

Civil Liberties

During World War One the Government passed legislation that controlled and restricted people's civil liberties. The aim was to help the War Effort but not everyone agreed with the control the government was taking of everyday life.

Defence Of the Realm Act (DORA)

One of the most important pieces of war-time legislation was the Defence of the Realm Act passed on 8th August 1914 only 4 days after Britain entered the war. The key aims of this Act were to:

- Control the passing of information, restrict communication
- Take over economic resources for the War Effort

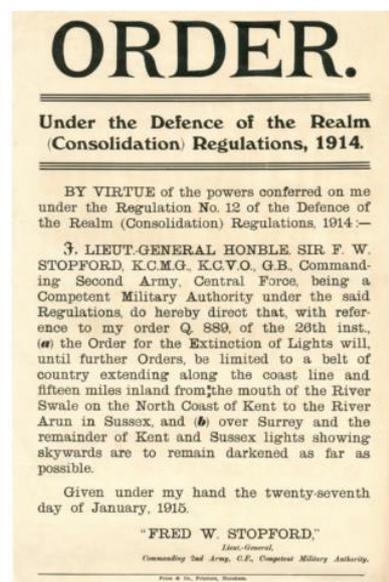
At first the Act was barely a couple of paragraphs long but once it passed more details were added in amendments.

The restriction of communications was to prevent the enemy from getting hold of information which could give them an advantage over the British army. In practice this led to a range of new rules and laws:

- Press censorship. No newspaper could talk about the details of the war. In 1915 a government selected a group of journalists who were allowed to provide some information. Letters home from soldiers were censored before they left the Front Line. It's important to remember this when looking at local resources like the West Sussex County Times that seem very supportive of the War.
- Taking photographs or asking for information on military bases was illegal.
- Owning telephone or telegraph or any other communication equipment was illegal – this included owning homing pigeons!
- All signalling equipment was banned
- There was strict control over who could own photographic chemicals and equipment.

They took over economic resources to make sure all British industry was focussed on the War Effort. The new rules and laws included ones to do with food production:

- The military could take over any land without permission of the land owner. Not all farmers were happy with this.
- Local governments could take any land not being used for food production to grow crops.
- Women were encouraged to form the Women's Land Army to take over jobs on farms.



Poster: 1998.1070 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum & Art Gallery

Horsham Poster about one of the amendments to the Act.



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- In 1918 National Rationing was introduced. This limited the amount of food each person could have.

As the war moved on this control became even more important especially in 1915 when there was a munitions crisis. The Munitions Act was passed and Lloyd George became head of the Ministry of Munitions. This act included new rules that:

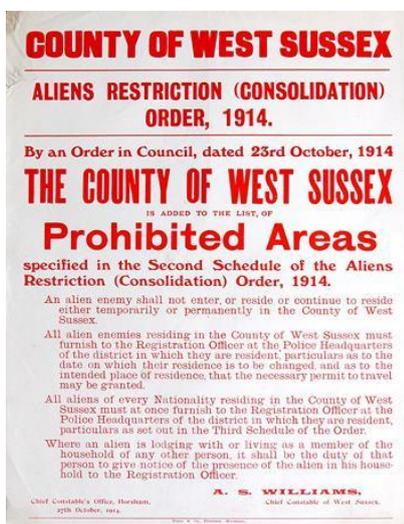
- banned strikes
- limited a worker's ability to leave and get jobs
- took control of certain factories.
- New factories were also built and women were brought in to work in them. In Horsham these munition girls worked at Prewett's Engineering works.
- They took control of the supply of materials like rubber
- In 1917 they took control of the coal industry.

DORA also meant new rules for how people lived their lives:

- Movement was restricted and no one was allowed to hang around places like bridges
- Light restrictions were brought in
- British Summer Time was brought in to increase working hours in daylight
- In 1915 there was a fear that alcohol was limiting workers' ability to work so pub opening hours were restricted. There was also a ban on 'treating' – buying rounds – and beer was watered down. Even the King gave up alcohol, the Cabinet initially promised to but weaselled out of it.
- In 1916 it became illegal for the first time to possess cocaine or opium if not a Doctor.

These rules and laws were not taken lightly and there were strict punishments for breaking them. Civilians accused of breaking these laws would be sent for a military court-martial and not allowed a

trial by jury. The death penalty was even briefly introduced if the person breaking the law did it with the intention of helping the enemy. By 1915, however, an amendment made trial by jury okay again unless there was an invasion or a military emergency.



Poster: 1998.1538 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum & Art Gallery
Horsham Poster listing all the rules of the Alien Registration act and how they apply to West Sussex.

