MAY 15 INTERNATIONAL CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS ‘DAY
Remember the dead COs of World War One
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Many thanks to all of you who have helped to make 2014 the year when we distributed a record 100,000 white poppies. This put a strain on our office and we know that some of you were disappointed that we could not get more poppies to you in time. We have made sure that this does not happen this year but it is as well to order in good time.

The increase in distribution of white poppies is gratifying but after all the Peace Pledge Union is not a florist and I doubt that you wear the white poppy as a fashion accessory. The white poppy has now spread to Canada, New Zealand, Australia and is making inroads amongst the ‘Flanders' poppies in Belgium. In its popularity we notice a danger of it being assimilated into that mélange of all-purpose ‘peace’ symbols signifying not very much. We strive to ensure that its radical anti war message of 'no to any war' remains firmly embedded in the symbolic meaning of our white poppy. Is that how you see it? It would be good to hear from you. Write to us.

Remembrance 2014, the first Remembrance Day of the WW1 centenary was unsurprisingly steeped in WW1 references. The popular so called sea of poppies at the Tower of London could also be called a blood red tide of poppies. The Tower originally built to suppress a conquered population, and home to many other cruelties since, graphically symbolised the source of the blood letting. It is from military installations that the forces that cause blood to flow emanate. The cascade of red poppies from the orifices of the battlement wall is a deeply symbolic (albeit probably unintended) illustration of this. Despite the popularity of the display it had to be dismantled just after Remembrance Day as several hundred arms manufacturers and sundry military and political attendants were having their annual dinner in the Tower.

Vladimir Putin's mouthpiece the "Autonomous Nonprofit Organization" RT (formally Russia Today television channel) made great play of this quoting CAAT’s press release: "It is disturbing that just weeks later it (the Tower of London) can play host to the very arms companies, which profit from perpetuating war and conflict.

The popular sea of poppies or blood red tide depending on your point of view at the Tower of London - originally built to suppress a conquered population and home to many other cruelties since, graphically symbolised the source of the blood letting.
today. It is crassly insensitive and in extremely bad taste that this historic monument would do this so soon after providing such a high-profile focal point for Remembrance Day.” Of course it suits the Russian propaganda machine to smear one of the world’s most lucrative industries but what of CAAT’s statement? We may be at one in its criticism of the arms trade (indeed the PPU was one of its founding organisations) but what about the whole red poppy industry and its role in reinforcing support and acceptance of the military. The congruence of 888,000 red poppies and a hundred arms manufacturers is not so strange. The arms manufacturers and the British Legion are, after all, a partnership.

Nostalgia and propaganda apart, the dominant narrative during remembrance and much of the WW1 centenary so far has been that the war was terrible but men heroically gave their all for freedom and their king and country, it was sad that so many were killed and injured and it must never happen again. Those too are the messages carefully wrapped in cellophane and left with wreaths of red poppies in cemeteries across France and Belgium by British school children, many on state paid visits accompanied by a serving soldier in uniform.

Of course the war was terrible and very sad for many and surely it should not happen again but what are these much trumpeted lessons that have been learned? And why do wars keep ‘happening’? What does this narrative tell us and the younger generation that the government and the British Legion are so anxious to reach? The causes of the war, when mentioned, are usually placed at a distance far removed from mere human intervention. Causes of any particular war may be complex but some core matters can be glimpsed everywhere. For example, do a media search for anything vaguely related to Remembrance during the remembrance period, such as the Guardian website and you will invariably get a big top of the page banner added for the army or the reserves. Remembrance Day and Armistice Day before have
always been a good time for military recruitment.

