



## ❖ CLIVE BARRETT

The Peace Museum, Bradford, UK

### “IMAGES AND SYMBOLS OF PEACE”

#### 1. Exploration of terms: “Peace” and “Museum”

In Britain and in most other countries there are more war museums and military museums than peace museums. A war museum contains weapons; a military museum tells stories of soldiers and battles. What does a peace museum contain? What stories does it tell?

Each museum here would answer those questions differently. In the founding documents of our Bradford museum we said that we would “collect, conserve and display materials relating to peace, nonviolence and conflict resolution”. In order to satisfy national standards as a registered museum, we have had to follow strict rules about collecting, conserving and displaying those materials. And as for defining peace, we divided up our approach to into nine categories: Images and symbols of peace; Nonviolence; Pacifism and war resistance; Peace movements; Disarmament; Diplomacy, international law and international organisations; Conflict resolution and prevention; Human rights; Ecology and peace.

Note that our very first category was “Images and Symbols of Peace”. Within this category we listed the types of material we would collect: “poems, quotations, photographs, paintings, sculpture, art ... including images and symbols of peace from different cultures and expressions of hope for a peaceful future; reflections of peace from religious and philosophical perspectives in text, calligraphy and illustration...” and so on.

Images and symbols of peace are therefore at the very heart of our museum. We try to focus on materials that are visual, rather than on text and archives. Out of 4000 items in our collection, over 3000 are peace posters from around the world. Within this extraordinarily rich collection, there are many images and symbols of peace [1]. I would like to share some of them, and some others, with you. I have grouped them together under several headings:

- Images of war
- Alternatives to weaponry
- Resistance to weaponry: the nuclear disarmament logo
- Images of remembrance
- Images from religious sources
- Other images

At the end I consider both how museums can best use such resources and also how the way we do use images of peace can affect the very nature of our museums.

## 2. Images and symbols of peace, mainly from the Bradford collection

### 2.1. Images of war

Here in Gernika, we are aware of Picasso's dramatic artwork representing a horrific act of war. [2] By stirring the conscience of the world, that picture has become an image for peace; at the UN in New York it was so powerful an image for peace that it had to be hidden when Colin Powell tried to justify US war against the people of Iraq. It was used on internet posters opposing that war [3, 4] The question may be asked, though, “When does an image of war become an image of peace?” For example, does an image of immense power [5] fill you with excitement or fear? Is this a triumph or a disaster? Governments often try to ignore the human cost of war. That was why one of the first peace museums of the 20th century, Ernst Friedrich's museum in Berlin [6], was so brave to concentrate almost exclusively on photographs of the horrors of war [7]. Many peace museums built at war sites, in Europe or Japan, depict the horror of the violence in that place. In Bradford we tend to restrict our imagery of horror to that which is artistic and symbolic. A poster from the 1930s, for example [8], indicates a child casualty of war, with a quotation from the sayings of Jesus indicating that children are special and should not have to suffer in this way. A 1980s photomontage [9] aimed to show that British government attempts at civil defence against nuclear attack were futile and would have deadly consequences.

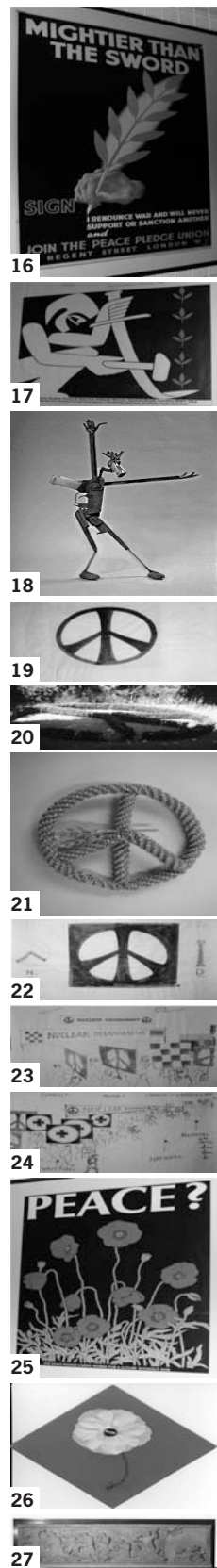
The very existence of weapons of war, even unused, can cause misery and death. One poster shows [10] that simply by selling arms to developing nations there is a human cost in the suffering of the poorest people on our planet.