- Trial by court-martial with no jury was introduced for civilians who broke any of the rules of DORA
- Briefly death penalty if proven with intention of assisting enemy
- 1915 amendment largely restored right of trial by jury but still possible to do so by court-martial in case of invasion or military emergency.

Alien Registration Act

Before DORA the Alien Registration Act was passed on 5th August 1914. The aim of this Act was to protect Britain against spies – German spies in particular. The act:



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- Allowed the removal and detention of spies
- Made people living in Britain who were from other countries have to register with the police
- The police could then deport these people or restrict where they could live

From the start of the war Christ's Hospital School was given to the military authorities to hold German prisoners. As a result of the Naval operations in the North Sea over 150 German prisoners were taken to Christ's Hospital in the very first days of the war. These prisoners were under the control of the West Kent Regiment.

Military Acts 1916

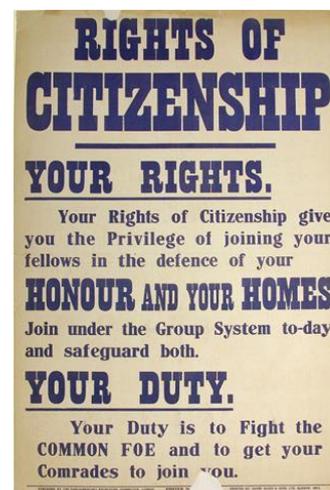
In January 1916 the first Military Act was passed. This act made serving in the army compulsory for all single men aged 18-41. This is called 'conscriptioin'. A second Act passed in May extended this to married men. Some men were still allowed to stay home if they were medically unfit, clergymen or in a protected ('starred') occupation.

These acts came about because despite the huge numbers of volunteers more men were needed for the War. Most other countries in Europe had used conscription since before the war but in Britain joining the army was voluntary. Propaganda was used to encourage men to join up in 1914. In 1915 a National Registration Act was passed that aimed to give the Government figures on men of military age who had not yet joined the army. All males between 15 and 65 years old had to register their age, name and occupation. This showed around 5,000,000 men of military age had not joined the army. 1,600,000 had jobs that were too important for them to leave to become soldiers – e.g. skilled engineers. So they were 'starred' on the list to show they were in a protected occupation. This Act led the way for the Military Acts.

These Acts affected the lives of everyone, not just the men called up. Nationally there were even demonstrations against conscription. In Horsham there were more women required to take on the roles of conscripted men, there was a shortage of Doctors and regular tribunals were held to judge those who refused to join the army.

By the end of the War

These key acts did not just affect war-time Britain. DORA was relaxed post war but never removed e.g. British Summer Time is still used today. And the military acts were maintained into 1920 to deal with trouble spots in Europe.



Poster: 1999.762 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum & Art Gallery
1916 Poster printed in Birmingham, collected in Horsham. The poster was created by anti-conscription Christian campaigners.



Glossary

Legislation	- Laws made by the government
Civil liberties	- A person's right to be subject to laws only for the good of the community, especially those to do with freedom of movement and speech.
Economic resources	- Resources such as workers, mines, factories and finances that are used to create goods and provide services.
Amendments	- An official change made to an Act or law.
Censorship	- Examining and controlling information – e.g. removing details about the army
Munitions	- Shells and bombs
Crisis	- A situation that is unstable and uncertain
Strikes	- A strike is when you refuse to carry on working
British Summer Time	- This is the act of moving of the clocks forward at the start of summer and back at the end to give more hours in which to work in daylight.
Alien	- In this case it means people not from Britain
Register	- Write down your name on an official record
Operations	- Coordinated military actions
Compulsory	- Something you have to do
Tribunals	- An official group/court who makes judgments

Find out more

- **Knight, J.** 2011 *Horsham's History, 1914-1918 Volume 4* Horsham District Council
- **Knight, J. and Mitchell, J.** 2014 *Horsham on the Front Line 1914-1918* Horsham Museum Society



References

- **Knight, J.** 2011 *Horsham's History, 1914-1918 Volume 4* Horsham District Council
- **Knight, J. and Mitchell, J.** 2014 *Horsham on the Front Line 1914-1918* Horsham Museum Society
- **National Archives** 2014 *Britain 1906-1914: civilians and war 1914-1918*
- **National Archive Transcript** 1914 *Defence of the Realm Consolidation Act*
- **Tudor, S.** 2014 'Britain and the First World War: Parliament, Empire and Commemoration', *House of Lords Library Note*

Images

- Posters from **Horsham Museum**, Albery Poster Collection www.horshamposters.com