Remembrance Day, unless contained within it is a view of a better future, will remain no more than annual theatre for the vast majority, a fundraising and recruiting opportunity for others. The British Legion calls itself the ‘custodian’ of remembrance; if this means remembering the human cost of Britain’s wars well and good but when this morphs into a justification of war then we should seriously question its place in public life. The title of the Legion’s Learning Pack 2014/15 is: For Them, For Now, For Ever. The title together with the cover picture helps us to decode the meaning. From ‘them’ the WW1 casualties to ‘for ever’ the modern day soldiers silhouetted under a hot desert sun reveal the Legion’s view not only of the past (a necessary war) but future (there will always be wars). Is this fatalistic vision of a future of endless wars and a miserable view of human inability to solve problems nonviolently how we see ourselves? Is this the lesson we want to impart to our children? Intractable as some conflicts may seem they are not beyond our ability to handle them without mass murder or drone assassinations. These fat slick Legion packs with DVDs are sent to all British schools free of charge as ‘part of the Legion’s commitment to promoting Remembrance to younger people’. The pack like much of the Legion’s material has embedded within it a fatalistic view of a future in which war will always have a place.

Victory Balls that Dick Sheppard found so offensive took

CONFLICT TIME PHOTOGRAPHY

There are always questions about representation of the world around us. Questions which we the viewer probably do not ask ourselves often enough while viewing a photograph even in a gallery. The photographer may have one thing in mind but what the viewer may be ‘seeing’ is something altogether different.

Conflict, Time, Photography at Tate Modern should be of interest to those of us concerned about war and its representation especially in the WW1 centenary years. The photographs in this exhibition are grouped according to how long after a conflict or event they were taken. War has passed on, we look at some of its traces on the landscape. In one room are photographs of destroyed cities taken shortly after the end of WW1, many printed at the time in what became popular tourist guides - an early example of today’s Dark Tourism or Thanatourism for the academically minded. When they were published they were regarded as an example of German barbarism. On the opposite wall was is a series of (it’s hard not to say ‘beautiful’ photographs) destroyed building in Afghanistan by Simon Norfolk. The sharpness and clarity of the images, the lighting, the framing speak of high art. Were it not for the subject I would be pleased to have any of those pic-
tures on my wall. Through the gloss it is not easy to reach what the century of war in that country has meant as the ruined buildings turn to ‘romantic’ ruins. The barbarians are not easy to spot here; perhaps they are too many and various.

Norfolk has been recording post war scenes for many years, scenes incomprehensible to most without a caption but haunting once located in space and time. A black and white photograph of a telegraph pole in an empty landscape signifying the cutting edge technology of its day that helped to mastermind the Armenian genocide can easily take one on an imaginative journey in a way that high gloss colour images seem to interdict. Perhaps its a problem for those coming from a black and white age.

Amid today’s WW1 razzmatazz the exhibition is mercifully free from celebrating the empire and military comments are absent. On the contrary quotations from Vonnegut on the wall outside the show’s entrance and a copy of Slaughterhouse 5 displayed in the first room while almost at the end a large photograph of conscientious objectors in Dyce Quarry 1916 objecting to military service perhaps indicate the moving spirit here.

Last years British Legion Young Professionals’ Poppy Rocks was sponsored by Lockheed Martin, the world’s biggest arms company. Lockheed Martin also manufactures the Trident missile. Each of Britain’s missile submarines is capable of carrying 16 missiles. Each of these missiles can kill far in excess of the 888,000 dead represented by the red poppies at the Tower of London.

place on Armistice Day in the early 1920s were after some protest moved to another day. Dick Sheppard arranged an alternative event which later became the Legion’s Festival of Remembrance in the Albert Hall. This annual show of military prowess with sing songs has for years been supported by BAE Systems. BAE Systems is the UK’s biggest arms company and has been a long-standing, active Legion supporter, though these days it keeps a low profile. Last year they sponsored the annual Poppy Ball, a white tie dinner. Some offices and arms factories also hosted their own local events.
Pacifists didn’t want soldiers on the battlefields of the First World War between 1914 and 1918 and they certainly don’t want them accompanying children to the same places between the years 2014 and 2018. Unfortunately the problem is that, as part of the Government’s programme that sees two students and one teacher from every state funded secondary school in England visiting the battlefields on the Western Front between 2014 and 2019, each coach ferrying teachers and pupils to the killing grounds contains at least one serving British soldier.

