

# Conscience Matters

## Teacher & Adult Helper Notes

### Contents

- 1 Visiting the Exhibition
- 2 The Exhibition
- 3 Suggested Activities
- 4 Additional Resources

### Introduction

This exhibition explores the little-known story of British conscientious objectors of the Second World War through paintings, poems, letters, music and speeches.

The reintroduction of conscription meant that British citizens were expected to contribute directly to the war effort. To gain exemptions from conscription on the grounds of conscience, individuals were required to appear before a tribunal and produce evidence about their honesty and commitment to their principles. During the Second World War, over 60,000 men and women chose not to fight for religious, political or moral reasons.

Following the stories of conscientious objectors including Scottish author, Fred Urquhart, and poet, Edwin Morgan, the exhibition will examine the application process, the reasons people had for opposing conscription, and what happened to them as a result. If successful in their application, conscientious objectors could be exempted from national service altogether, or more commonly assigned to other non-combatant roles such as bomb disposal, hospital work or agricultural labour. Some of those whose applications were unsuccessful were ultimately imprisoned.

Conscience Matters is the result of a major research project into conscientious objectors in Britain led by the University of Edinburgh.

# 1 Visiting the Exhibition

*(Please share this information with your adult helpers)*

## **Important information**

- Food and drink is not permitted
- Photography is not allowed
- The exhibition is based in gallery 7 and leads to the museum exit. Please exit via this door to assist with visitor flow and head back into the museum through the main entrance.
- We recommend you split your class into 3 groups, with 1 exploring the exhibition whilst the rest of the class explore the museum or other areas of the castle.

# 2 The Exhibition

The exhibition is located within the National War Museum. It is split into two sections.

The first section tells the story of development of anti-war attitudes following the First World War and the creation of the Register of Conscientious Objectors.

The second section tells the story of individual Scottish conscientious objectors through a range of text, images and objects. Their roles included:

- Hospital orderly
- Ambulance driver
- Prisoner of War
- Nurse
- Farmworker

This section also includes a short film and artwork relating to conscientious objectors. The film has subtitles, lasts just under 10 minutes and is on a loop with a 2 minute pause between each showing.

There are two touch screens where pupils can:

- Explore expressions of conscience or listen to trails of conscientious objectors
- Find out more about the story of Fred Urquhart, a conscientious objector

The exit from the exhibition will take you outside into Hospital Square.

# 3 Suggested Activities

## **Within the exhibition**

- Find at least three non-combat jobs that were given to conscientious objectors. Why do you think people were given different jobs to do?
- Men and women became conscientious objectors for different reasons. Looking at the individual stories within the exhibition find and discuss the different reasons for objecting.
- Read the diary extracts in the Fred Urquhart's touchscreen. How did Fred Urquhart's emotions change during the tribunal process?

### **Curriculum links – Primary**

I can use primary and secondary sources selectively to research events in the past. SOC 2-01a

I can investigate a Scottish historical theme to discover how past events or the actions of individuals or groups have shaped Scottish society. SOC 2-03a

### **Curriculum links – Secondary**

I can use my knowledge of a historical period to interpret the evidence and present an informed view. SOC 3-01a

I can discuss the motives of those involved in a significant turning point in the past and assess the consequences it had then and since. SOC 3-06a

Through researching, I can identify possible causes of a past conflict and report on the impact it has had on the lives of people at that time. SOC 3-06b

This exhibition is also relevant for National Qualification and Higher History classes.

### **Post-visit activities**

After the exhibition we suggest some of the following activities back in class.

- Split your class into groups. Each group is either for or against being/supporting conscientious objectors. During a class debate each group can put forward their arguments.
- Some conscientious objectors were imprisoned while others were given alternative non-combat roles. Should all conscientious objectors have been treated in the same way? Write a diary entry for a day in the life of a conscientious objector during the Second World War.
- Create a leaflet for the Peace Pledge Union
- Design two posters
  - 1) Encouraging others to become conscientious objectors on the grounds of religious, political or moral reasons.
  - 2) Discouraging people from being conscientious objectors and encouraging them to contribute directly in the war effort.
- Write a poem
  - inspired by Edwin Morgan's story.
  - inspired by Edwin Morgan poem titles e.g. The Picnic, In the Snack bar, The First Men on Mercury.

## 4 Additional Resources

Back in class you can use these resources to help explore the themes of the exhibition further.

National War Museum's page on the exhibition

**<https://www.nms.ac.uk/national-war-museum/whats-on/conscience-matters/>**

Edinburgh University's information on Fred Urquhart

**<https://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/library-museum-gallery/crc/collections/special-collections/scottish-literature/urquhart/about>**

Scottish Poetry Library's information about Edwin Morgan

**<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poet/edwin-morgan/>**

## Questions or feedback?

If you have any questions, comments or feedback, please get in touch with us.  
We'd also love to see any work your class produces after visiting the exhibition:

**[schools@nms.ac.uk](mailto:schools@nms.ac.uk) @NtlMuseumsScot  
#ConscienceMatters**