melbourne Victoria).

An electric battery used in blasting operations was found near the body. From the surrounding circumstances, certain conclusions were reached as to how the man met his death, and the police are collecting evidence to lay before the deputy coroner at the adjourned inquest to be held on a date to be fixed.

There was no one else working at the quarry at the time of the fatality.

Gnato was an Italian, aged about 28 years, and came from Queensland two or three years ago. He resided in a hut near the works, and when the police searched the hut they found a letter written in Italian to his parents, who reside in Italy. The letter was translated into English, and it is understood that when it is presented before the Coroner it will throw some light on the tragedy.

The police enquiries pointed to the conclusion that there was no foul play.

The deputy coroner (Mr C. C. Hunt) visited the scene of the tragedy and viewed the body, and after taking formal evidence of identification gave an order for burial and adjourned the enquiry to a date to be fixed.

The funeral took place yesterday afternoon from Messrs F. J. Crouch and Sons funeral parlours.

The internment took place in the Stawell Cemetery and many of deceased's friends attended to pay their last sad tributes of respect. The coffin bearers were Messrs Leo Savoia, Geo. Trusgnh, Adolfo Sartori, A. Boag, C. W. Holmquest and H. C. Roussac. Rev. Father W. N. Close conducted the service at the graveside. Messrs F. J. Crouch and Son carried out the funeral arrangements.

When blasting operations are in progress and after the face of stone to be brought down has been drilled, a charge of gelignite is inserted in the hole together with a cap attached to the end of a length of wire being connected to an electric battery. When the operator connects the wire to the battery, the charge is fired.

Whether Gnato placed a cap in his mouth and connected it to the battery will be disclosed at the enquiry. The extent of the injuries can be gauged by the fact that Gnato was not recognisable.

One letter in the possession of the dead man spelt his name Gnato, another Gnatto, and a third Gnata. The Italian Consul's office was communicated with, and did not seem to have any knowledge of the dead man.

Ellenor also included a further item from the *Stawell News*, dated 27 July 1938, about the Coronial Enquiry into Antonio's death. The Coroner, Mr. C. C. Hunt, determined 'that death was due to the effect of some highly explosive substance which had blown off practically the whole of his head — such injuries having been intentionally self-inflicted'. Mr Hunt had earlier heard statements from Dr Gibson, fellow Stawell labourer Charles William Holmquest and Frederick James Tilley, the manager of Snell's Quarry. The Coroner's report stated in part:

Tilley gave evidence of Gnata's employment with the Quarry. 'He was employed as a powder monkey and had charge of the explosives. At that part of the quarry where the body was found, no blasting had taken place for the previous three or four days.' Mr Tilley then gave a demonstration on the floor of the court with the battery and charge. 'From inspection of the ledge on which the body was found I could find no evidence that deceased had been engaged in ordinary blasting operations,' concluded Mr Tilley. 'I don't think that a detonator would have sufficient power to blow his head right off; I think it would have needed a plug of gelignite as well'.

Ken Smith, a local Stawell identity now in his seventies, told me he remembered the day Antonio died. Ken's family lived not far from the quarry at the time.

'It was early in the morning and we were having breakfast at home when the blast went off, and I can remember either my brother or my mother saying "They're starting early". Charlie Snell had the contract and there was quite a team of Italians working for him. I'm not quite sure how many Italians there were all up, but there were a good twenty-five to thirty working there and they lived on the site, most of them. They had huts and tin shacks and they lived pretty rough, the poor buggers, with no electricity or running water. They had no recreation there, and the only recreation they could get would have been in the town, a mile and a half away ... they'd have to walk there to get a drink or a bit of tucker'.

'The quarry was at a place called "Wild Cat Hill" and why it was called that I can't really say. An old bloke thought it had something to do with the blokes who put down the main Melbourne to Adelaide rail line through the cutting being known as 'wild cats', but I can't be sure. In later years they filled the quarry in with the town's rubbish, and eventually it's been levelled off and the trees have grown back'.

