

Box 13. Silence of Religion – Tea and Sympathy



List of contents

1. Teacup
2. Saucer
3. Hymn book with bible with a bullet insert
4. Tea caddy with tea
5. Biscuit tin
6. Photograph of a group of men from a chapel with images of the absent men added (Glamorgan Archives)
7. Chapel records fixed in the lid with note of the outbreak of war (Glamorgan Archives)

Key information

- WW1 had a profound impact on religion, beliefs and superstition.
- At the time of WW1, faith was integrated into all aspects of life and the experience of war shaped people's beliefs. Some people turned to religion for comfort, others turned away from it as their faith was destroyed by what they felt was the futility and brutality of war.
- Most faiths supported war, evident in the heartfelt sermons, justifying the support they gave, and urging the congregation to support the war effort. For many, church and patriotism were closely linked. Destruction of churches took on a significance, seen as an attack on civilization by a barbarous enemy.
- The **Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)** condemned war as being incompatible with Jesus's teachings, and many were Conscientious Objectors. For those Quakers who served, they set up the Friends Ambulance Service and took on the dangerous role of stretcher bearers on the battle fields.
- On the front line and behind lines **chaplains** offered communion and pastoral care. They administered last rites to those who they could reach who lay dying on the front line and presided over burials. They also supported men who were condemned to be shot at dawn, staying with them throughout the night before their execution, helpless to overturn the judgement. (See **Box 3 Silence of Shot at Dawn**).
- **Talbot House (Toc H)** in Ypres was created as a refuge for soldiers and officers alike, rank was left at the door. Known for its homely atmosphere, a home from home, there was an abundance of tea, books and comfortable chairs. A chapel was at the top of the house built by the soldiers. It offered a homely nourishing alternative.
- There were stories of men seeing **angels** on the battle fields aiding wounded soldiers and offering protection, such as the Angel of Mons who supposedly protected the British Army in the Battle of Mons. These stories instilled hope into the men that miracles could happen.
- With the randomness of death and destruction, troops developed a fatalistic mantra they repeated '*If your name is on the shell, you will get it.*'
- Superstition was prevalent at home and in the trenches. Lucky charms were often carried or worn with the belief they gave protection, with the wearer becoming fearful if the charm was lost or broken, taking it as a foreboding. (See also **Box 7 Silence of Waiting**, envelope 1). Some

turned to routines for comfort as a way of control at a time when life and death was being distributed randomly. Pocket bibles were often placed in top pockets fuelled by stories that they had stopped bullets. (See enclosed hymn nook with the bible insert and bullet hole - sadly this soldier was killed by the bullet).

- Impromptu shrines were made in towns and villages for relatives of the soldiers to light candles in hope of good news.
- **Fortune tellers** experienced a boom during WW1.
- With so many killed a desire grew for survivors and the bereaved to somehow be in contact with the afterlife. They sought out people who could offer this contact, finding comfort from it. This led to a dramatic rise in the popularity of **Spiritualism**.
- **Tea** was seen as a comforting brew and reinforced routine. *Time for a cup of tea, Tea Break*. In times of distressing news, it was given with “tea and sympathy”, a calming drink. In addition to this it also linked with the rise in superstition, an interest in paranormal, and the need for reassurance about the future through reading tea leaves, showing a desperation for good news.

13. Silence of Religion – Tea and Sympathy: questions



1. What do you think is in this box?
2. What do you think it was used for and where would you use it?

3. Can you find a reference to the start of the war in the document placed in the lid of the box?
4. Open the book – what do you think happened in the photograph of the bible inside?
5. Look at the photograph of the men - what are the differences between the faces of them in the photograph?
6. Why do you think they did this?



7. Unwrap the objects carefully. How do they feel in your hands? Are there any marks on them?
8. Open the red box and smell the contents. Do you like the smell?
9. When do people drink tea?
10. Make a cup of tea and swill the contents out leaving the tealeaves – what can you see in the shapes left behind?

Suggested box combinations

- Box 2 Silence of Mourning
- Box 7 Silence of Waiting
- Box 12 Silence of Women
- Box 14 Silence of Surplus Women

Suggested activities

- Make the tea as outlined in the questions, and swill the cup and pour out the water, leaving only the tea – draw the shapes made by the tea, what so they remind you of?
- Do this a number of times, creating different drawings each time, what do your drawing remind you of? Write a poem about the things you can see.

Caring for the box after use

- Please wrap the teacup and saucer carefully and place it back in the box.
- Carefully place everything back in the box.