The aims of these trips include:

- to enable students to develop a personal connection to the First World War through interacting with the battlefield sites, participating in remembrance ceremonies, recording, reflecting and sharing their own experiences

What is missing is the posing of the question WHY? Why for instance should students develop a personal connection to the First World War, interact with the battlefield sites and participate in remembrance ceremonies? The Peace Pledge Union (PPU) would very much support the idea of pupils visiting cemeteries and the scenes of mass slaughter if the aim was to bring home to pupils the fact that war is a crime and that everything in our power should be done to avoid conflicts in the future whilst remembering that wars are futile and wasteful of human life and potential. Some teachers do of course share such views and are interested in providing a more balanced approach. It is also to the credit of the organisers of the Institute of Education, Continuing Professional Development events that they have given space to the PPU to enable a pacifist narrative on WW1 to be shared with teachers.

Some teachers, however, do not have fully formed objective perspectives about World War 1 and many accept the not uncommon view that the British and Commonwealth (note the use of the word Commonwealth as opposed to Empire) soldiers were killed and sacrificed in order that Britain
Remembrance is being used as an implicit validation for current and future involvement in conflicts as tools of foreign and domestic policy.

could be free. Much emphasis is placed on pupils researching the lives of local men so that they can personalise remembrance and provide some meaning when confronted by row upon row of soldiers' graves. The very nature of the carefully tended graves with their residual xenophobic trappings do promote the glorification of that mass slaughter, yet providing an individual local context is perhaps a more easily digestible way for young people today to be accepting of the carnage of World War I.

Worryingly remembrance is being used as an implicit validation for current and future involvement in conflicts as tools of foreign and domestic policy. This is brought into sharp focus by the involvement of serving soldiers when pupils are studying World War I. The "official" reason for this involvement is that real and live commentary can be provided on what it is like to be a soldier in combat situations and allegedly pupils as young as 11 years old can then get a realistic feel for what men experienced on the Western Front during WWI. At this point the question arises exactly how can a soldier in the modern British army manage to replicate experiences of First World War soldiers, closely followed by the question why do pupils need to know what were those experiences?

The PPU views with alarm the increasing militarisation of education in the UK exemplified by the expansion of the Combined Cadet Corps into state schools, the celebration in a growing number of schools of Red, White and Blue Day, Camo Day, Armed Forces Day, Uniform to Work Day, Remembrance events and National Heroes Day. Serving soldiers have an agenda that promotes militaristic values and ethos and it is extremely worrying that many teachers implicitly buy into a notion that the British army is a force for good in the modern world with service discipline also something that schools and pupils should be welcoming. Soldiers accompanying pupils to cemeteries
and battlefields is another part of the increasing normalisation of militarism in education which is part of the British armed forces insidious schools' recruitment strategy. It is within this context and that of pupils increasingly being expected to show their unqualified support for the armed forces that the PPU opposes military involvement in Battlefield Tours.

If you also wish to make your opposition felt to the involvement of serving soldiers in the Battlefield Tours join us at our forthcoming conference or contact Peter at peaceeducation@ppu.org.uk

Unchecked climate change, global nuclear weapons modernizations, and outsized nuclear weapons arsenals pose extraordinary and undeniable threats to the continued existence of humanity, and world leaders have failed to act with the speed or on the scale required to protect citizens from potential catastrophe. These failures of political leadership endanger every person on Earth. Despite some modestly positive developments in the climate change arena, current efforts are entirely insufficient to prevent a catastrophic warming of Earth. Meanwhile, the United States and Russia have embarked on massive programs to modernize their nuclear triads—thereby undermining existing nuclear weapons treaties. “The clock ticks now at just three minutes to midnight because international leaders are failing to perform their most important duty—ensuring and preserving the health and vitality of human civilization.” http://thebulletin.org/timeline
what am I doing to stop war?

