

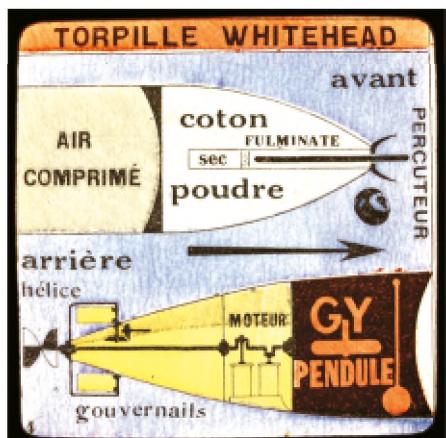
FROM THE SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA TO THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Kevin Varty

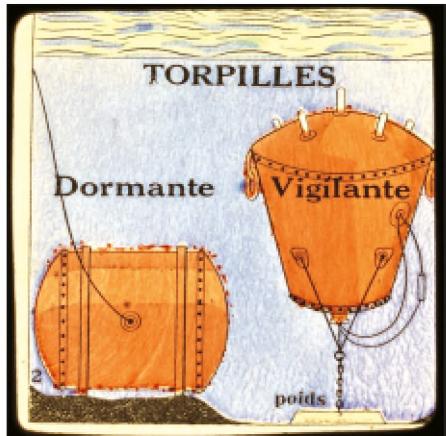
It may seem a strange title but this story shows how a single slide can take you on a voyage of discovery. Let me explain. I have an interest in RMS *Lusitania*, a Cunard liner sunk by a German submarine in 1915. A slide of the *Lusitania* appeared on a well-known internet auction site. The details were rather vague but I won the auction and the slide arrived a few days later. I was surprised at the contents of the box. There were 12 slides in total but only one showed a rather naïve image of the *Lusitania*. The others showed images of submarines – and all in French.

The slides are 4 inches by 3¼ inches, the images are printed on tissue paper and they are bound in the usual way. The set is entitled *La Guerre Sous Marine* ('Underwater Warfare'). They must have been manufactured after 1915 but I have not been able to find any other details about them. Despite the tissue images, they project well, and I showed them at Lacey Green (TML 36) and recently at the Bristol Bash (p. 14).

The slides show various components of submarines, mines and torpedoes. The images are quite amusing in places and I would like to know what audience that they were intended for. One



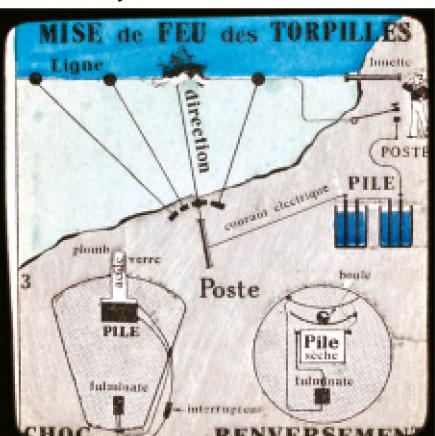
A Whitehead torpedo



Two types of mine (early mines were also called 'torpedoes') – active and dormant



Submarine layout



Firing the torpedoes

slide shows a Whitehead torpedo and this did not sound very French to me. I discovered that Robert Whitehead was an British engineer who was born in Bolton in 1823. His main claim to fame was in developing the first effective self-propelled torpedo for naval use. Could he be indirectly involved in the sinking of the *Lusitania*?

Whitehead was involved with Giovanni Luppis from the Austrian Navy and they worked on self-propelled torpedoes in the 1860s. Luppis thought that a small boat, loaded with explosives, propelled by compressed air and steered by long ropes from the shore would work. Whitehead had other ideas and soon developed the torpedo as we know it. In 1890, Whitehead opened a factory in Portland, Dorset, started to produce torpedoes and made a huge amount of money. Being a shrewd businessman, he took out patents and copyrights to protect his interests.

Robert had two granddaughters, Agathe and Marguerite. One day in 1909, Agathe was asked to christen an Austrian submarine, one of the perks of having an Austrian Countess as her mother. At the event, Agathe met the young captain, Georg Ritter von Trapp (1880-1947). He went on to be the most successful Austro-Hungarian submarine commander of the Great War, sinking 11 Allied ships. Georg and Agathe fell in love and were married in 1911. They had seven children, who later formed the von Trapp Family singers. Agathe sadly died of scarlet fever in 1922, aged 31, and Georg remarried in 1927. His new wife was Maria Kutschera who was training to become a nun. They had three children who also joined the von Trapp Family singers. And, of course, *The Sound of Music* is based on the lives of Georg and Maria von Trapp.

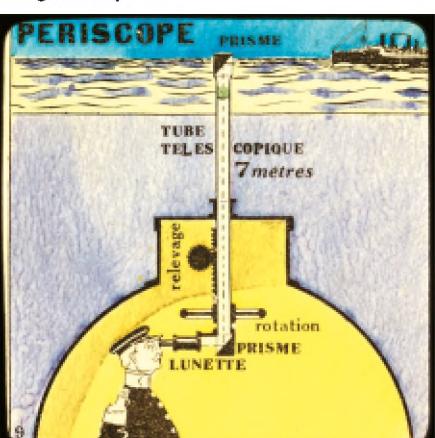
This was all started by what I thought was the purchase of one slide. However the tissue paper set proved to be really interesting. But my favourite slide is still the image of the Lusitania, appearing to be looking at a suspicious periscope and wondering what is going to happen next!



Hunting with a torpedo boat



RMS Lusitania viewing a suspect periscope



The captain looking through the periscope