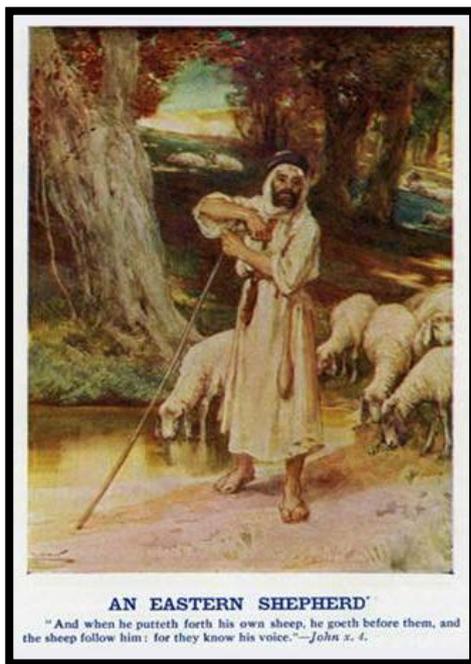


ILLUSTRATING THE WW1 ANNIVERSARY GOSPEL

When we came to create the 100th Anniversary Edition Active Service John's Gospel, we decided to commission some new artwork to illustrate it. It would not be an exact replica, but the new artwork would be an opportunity to reflect on the last 100 years, to bring something new to the text, and to think about what the Bible might have meant to the ordinary servicemen and women who received the Gospels at the time.



When war began in 1914, *Scripture Gift Mission (SGM)* moved fast to print as much literature for troops as it could afford. The mass produced Gospels used simple card covers and cheap paper, keeping costs low.

There were many editions of the war Gospels. Some had calendars or a timeline of key events of the war on the back cover. Some were illustrated, and some were not. Where illustrations were used, pictures were drawn from **SGM's** library of Palestine pictures – paintings from the Holy Lands that had been commissioned twenty years before. The paintings, which each illustrated a particular verse, were featured on four insert pages.

Working with the Sparks design studio, we commissioned Henningham Family Press to create four new pieces for the insert pages. Each one was inspired by a key verse from John's Gospel, and drew on the personal testimonies from soldiers that are included in the anniversary edition.

Henningham Family Press

Henningham Family Press is the collaborative art of writers, bookbinders and fine art printmakers David and Ping Henningham. They have exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, The British Library and internationally. Collections such as the V&A and the Tate have acquired their work.

Among their various works are a project for the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, and a series of works called *An Unknown Soldier* that explores propaganda and the role of artists in the First World War. This combination of previous experience made them the perfect choice to take on the challenge of illustrating the 100th Anniversary Edition Active Service John's Gospel.



Their idea was to create four portraits, each showing a young man “faced with the strains of war”, and then set them against colourful and disorienting backgrounds. This would take simple human stories and experiences, complete with their moments of doubt and fear, and contrast them with the propaganda and myth-making of the warring governments.

“On an international level,” says David Henningham, “the war was about self-aggrandisement and vainglory, but this did not prevent the men who had enlisted from performing acts of genuine humility and love, the kind of sacrifices they would have found examples of in the pages of these little gospels.”

The portraits were drawn from life using actors in period uniform, including an aviator and a sailor to represent the Navy and Air Force as well as the Army. Colours were then added layer by layer to create the final screenprints.

The four portraits



Night watch

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John 1:5

The first illustration portrays a night watchman on duty. It echoes testimonies from the letters that **SGM** received from soldiers during the war, and that are included in the Gospel: “When at night I have been alone with him by my side, and the Germans but thirty yards away, I realised that I needed more than my own courage to take the strain” wrote one soldier. Another said that it was during his night watch that he “prayed for the first time in many years.”

Reflecting these stories, the night watchman is kneeling on the firestep of the trench, as if he is praying. His pose references religious paintings of hermits at prayer.