Charles Snell, who died a little over ten years ago aged eighty-nine, operated quarries in a number of locales, including the main depot of Oakleigh, as well as Culcairn, Pyramid Hill, Axedale and of course, Stawell. Snell's nephew, Henri Claude Roussac, was one of his drivers, and a pallbearer at Antonio's funeral. Henri's son, Charles, told me in August 1998 that 'I can remember my father quite liked Tony'.

I'm trying to think back sixty years ago, and I can only go on what my father told me. He said



*The hut believed to be the abode where Antonio Gnata spent his last hours.
(Courtesy Tony De Bolfo)*

Tony lived on his own near the quarry and he used to play the accordion. My father told me that Tony had word to go down to the Italian Consulate in Melbourne, which he did a number of times, and always came back worried.' This substantiates archival evidence that Gnata was having difficulty securing safe passage into Australia for his older brother Amedeo and for Vittorio Azzolin. 'He said Tony was one who kept things to himself and who kept things bottled up, and whatever happened in Melbourne set him off.

Charles said that he used to accompany his father on Saturday mornings to the quarry, 'which we used to call "the black range" '. 'They [the Italians] used to bring the bluestone to the crusher, load up the trucks and transport it onto the train carriages. It was bluestone screenings for making roads or for using as ballast between railway lines. The quarry, to my knowledge, operated for about three years from 1937 to 1940 and my uncle employed a lot of Italians. Tony

was well liked at the quarry, and it was a terrible shock for them when it happened, for it's something that doesn't happen every day. I was only about fifteen at the time and these things don't impress you too much'.

The *Stawell News* of 1 June 1938 also reported the tabling to the court of Antonio Gnata's suicide note, which was translated by a local truck driver, Adolfo Sartori, who also acted as one of Antonio's pallbearers.

Sixty years later, in the Melbourne office of the Australian Archives I held this note, which had been wrapped in plastic and deposited somewhere in the Public Records Office vast depository at Laverton. The folded note was contained in an old white envelope, upon which was written the words 'Pappa [sic] E Mamma' in pen and ink. The sight of these simple words evoked a strong emotional reaction in me and I held my breath as I reached for the envelope's contents.

A few moments later I unfolded the letter and cast my eyes over the last lines penned by a deeply troubled man to his loved ones.

*Addio Pappa E Mamma
Ci Vedremo nel l'altro
Mondo., Bacci Ardenti.
Vostro Amatissimo
Figlio A. Gnata.
Nulla mi Potrà trattenere
Il destino mi vuole.*

[Goodbye Father and Mother
We'll see each other in the next
world. Ardent kisses.
From your most beloved
son, A. Gnata.
Nothing can keep me.
Destiny wants me.]

Having discovered the awful fate that befell Antonio, there was now only one duty left to perform: to relay the circumstances to Antonio's surviving niece, Maria, and nephew, Tony. Tony and Maria were grateful to learn of these developments, as the final chapter had now been

closed on a story that had for so many years remained incomplete. But with the anniversary of the death of Antonio Gnata looming, this horrific story at least carried a wonderful postscript.

On the morning of 30 May 1998 — sixty years to the day since Antonio Gnata took his own life — a small group of people made the trek to Stawell Cemetery: Tony Dal Sasso, his son John, daughter Ilda, granddaughter Veronica, and myself. Meeting us at the cemetery were Antonio's niece Maria Busana and her husband Tony, both of whom had that morning completed a four and a half hour drive to Stawell from their Wonthaggi home.

Also there were Ellenor Musumeci and the Genealogical Society's Vice President Charles Kerr, along with Father Wally Tudor, the parish priest of St Patrick's Church Stawell.

While I have never kept a diary, the poignancy of this occasion compelled me to record the day's events as follows:

At eleven o'clock on what was a fine and mild autumn day, Father Tudor conducted a short, moving service by the grave — one of three unmarked graves lying side by side. There Maria laid two bouquets made up of yellow-centred white daisies, yellow, orange and white lilies, yellow and red roses and white chrysanthemums — the first flowers ever placed there.