### 2.2. Alternatives to weaponry

The War Resisters International (WRI), originally called PACO, was formed in the Netherlands in 1921 with the members agreeing to the statement that “War is a crime against humanity: I therefore am determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war”. The symbol of the WRI [11] is of two hands breaking a rifle. It has been associated with conscientious objectors to military service across the world. This example is a wonderful hand carving, in wood, made by a Jehovah's Witness, imprisoned in Greece for refusing conscription into the army. There are other variations, too [12]. I think an image [13] of rifles with the barrels entwined into a heart, a symbol of love, is of Japanese origin. It indicates how symbols can transcend language, and, indeed, become an international language themselves. It reminds me in principle [14] of the New York UN sculpture of a knotted gun, crafted in memory of John Lennon. If only we had the money I would love to purchase a tank to put outside our museum and commission a sculptor to tie a knot in its barrel!

The transforming of weapons is a common technique in peace imagery. I have already mentioned the arms trade. An image promoted by the Quakers [15], “The hungry need bread not bombs” is found on tea towels and even on





carrier bags. As an alternative to weaponry [16], a 1930s poster proclaims that the pen is mightier than the sword.

The Judaeo-Christian scriptures contain one of the classic texts of weapon transformation [17]. The books of both Isaiah and Micah contain a vision of beating swords into ploughs. The principle reminds me of a recent scheme in Mozambique to encourage people to hand in their weapons in exchange for farming equipment [18]. The weapons handed in were sculpted into a variety of extraordinary shapes, including a disco-dancer! (Sadly, we don't have this particular sculpture in our collection, but a neighbouring museum, with which we work very closely, does have a chair made from the same materials.)

### 2.3. Resistance to weaponry: the Nuclear Disarmament logo

[19] What we do have in our collection is a symbol that is known across the world. It seemsto have been adopted by every protest group and disaffected teenage graffiti artist on the planet. I have seen it in flowerbeds [20] (this one is in Crete); I have seen it made of corn [21]; I have seen its shape formed by crowds of thousands of people. Yet few know of its origins. In Bradford we have copies of the original drawings by the man who designed the symbol [22]. In 1957, an opponent of nuclear weapons, Gerald Holtom, made this drawing of the semaphore code letters N (^) and D (I), standing for Nuclear Disarmament. On top of each other, they gave us the symbol first used by the British peace group, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament [23]. Holtom also made sketches of how he thought the symbol would look on protest demonstrations [24]: these pictures too we have in our collection.

### 2.4. Images of remembrance

Ever since the pointless slaughter of millions of men in the trenches of Europe in the First World War, there have been annual ceremonies of remembrance in Britain. The symbol of remembrance has been the red poppy, the only colour to be seen in the grey and the mud of northern France and Belgium [25]. Yet these ceremonies of remembrance have often degenerated into pageants of the very nationalism and militarism that had caused the war. At times, the red poppy does not so much honour the dead as fuel the very emotions that promote war. Hence the question, "Is this peace?" [26] In 1933, the Co-operative Women's Guild, whose members had lost husbands, fathers, brothers, sons in 1914-1918, introduced the white poppy for peace. This not only commemorates those who lost their lives in war, but stands for a commitment to work for peace and the prevention of future war.

War memorials and gravestones are also reminders of the losses of war, and may be used, like the red poppy, to stir up feelings of nationalism. Two images show that this need not always be the case. The neighbouring city to Bradford is Leeds. [27] The pacifist sculptor Eric Gill was commissioned to create a war memorial for the University of Leeds. He produced a frieze showing Jesus driving the money-changers out of the temple. His astonishingly brave message was

that capitalism was the cause of war. It was not the message usually conveyed by war memorials. Even gravestones can provide an unexpected protest against war. [28] This gravestone was seen during the 4th International Conference of Peace Museums, on our excursion to the 1917 killing fields of Passchendaele. [29] The unusual carving rightly, if surprisingly, states that this young man was "sacrificed to the fallacy that war can end war".