Cody kite

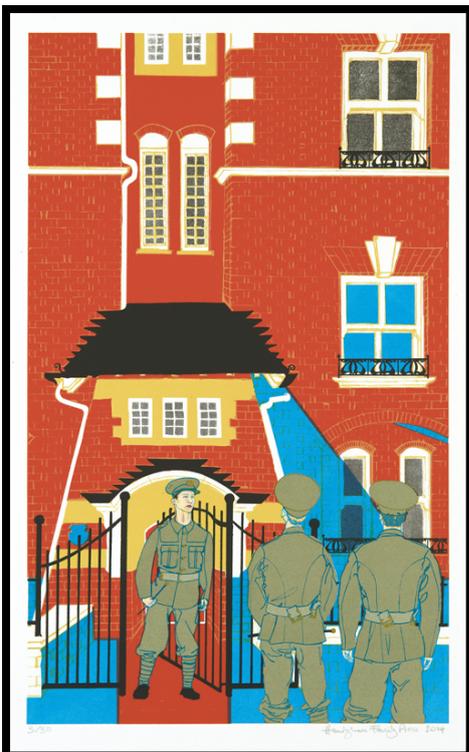
“I shall give them eternal life. And they shall never perish.” John 10:28

At the start of the war, the Royal Flying Corps experimented with man-lifting kites, the invention of Wild West showman and aviation pioneer Samuel Cody. An officer would be hoisted by a chain of five kites so that he could observe the battlefield and call in artillery fire.

It was a precarious assignment, putting the officer at the mercy of the elaborate contraption. In the artwork, this vulnerability becomes symbolic of the danger and uncertainty that all those serving during the war experienced, often on a daily basis.

Like the watchman image, there’s also a reference to religious art, in this case traditional depictions of the ascension. The officer is rising to the heavens, but

this is not an ascent to glory. It is to conduct warfare, and the looming black shapes of the kite reflect the more sinister purposes of this man-made ascension.



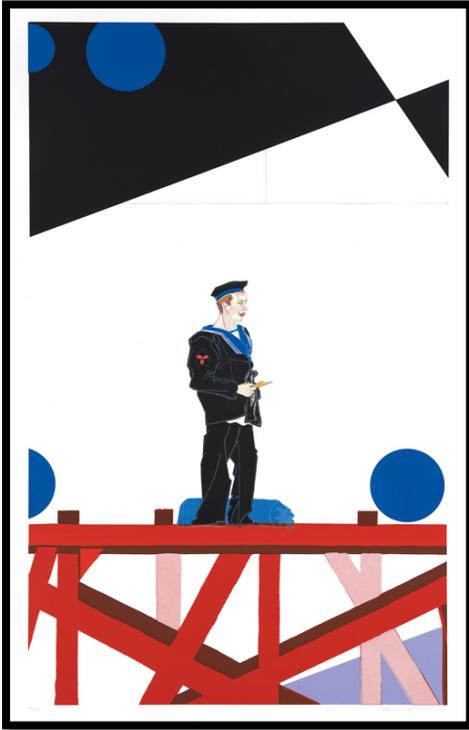
Pals

“Greater love has no-one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13

Britain had traditionally been a naval power, and when war broke out in Europe, it needed to expand its army very fast. To encourage men to enlist, ‘pals’ regiments were formed, where men would fight alongside friends, brothers and colleagues. While this did create camaraderie, it also meant that soldiers would lose those nearest to them when there were casualties, and that losses at home would be concentrated in specific communities if a regiment was decimated.

The image in the WW1 Anniversary Gospel shows a young soldier leaving the recruitment centre of Navarino Mansions in London. He joins his friends waiting for him outside. Their faces are obscured, hinting at the loss to come.

The recruiting centre towers above the three men, distorted with the angles and colours of the Union Jack, suggesting the appeal to patriotism and empire that led so many young men to war.



Embarkation on a dazzle ship

“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

During the First World War, a new technique called ‘dazzle camouflage’ was used in the Navy. Ships were painted in vivid colours and jagged geometric shapes, designed to confuse the enemy and disguise the ship’s size and direction of travel.

The sharp angles of the ship contrast with the ill-fitting uniform of the young sailor as he embarks for the first time. In his hand he holds a copy of the Gospel, given to him on the docks – will he read it? Will he find the truth in it, or more deception?

The setting here refers to another of the stories from the archives. “When your small Testaments were distributed in Southampton I, among others,

accepted one in a more derisive than complimentary manner” the letter-writer admits. “I little dreamed that I should use it and find in it great consolation in lonely hours.”

For more information about the WW1 Anniversary Gospel, visit sgmlifeworlds.com, where you can also watch an interview with David Henningham and other videos about our work during the war.

Prints of each of the four artworks are also available as numbered and signed limited editions. All proceeds from these will go towards the work of **SGM Lifeworlds** as we resource churches to mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War. Call us on 020 7730 2155 to find out more.

To order copies of the WW1 Anniversary Gospel
visit www.sgmlifeworlds.com/WW1

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