

Box 15. Silence of Those Who Contributed in Different Ways



List of Contents:

1. Wooden Hand (Helping Hand)
2. **Pack 1** Munitions women: 4 photographs about munition women; one letter to a reporter about her daughter, Dorothy Mary Watson; a small envelope with green hair.
3. **Pack 2** Dorothy Lawrence – The “only English Woman Soldier”: One photograph wrapped in newspaper; one information sheet about her in an envelope.
4. **Pack 3** Land workers: One photograph of women driving a tractor.
5. **Pack 4** An envelope with information sheet about railway workers and ambulance train workers. 2 photographs of an ambulance train.
6. **Pack 5** Information sheet on sewing with information on how to make servicemen socks to send to them.
7. **Pack 6** Police during war time. 3 photographs: 1 photograph of a policeman and 2 of photographs of female police officers. One of is Mary Sophia Allen, from Cardiff, who eventually became Commandant of the WPS (Women’s Police Service)
8. **Pack 8** Merchant Sailors: 2 photographs
9. **Pack 9** Bus driver
10. **Pack 11** Exempt from joining the forces, remaining as a ploughman.

Key information

- Many people contributed to the war effort in many different ways. These people were supporting the men on the front Line. The wooden hand included in this box represents the ‘helping hand’ these people gave.
- **Munitions:** Prior to the war women were already working in service and in industry, such as textiles. The shell crisis in 1915 meant women were actively drafted to work in munitions factories and by the end of the war almost a million women worked in this industry. There was excitement doing this work, the uniforms had trousers and for the first-time women could wear them (see photo signed trousers). This workwear trend influenced the fashion industry at the time. There were opportunities to try different social interactions and women at the munitions factory were able to join the first female football teams. Contrasting with this excitement was a darker side. The chemicals they worked with poisoned their skin, turning it yellow and made their hair green (hence the strand of green hair in this pack). The chemicals also caused fits in the evening and there was a danger of explosions as in the case of Dorothy Mary Watson who was blown up 31st July 1917 and killed at Pembrey Munitions Factory.
- **Dorothy Lawrence** was “the only English woman soldier”. Dorothy was a journalist who cycled, all the way to France, right to the firing line, 15 miles away from Paris. No one challenged her as young girls riding bicycles in France was a common sight. She was determined to get to the front line and befriended two British soldiers in Paris, persuading them to help her with her plan to disguise herself as male soldier. They agreed and over the next few weeks smuggled bits of uniform to her in newspaper parcels (why her photograph is wrapped in newspaper in the box). She was successful in her aim and fooled everyone on the front line that she was a real soldier. Dorothy was given tasks of laying down mines with the other soldiers, but after 10 days became ill, fainting. At that point she knew her cover could be blown and so turned herself in to avoid anyone else being implicated. The army were embarrassed that she been able to fool them so easily and prevented her from writing about her experience, worried that it would encourage others to follow in her shoes. Nevertheless, she did write and publish a book some years later called Sapper Dorothy Lawrence.

- **Land workers:** 23,000 women were recruited to work on the land full-time replacing the men who were at war. They were known as the Land Army and their main task was to increase food production.
- **Railway:** Just one month after the war started in 4th August 1914, nearly 100,000 railway men had left to fight. Transportation of vital supplies was under threat. Women were enlisted to the rail industry to keep it going. They did most of the jobs men had vacated except drive trains and fire engines due to training taking too long
- **Police:** 1914 saw the first women police officers, becoming known in 1915 as the WPS (Women Police Service). This was made up of volunteers from the suffragette movement. One of their tasks was to patrol parks and cinemas to make sure women were behaving correctly with men. The deputy in charge of this was a Welsh woman from Cardiff, Mary Sophia Allen, who eventually became Commandant of the WPS. She had previously been arrested for being one of the women who stormed parliament and was imprisoned for smashing windows in a number of places including the Home Office and the Inland Revenue.
- **Merchant Navy:** The title 'Merchant Navy' was granted by King George V to civilian cargo ships in recognition of the essential contribution made during WW1 by the merchant sailors, importing food and raw materials to Britain, transporting soldiers overseas and transporting supplies to them. It was the largest fleet in the world, and employed merchant seamen and some women, from different parts of the British Empire – India, Hong Kong and West African countries.

Germany had a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare – which meant sinking vessels on sight. During WW1 over 3,000 British merchant and fishing vessels were sunk and almost 15,000 merchant seamen killed.

- **Bus drivers:** Some were exempt on grounds of public utility. Some decommissioned London Buses were used to transport the soldiers to the front line.
- **Exempt from Service:** A number of men were exempt from service on grounds of public utility – for example the ploughman in pack 11. He had to go before a tribunal and present his case before being exempt from military service. Men who were exempt for service were issued badges that they could wear to acknowledge their contribution (and avoid being labelled as Conscientious Objectors).

15. Silence of Those Who Contributed in Different Ways: questions



1. What do you think is in this box?
2. What do you think this box was used for?
3. Can you imagine the room this box would have been placed in?

4. Why do you think there is a hand in here?
5. Can you finish this phrase:
A Hand
6. Take the contents out carefully – what are the different occupations you can see? List them and think about how they helped the war.



7. **Munitions**
 - a. Why is this hair green?
 - b. How do you think it felt to have green hair?
 - c. What happened to the munition woman?
8. What happened to female teachers during and after the War?

Suggested box combinations

- Box 4 Silence of Conscientious Objectors
- Box 8 Silence of Propaganda
- Box 12 Silence of Women
- Box 17 Silence of Ethnicity

Suggested Activities

- Map a colourful mind map of all the different roles people did during the war and list how these roles helped support Britain.
- List the impact on Britain during the war if these roles had suddenly stopped. Is there one role that is more important than the others? Or are they all important? Discuss your mind map.
- From your mind map create a poem about all the different roles.

Caring for the box after use

- This box is slightly more complicated to pack away, so please take extra care to make sure the right documents/ images are placed back in the right packs
- Carefully place everything back in the box
- Place the hand on top