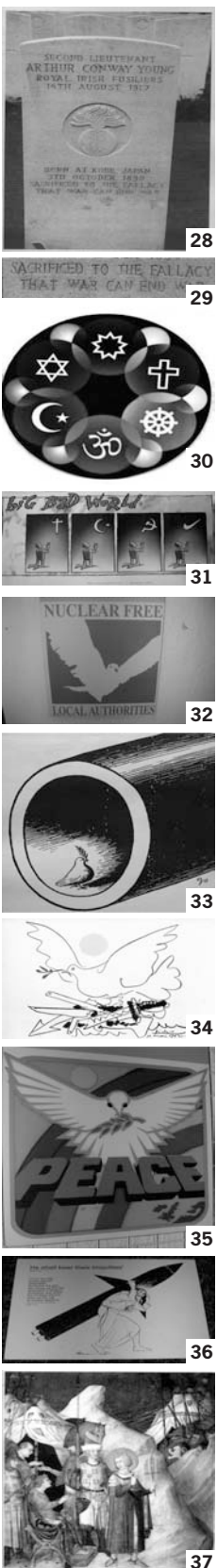
### 2.5. Images from religious sources

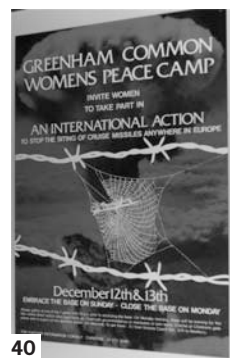
Many images and symbols are ambiguous; they can have opposing meanings. [30] What do you think when you see religious symbols, perhaps a cross, a crescent, the Star of David? To some people, these signify spiritual peace and right teaching for a better world. To other people, they are a threat, or signs of the cause of many of the world's wars and much of the world's suffering. And are there equally dangerous 'religions' for those of no religion? [31]

Whether you regard religions as a curse or a blessing, you will have been influenced by images of peace that originate from religious texts. There were many primitive stories circulating in different cultures in the ancient Middle East about the creation of life out of water. One of the oldest of these stories is the Epic of Gilgamesh, in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). A version of that story can be found in the Hebrew scriptures, in the Book of Genesis - the story of Noah and the Flood. Noah, his family, and a host of animals took to their Ark to escape the violence of the flood [32]. They realise that the waters are falling and that a new start can be made to life on earth when their dove returns carrying an olive branch [33]. The dove and the olive branch become symbols of the new order of peace, as here, again, with Picasso [34]. (The dove is not the only creature used to represent peace: others are the butterfly, and, in some cultures, the nonviolent tortoise.) More than that, when Noah restarts his life, he is told by God that a rainbow in the sky would signify the end of God's anger, that there would be no more violence against the earth [35]. The rainbow becomes a symbol of the end of violence and the dawn of the age of peace. The dove, olive branch and rainbow become world-wide symbols of peace, reaching far beyond Judaeo-Christian cultures (even if some artists get rainbow colours the wrong way round!)

Not all adherents of a religion accept the way that their own religion can be abused and misused in the cause of war [36]. Here, a Christian cartoonist mocks Christians who accept nuclear weapons by portraying a Jesus figure carrying a missile instead of his cross. He shall "bear their iniquities", that is, carry their sins.

Also in this section I would like to draw your attention to what I think may be the earliest artistic representation of conscientious objection to military service [37]. In the 4th century, St. Martin of Tours, who had been a soldier carrying out "police-work", refused to go into battle. He turned down his pay, saying, "I am a soldier of Christ; it is not lawful for me to fight". He even offered to go unarmed towards the enemy alone. The story is depicted in a 14th century fresco by Simone Martini in the Franciscan basilica at Assisi. If you can think of any older artwork depicting war-refusal, please let me know.





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## 2.6. Other images

Other symbols of peace include a handshake of reconciliation or a pair of human hands [38], not clenched, but open. This example is on a quilt made for us by children from the Ukraine. A similar United Nations poster [39] incorporates an image of planet earth, this fragile planet on which we live and for which we are responsible. A whole variety of ecological or environmental images of flowers, creatures, signs of life and health, convey the same message. The point is that all things are related. It was that relatedness, that network of solidarity that led to women's groups in the 1980s [40, 41] introducing the spider's web, seen here on a poster for a women's peace camp at a US nuclear weapons base at Greenham Common, as an image of connectedness and mutual strength.

