

**Dr Sonja Andrew**

**Abstract: Visualising Dissenting Voices**

John Edgar Bell was a Quaker and conscientious objector in WW1. He was imprisoned for refusing to fight and his family moved home due to abuse from their community, as graffiti and crosses were scrawled on their door. John's health deteriorated in prison and in the last year of the war he finally agreed to take part in non-combatant service, but the physical and mental scars of his prison experiences stayed with him and his family for many years. There was much lingering resentment towards conscientious objectors and their families in the post war period. John could no longer work as a skilled engineer and had great difficulty getting employment, as no one wanted to work with a 'conchie'. Crosses on their home also continued to single them out in their new community, where so many men had been lost to war. By WW2 John's daughter had married. Her husband was in a reserved occupation and again she faced social condemnation, as both her father and her husband had not fought.

This presentation explores the development and interpretation of 'The Ties That Bind', a series of textile panels that attempt to visually communicate John Edgar Bell's story and the consequences of the objector's beliefs, for both himself and his family. The narrative sequence of panels is based on the family at the start of the war, the imprisonment of the objector, and the continued hostility towards conscientious objectors and their families that continued into WW2 and beyond. The panels were exhibited without a content description at six UK locations to examine viewers' interpretations of the narrative. This presentation discusses the visual construction of the story and the meanings attributed to the images and narrative sequences, examining the personal and cultural influences that informed viewers' interpretations of this WW1 story.