Ben Copsey reflects on the value of talking about the resistance to war by WW1 conscientious objectors amid the clamour to commemorate, ‘remember and commercialise the 1914-1918 conflict.

November is always a busy month on the Objecting to War project as national interest in the First World War has never been higher, and we’ve been making sure the stories of Conscientious Objectors aren’t lost in the clamour to commemorate, “remember” and commercialise the 1914-1918 conflict.

We’ve travelled all over London, and beyond, delivering talks, workshops and Question and Answer sessions in libraries, archives, museums, schools and universities, talking about Conscientious Objection but also hopefully leaving the audience with an enduring question – “What am I doing to end war?”

It’s a tricky balance. Everyone wants a historical talk, something to listen to and learn from, delivered in a comfortable environment with hopefully a wine and cheese reception afterwards, but does anyone want to be preached to about their responsibilities towards conflict in the modern world and, depending on the venue and the type of talk, is it even an appropriate place to loftily pontificate on pacifist theory?

As we do more and more talks with the project I think we’re getting better at striking this balance. We do this in a couple of main ways.

The first is the easiest – we talk about history. Conscientious Objection is an endlessly fascinating and emotive subject, one based on the ideals and aspirations of a diverse and inspiring group of men acting in the hope of a better world.
Conscientious Objection is not a dead subject, but one that is still relevant today.

one hundred years ago. Just talking to people about Conscientious Objection, simply explaining some of the experiences COs had and their reasons for refusing to kill proposes the subject as something worth talking and thinking about. It drags Conscientious Objection out of the shadows of history where it’s been consigned – as something cowardly, shameful and wrong – and makes it a relevant topic, encouraging people to think about what it entails, what it means and why it happened.

The second is sometimes controversial, but always necessary – talking about the present. Conscientious Objection isn’t just a historical fact, but a present day reality. Whether discussing the nations that still today force their young men and women into the Armed Forces, or into National Service, or Conscientious Objection to Military Taxation, we try to remind our audience that Conscientious Objection is not a dead subject, but one that is still, shockingly, relevant today.

The talks and lectures we deliver always end on the same point, conveniently coming back to the PPU offices, with the CO Plaque. It’s a good place to end a talk on, not because it’s particularly good to focus on the dead – unlike other aspects of First World War heritage, I prefer to focus on the future, embodied by the COs that survived, but because of the tribute carved on it: “It is by the faith of the idealist that the ideal comes true”. The audiences we talk to are not pacifists, they might not be interested in peace at all. They aren’t guaranteed to be sympathetic, so to stress that COs were working towards the ideal of world peace can be a powerful message. “Whatever you think about Pacifism” I always say, “you can’t argue with that ideal – that’s what they were trying to achieve”. Hopefully showcasing, if only briefly, that ideal gets people to think about it and even perhaps act towards it.

These three points sound simple, but I think they’re key to moving beyond a purely historical talk into something that contributes to the work we do here at the PPU. Draw in an engaging way on the experiences of the past, connect it to the present and talk about the

The conscientious objector memorial plaque will feature in our forthcoming exhibition which will launch on May 15. See back page.

About the men who died
http://goo.gl/HvHJhW
On Thursday night 12th March the BBC hosted a Question Time debate in Leeds, with a panel that included Charles Kennedy, Liberal Democrat MP, and Ian Hislop, editor of Private Eye. In the course of the debate there was discussion on the forthcoming General Election, and some mention of the young women from London who recently made headlines in their flight to Syria to join ISIS/ISIL. During the course of the latter discussion, an interesting debate began about the causes and reasons for this situation, with some suggestion that it has arisen partly because of the wars in the Middle East over the past three decades, and further back. This discussion though, just as it was gathering speed, was closed to facilitate a question on Jeremy Clarkson – in much the same way as news broadcasts often end with a light-hearted tale at the very end of the show.