A bridge is an effective symbol of reconciliation [42]. During the Cold War, Mothers for Peace from Bradford instituted a project to make a huge, beautiful peace quilt with sections embroidered by women from East and West. The quilt bridged the gulf between nations, particularly with the Soviet bloc countries. For example, the Russian woman who made the centre top right panel spoke of a "Flying ship to friendship! It means that we should use all opportunities to make friends, to live in peace and happiness. This magic kind of traffic!"

Some symbolism is beyond my understanding [43]. As well as the magnificent Mothers for Peace Quilt, another masterpiece of embroidery on display in the peace museum in Bradford is this marvellous banner by Lanark Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. (Lanark is the region around Edinburgh, in Scotland). Some of the symbolism you will recognise – the dove, for example – and possibly the angels of good overcoming evil, but other symbolism appears mythological. I don't understand it, but I do think it is beautiful!

## 3. Using images, becoming sacraments

How do we use these artistic images in museum outreach and peace education? Art has an ability to communicate that words can never match. For many young people in particular, art and imagery can encourage imagination and enable even the least able school students to learn about peace. Symbols enable a person to represent a concept that can otherwise be too hard to put down on paper. My colleagues in the peace museum have encouraged children to produce their own artwork, with considerable success. There has been practical web-making [44] and designing [45]. You will recognise many of the symbols that I have introduced above [46, 47, 48, 49]. Bradford is



a multi-racial, multi-cultural city [50], and many of the images produced by school students reflect their desire for peace between different races and religions.

One of the most unusual but powerful symbols of peace is a foot. It can be an image of suffering, as in this shoe from the remains of the World Trade Center [51]. It can be an emotional symbol of the Holocaust, as I experienced when seeing a pair of children's shoes from Auschwitz displayed at Memorial, Caen (also in Osaka). Yet a foot can be an image of the walk, the journey to peace. That passage from Isaiah about beating swords into ploughshares continues by saying "walk in the light" (and some use light, especially candles, as signs of peace; this candle has been lit from the World Peace Flame [52]). Nelson Mandela's autobiography is entitled "Long Walk to Freedom" [53]. It can be important to understand peace as a journey more than as a destination. Peace is not a destination but a way of travelling; peace is a walk, and we must walk peacefully. A foot can be a symbol of peaceful living. A recent project involved school students designing a foot. You will that domestic violence is included: "Peace in the home" [54] and familiar symbols: rainbow and globe [55]. Some students included two messages: firstly, what the government should do for peace, and secondly, what they – the students – would do, from making peace posters [56] to writing to the Government [57].

There is a personal responsibility to peacemaking, and the imagery of peace can lead young people into taking responsibility for their own peacemaking. This is a new generation, growing into nonviolence, conflict resolution and conflict prevention. The art, the symbols, the imagery combined to make a difference to the behaviour of these young people. It led them to pledge themselves to taking their own action for peace, to recognising the personal responsibility they themselves had for creating peace in the world.

Such an education programme, based on the symbols and images of peace, affects the very nature and purpose of the peace museum. This is peace, the process of exploring peace. A peace museum is more than a warehouse, storing materials for their own sake. It uses the items in its collection, and especially the images and symbols, to change the lives of those with whom it is engaged. A peace museum, therefore, does not merely contain symbols of peace, but by encouraging the promotion of peace, the museum itself becomes a symbol of peace. Borrowing a term from Christian theology, the museum becomes a "sacrament". A sacrament is a sign that brings into effect the thing it is a sign of. A peace museum is an outward and visible sign of peace: it helps to create the very peace that it signifies.

What about your museum? What symbols and images of peace do you display? How do you use those images in your own education work? Is your museum a sign of peace, bringing into effect the very peace you signify? Is your museum a sacrament?

I would like to end with an image that we in Bradford have adopted from the peace museum in Chicago [58]. It reads, simply, "Support the Peace Museum!"