At the completion of the fifteen-minute ceremony, all visitors were introduced to Colin Woodgate, the owner of the site of the now filled-in quarry. On Colin's property was a ramshackle old timber and tin hut, quite possibly that in which Antonio spent his final hours.

The visitors followed Colin in their cars on a short three-kilometre journey to the hut. It adjoined what was an elongated timber work shed, built beneath a magnificent ghost gum, whose huge limbs jutted out over the dwelling like the timber spokes of a giant umbrella. The living quarters of the hut, the dimensions of which I would compare with those of an old prison cell, comprised greying, weather-beaten, vertical weatherboards, a timber door with a rusty chain lock, and a red-brick chimney.

Inside could be found a few hay bales and the brick fireplace, from which dangled a piece of old rusty chain, presumably for the purpose of supporting the boiling billy. A few pieces of corrugated iron roofing were missing — the legacy of a recent storm, according to Colin.

Colin said people had asked him why he had never demolished the hut, and he always replied that there was something interesting about the old structure. The story involving Antonio Gnata only served to rekindle this interest, and the archival information I presented to Colin was gratefully received.

He then took us on a five-minute walk from the hut up a small incline to the quarry. I say 'up' to the quarry, because where the quarry had once been was now a man-made earthen mound rising 100 feet above its natural surrounds, having been gradually filled in over the past fifty years. From the top of this mound one has an unimpeded view over a pea-green valley to the blue-grey of the majestic Grampians.

Afterwards we returned to the cars. I walked back with Maria, who was clearly moved by the whole experience. In contemplating the reality that this was the place where Antonio met his terrible end, Maria could be heard saying softly to herself 'Life ... life'.

Then we all drove a couple of hundred yards to the site of the old cement crusher — or what was left of it. Scattered around the scrub, in loose granite and quartz-encrusted earth, were jagged chunks of bluestone — the stone Antonio Gnata helped extract from the mine during the last eighteen months of his life.

At one point, Colin uncovered an elongated fifty-centimetre by twenty-centimetre bluestone slab, which John Dal Sasso suggested should become the temporary headstone of Antonio Gnata's grave — so it did. In fact, everyone took their little pieces of bluestone to remember their very special time here.

We then gathered at the local Stawell hotel, The Brix, to talk about Gnata and the Italian quarry workers. Father Wally made a pledge to Maria Busana and Tony Dal Sasso that Antonio Gnata's memory would be acknowledged at mass the following day. We then said our goodbyes and went our own ways.

'...Maria laid two bouquets...the first flowers ever placed there...'



A gathering at the grave of Antonio Gnata in Stawell Cemetery to mark the sixtieth anniversary of his death, 30 May 1998. (Photographs courtesy Tony De Bolfo)

I later learned that on the following morning, at Maria's request, Charles Kerr returned to Antonio's grave and dug holes for the vases that Maria had brought for the flowers. There he found the Bible and bottle of Holy Water mistakenly left behind by Father Tudor at the completion of the service.

On the night of Thursday, July 30, 1998 Maria Busana rang to say that a wonderful photograph of Antonio as a young man, taken prior to his ill-fated departure for Australia, had just arrived from Italy. Maria has since suffered a severe stroke, which has greatly restricted movement in one side of her body. However, with the support of her family, she is making steady progress and her spirit has been buoyed no end by a bronze plaque since placed on the grave of her dear uncle.

Antonio Gnata's difficult life and lonely death brought home to me in the most resounding manner the adversities confronting the migrant — of having to farewell family, friends and home, maybe forever, and of embarking on an uncertain future in some faraway place where differences in culture, lifestyle, language and customs are as vast as the oceans separating the new land from the old.

Perhaps such sentiments will strike a chord with future visitors to Stawell Cemetery, who may care to place a flower at the final resting place of the quarryman from Salcedo. ■