

Recruitment and Conscription

'Your Country Needs You!'

When Britain entered the war in August 1914 they only had around 700,000 men in their army. These were Regular army, Territorial Army, Regular Army Reservists and Special Reservists. Many of the active service men were already overseas mainly in India. On the other hand Germany had over 3.7 million men in their army. So Britain needed volunteers and fast.

Field Marshall Earl Kitchener was appointed Secretary of State for War and told the Government he would need at least 500,000 more men. So on 11th August 1914 a proclamation was issued calling for 100,000 volunteers. After only two weeks this number was met and formed Kitchener's First Army. On 28th August another 100,000 were called for and this was also met. Soon more and more Divisions were being formed.



Poster: 1998.1548 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum & Art Gallery

Horsham Poster 1914. The first appeal was for fit men aged 19-30 for active service. This appeal extended the age limit.

Horsham meets the call

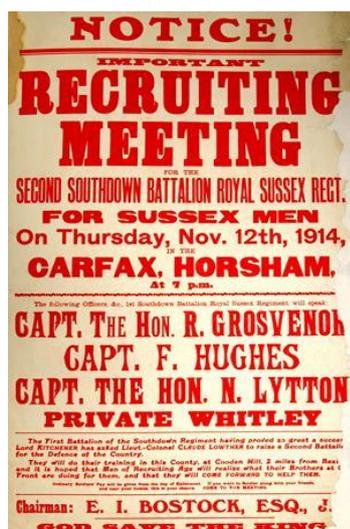
On 9th September 1914 the West Sussex County Times gives us an idea of the initial response of Horsham lads to Kitchener's Appeal:

"Stirring scenes have been witnessed day after day this week at the headquarters of the 4th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment in Park Street. On Monday the building was totally inadequate to meet anything like the demands and the process of recruiting required the utilisation of another building."

Pals and Propaganda

Getting hundreds of thousands of young men to volunteer for the army in only a few months seems a daunting task. At the start of the war however the idea of joining the army was treated with excitement by many and the phrase it will 'all be over by Christmas' was on many a young mind. In some areas of the country a short term in the army being fed and cared for and getting a 'trip' to the continent seemed preferable to their current life. In fact even though the age limit was 19 for overseas service (18 for joining at home) many underage boys snuck in. Often they were even encouraged by family and recruiting officers to join.





Poster: 1999.531 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum & Art Gallery

Horsham Poster 1914 advertising one of many recruiting meetings held in the Horsham area.

But there were still those who hesitated for a variety of reasons. For example in Horsham the West Sussex County Times reports that recruiting meetings had to reassure men that they would not be sent straight to the Front Line and would be trained.

So the government used a range of methods to recruit men. They relied heavily upon propaganda. This propaganda presented:

- The positives of the army
- The shame of not volunteering
- The atrocities (real and imagined) the enemy was committing whilst you stayed at home
- The pride of serving your country

These messages couldn't be put on TV on the internet or tweeted to the nation as none of this existed then. Even radio was not used by the public yet. Instead, in places like Horsham, public meetings were held to rally the troops, newspapers published articles and adverts and a vast poster campaign began.

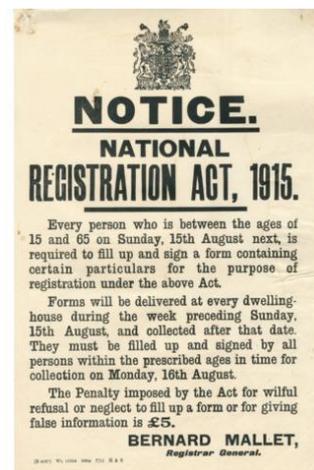
There was also a feeling that men and boys would be more likely to join up if they could join with their friends. So in Liverpool at the start of the war Lord Derby called for a battalion of local men. Within days he had enough men for *four* battalions. Soon 'Pals' regiments as they were called popped up all over the country.

All this effort seemed to work, certainly public opinion appeared in majority in favour of the war and by the end of 1914 around 1,000,000 men had volunteered.

Conscription

But the war was not 'over by Christmas' and the loss of life was getting worse. In 1915 one day of the battle of the Somme (July 1st) saw the British army's single greatest loss in its history – 60000 casualties, 20000 dead. Several of the Pals regiments were almost wiped out having a huge impact on some areas. Families in Horsham who had proudly encouraged their underage sons to join up began to fear. One mother even went to Chichester Barracks and took her boy home.