There’s nothing wrong with that I suppose. If we only concentrated on the serious stuff we would probably go mad with the world in the state that it is. But maybe, now more than ever, we need to ask the big bread and butter questions and not be distracted by circuses

plaque in a way that points towards a better future. That’s not to say that there’s a rigid formula, or that every talk is the same. This month we’ve talked about local COs in Uxbridge, the nature of Edwardian Pacifism in Cambridge and how COs felt in prison with schoolchildren in Islington. In each case though, the idea has been the same. Avoid high-horse preaching, make the story of conscientious objection accessible and instead of dwelling on the past as a curiosity, make Objection important, relevant and about hope for the future – a future that rests as much with the audience as with the peace movement.

question time

Paul Breen
Signs and symbols.

There was a lot of marching and tinkling of medals at the service for Afghanistan at St Paul’s Cathedral on 13 March. Commentators noted that this was not a triumphalist event - even for British skill at turning disaster into victory, this was one failure too far.

In 1982 Archbishop Robert Runcie denounced nationalism, condemned the global arms trade and characterised war as a sign of human failure in the post Falklands war ceremony at St Paul’s. In 2009 following the gulf war Archbishop Rowan Williams merely noted the failure to foresee and measure the cost of the war. He also noted that it would be a long time before the rights and wrongs of the conflict would be resolved. This year Archbishop Justin Welby’s sermon centred on the faithfulness of the individuals who fought in Afghanistan and of the families who waited for them.

The retreat of the anglican church’s hierarchy from challenging war making in 1982 is saddening. From denouncing war in 1982, through wondering whether war is right or wrong to a parochial concern for the few british individuals that were killed which may have given comfort to the military and relatives but surely is an inadequate response to the invasion and its consequences now that Afghanistan is as ungovernable - over15000 civilians killed since British boots pounded its soil once again.

A ‘drum head’ altar, as pictured above, was also seen on the steps of St Paul’s cathedral in 1915 when the Bishop of London Arthur Winnington-Ingram used his authority to recruit men to fight in the war. There is no mention of this on the Cathedrals tourist oriented website.
There has to be something more than that, something more than primal instinct driving them to take such drastic actions. We were told in the early 2000s that the west was going to war in Afghanistan and Iraq to stop them coming here to attack us. Everything that has happened since then has made this sound like a self-fulfilling prophecy, and shows lack of awareness of Muslim beliefs about what will happen in the event of a clash between Islam and non-believers.

I was on the marches, in London, to stop the Iraq war in 2003. I thought at the time it was just a pretext for going into Iran. That may well have been the intention, but the course of history has gotten out of control. Even the development of ISIS/ISIL seems like it was part of a gameplan that went wrong. These were the rebels we started to arm in order to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. Everything the west seems to have touched in the Middle East in the past twenty years appears to have gone horribly wrong – catastrophically

involving celebrities and TV presenters.

Some would argue that we are crashing headlong into a disaster shaped by American foreign policy since the end of the Second World War, and have gone down a certain road so far that it is impossible to turn back.

Particularly since the September 11th attacks in the United States and then the war in Afghanistan we have entered a state or a stasis where war has been accepted as inevitable, and the questioning of this has become unpatriotic.

On Friday 13th March the UK’s war effort was honoured in a service commemorating the end of Britain’s involvement in Afghanistan. Many young people lost their lives in this conflict against a foe that in comparison to ISIS/ISIL seems quite tame in its objectives. I could be wrong but the Taliban’s aim was to take control of Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, whilst Al Qaeda wanted to bring an end to western involvement in Muslim countries.

ISIS/ISIL on the other hand want to suck the western world into a battle in the Middle East wherein the western armies will be defeated, and our countries conquered for all time in the aftermath. This for some adherents could take the form of a Biblical apocalypse, whilst for others it is a global Muslim caliphate.

Whichever form they want it to take, we are now possibly on the edge of what will actually be a wholesale World War, rather than the two western-European and Asian-Pacific dominated wars of the twentieth century.

