

DEFENCE OF THE REALM ACTS (DORA)

The Defence of the Realm Act was passed on 8th August, 1914. It regulated virtually every aspect of the British home front. It gave the Government wide powers to prosecute anyone whose actions were deemed to jeopardise the success of the operations of His Majesty's forces or to assist the enemy:

- Whistling for London taxis was banned (because whistles were blown as an air raid warning)
- Loitering near bridges or tunnels was forbidden
- Lighting bonfires was forbidden
- British Summer Time came into force in May 1916
- Pub opening times and alcohol strength were reduced. It was an offence to buy drinks for others ('no treating' order)
- Possession of cocaine or opium other than by doctors became a criminal offence
- Blackout was introduced, initially in certain towns and cities and near the coast, but soon became applied generally, leading to prosecutions
- Press correspondence was censored. Military censors examined 300,000 private telegrams in 1916 alone
- Fines were levied for making bread with white flour instead of whole wheat. Restrictions on food production led to rationing in February 1918
- There were restrictions on the movements of foreign nationals from enemy countries. Many such 'aliens' were interned, although later released to work on farms
- Railways and seaports were put under military authority
- Men in certain categories of employment (miners, doctors, engineers etc.) were forbidden to enlist but were directed to appropriate placements
- There was censorship of the press
- Any workshop or factory belonging to the crown, or working for the crown was considered exempt from the Factory and Workshop Act under which no woman or girl was allowed to work at night. This allowed girl sorters at the Post Office and women munitions workers to be employed through the night
- Under DORA, public footpaths and fields could be closed without notice by the authorities. On *suspicion* of wrongdoing any person appointed by the authorities could enter houses, land, vehicles or vessels by force, day or night and seize anything within. The owner must then be summoned and it was for the Court to decide whether the articles be destroyed or not. The hearing might take place in secret. Any officer, soldier or sailor on patrol duty, or any police officer could stop a vehicle of any kind on the public way and, if he had any reason to suspect that the vehicle 'is being used for any purpose in any way prejudicial to the public under the Defence of the Realm', he might search and seize it, or seize anything he finds in it on mere suspicion.
- On 1st December 1916, compulsory returns were imposed under DORA for potato crops on land over 10 acres