On 15th July 1915 the Government introduced National Registration. The goal of this act was 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



Poster: 1998.1045 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum & Art Gallery

Horsham Poster 1915, informing the people of Horsham about the National Registration Act.



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 conscription.

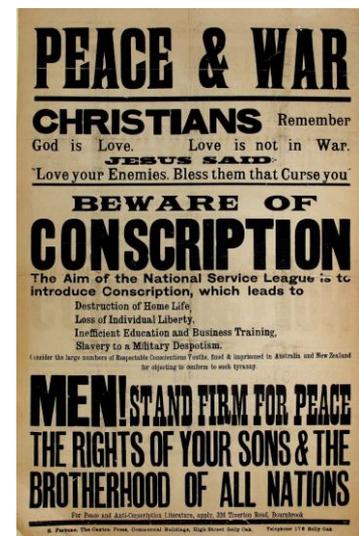
Most other European countries at the time had used conscription to create their armies long before the war. In places like France and Germany it was the duty of each citizen where possible to serve in the army at some point in their life. Britain did not introduce this compulsory service until 1916.

Towards the end of 1915 there was one last push for volunteers before they decided on conscription. The Derby Scheme (named after Lord Derby the Director-General of Recruiting) allowed men aged between 18 and 40 to volunteer or attest. Attesting meant that they signed a promise to go into the army when called but for the moment would be allowed back to their normal jobs. They wore armbands to show they had promised. However this scheme was not very successful and in January 1916 the first Military Act was passed.

This act made serving in the army compulsory for all single men aged 18-41. 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.

Conscription affected everyone, not just the men called up. 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.

Nationally there were demonstrations against conscription. In Horsham Sylvia Pankhurst visited the town to try and gain support for a repeal of the Military Acts. The people of Horsham were not impressed and according to the West Sussex County Times she was pelted with fruit and veg and was practically chased out of town by crowds singing the national anthem. The Act was enforced to the end of the war and beyond. In 1918 the Act was extended until 1920 to help the army deal with continuing European troubles.



Poster: 1999.653 © 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.

Conscientious Objectors

The Horsham tribunals revealed men who did not want to join the army for a variety of reasons. Some felt their businesses would not survive without them or had family that was dependant on them. Others believed for moral and/or religious reasons they could not fight. These men were known as ‘conscientious objectors’. They faced tough judgment at the tribunals. Most were forced to at least join the army as a non-combatant – e.g. as a driver or helping the wounded. Some who refused to support the war in any way were even imprisoned. Public opinion was often against these men. One way women were encouraged to show their disapproval of these objectors was to give them a white feather.



Final facts and Figures

- Around 6 million men were mobilised for the British forces
- Around 2,500,000 men joined the British Army voluntarily in World War One
- Another 2,500,000 men were conscripted.
- Over 700,000 of these men died in the war and many more were injured.
- Over 2000 Horsham men joined the forces and over 350 died.

Glossary

Reservists	- men who belong to the military who are not on active service but will be available to serve when called upon.
Proclamation	- an official public announcement.
Initial	- the very first.
Propaganda	- is when you present information that promotes a political cause or point of view from only one side.
Atrocities	- an extremely wicked or cruel act
Compulsory	- has to be done because of a law.
Tribunal	- a court of justice.
Repeal	- officially cancel.
Non-combatant	- a member of the military who does not fight.
Mobilised	- assembled and prepared troops for battle.

Find out more

- **BBC iWonder** 2014 *How did Britain let 250000 underage soldiers fight in WW1?* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zcvdhyc>
- **British Library** 2014 *World War One Themes: The War Machine*, <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/themes/the-war-machine> Last viewed: 07/07/14
- **Cooper, G.** 2009 *Horsham's Heroes of the Great War 1914-1919: "That His Name be Not Forgotten"* Horsham Museum Society
- **Horsham Museum**, *Albery Poster Collection* www.horshamposters.com
- **Knight, J. and Mitchell, J.** 2014. *Horsham on the Front Line 1914-1918*, Horsham Museum Society



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- **Parliament UK**, 2014. Conscription: the First World War
<http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/overview/conscription/>
- **Robinson, B.** 2011 'The Pals battalions in World War One' *BBC History*
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<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/voluntary-recruiting>
- **Watson, A.** 2014 'Recruitment: Conscripts and volunteers during World War One' *British Library Articles*, <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/recruitment-conscripts-and-volunteers>
- Extracts from the **West Sussex County Times** accessed via Horsham Library

Images

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