Going back to Question Time, one of the questions raised but unanswered is what we can do about this situation. As a couple of speakers pointed out, the current narrative of radicalisation is far too simple. These kids are surely not just leaving England’s shores all dreamy eyed about the notion of living in a society that wants to revert back to the centuries where Islam originated.

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wrong even. It is barely two decades since Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat appeared to have sealed agreement on steps to a peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine dispute. Today that seems not from another century, but another world.

So what’s the point of raising these issues, of asking more questions than answers? Though I am writing this I am not even sure what we can do next, those of us who want to see an end to war. We seem to have been led blindly into a situation of endless war for the next twenty to thirty years. Even some of the most extreme Islamists have a vision for how this state of affairs should end. Their idea is to put an end to all wars by having one united Muslim world. That may be frightening and idealistic but at least we can see there is an end game.

What is ‘our’ end game? Who is deciding the rules of the game? Is it the arms industry and corporations who benefit from chaos and endless war? Is there even something more sinister at hand? There are so many questions and so few answers. Maybe we’re not interested in answers, or maybe our narrative isn’t all that more complex than the simple good and evil fables peddled by ISIS/ISIL.

But I just wonder are we going to keep stumbling through this fog of media nonsense about the lives of celebrities and the other circuses they intoxicate us with, such as worrying whether or not Charles Kennedy was drunk on TV?

And are we going to see more and more services over the coming years for more young people whose lives have been sacrificed in far-flung corners of the world? On Thursday night, before Question Time, I also watched an interview with the father of one of the young soldiers commemorated in the Afghan war service. Through all his sadness he said the sacrifice was worth it, though he barely seemed to know what his son had actually been fighting for, and then he suggested that war was a natural condition – there would always be war.

Maybe in his grief that’s the only way to stay sane, but isn’t it time that somebody started asking the question of why war is inevitable? Even the men who died in the First World War believed that they were fighting a war to end all wars. Isn’t it a contradiction then to remember the sacrifice of these people and not aspire to the same values as they aspired to? Where have those values gone? Have they got lost somewhere on the road to Damascus that could bring us all to ruin?

But to end on a positive note, I hope that a year from now there’s no more ISIS or ISIL, and places such as Syria and Iraq have found the peace they deserve in these cradles of civilisation. Maybe that makes me as drunk and open to ridicule as a certain politician on TV, but isn’t that better than being sober and walking blindly from one international disaster to another, without ever asking why?
INTERNATIONAL
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS
DAY
15 MAY

At the moment, the PPU offices are a busy whirl of paper and plywood as all the final elements of our Conscientious Objector exhibition Refusing to Kill are coming together. From artwork, letters and pictures to text, newspapers and videos we are busy assembling, designing and writing what will be one of the high points of the PPU’s Objecting to War project.

Our new exhibition tells the story of Conscientious Objection in the first world war at a critical time in the history of pacifism. For the first time the strength and courage of pacifist conviction was tested under law, and the first concrete expressions of what it means to be opposed to war were formed. Through history, biographies and some incredible and important artefacts it tells the story of who the Conscientious Objectors and the women who supported them were and explains what it meant to be against what became the First World War.

While our exhibition describes the how, what, why and when of Conscientious Objection, it is not simply a historical view. We have made sure that the issues raised and questions asked by COs are at the forefront of our work. From the pre-war pacifists and protests through Tribunals, prisons and work camps through to the modern day the exhibition asks: What are you going to do about War today?

Friday May 15 2015
12.00 Tavistock Sq  Ceremony at CO Stone remembering women against war

Friday May 15 2015
3.00 PPU office. Launch and Press preview of the PPU’s new exhibition Refusing to Kill.

Saturday 16 May 2015
11.00 - 4 PPU office. Open Day to view exhibition, and discuss projects and meet fellow members and supporters.

Friday 29 May 2015
Bruce Castle Museum, Lordship Lane London N17 8NU. Opening of public PPU exhibition on conscientious objection.