

The limits of child's play in wartime

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Flying kites on windy days; challenging your friends to a game of conkers; and feeding bread to the ducks in the park – these are the staples of childhood, aren't they? Not the case during the First World War.

All these activities, which we all took for granted growing up, were banned from 1914 to 1918 following the introduction of the Defence of the Realm Act (known as DORA). A far-reaching piece of legislation, it took effect within days of Britain entering the First World War and severely curtailed the lives of children.

DORA prohibited any activity that could possibly be of 'value to an enemy'. As you might expect, nobody was allowed to talk about naval or military matters in public, or spread rumours. The public was banned from buying binoculars, ringing church bells, trespassing on railway lines or bridges and melting down gold

and silver.

But it is how the legislation particularly limited the lives of children that interested the charity, London Play. Working with primary schools in Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Southwark, National Lottery funding is enabling the charity to work with 150 children to explore how the draconian restrictions impacted on the lives of their 1914 counterparts.

Stuart Hobley, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: “Can you imagine not being able to fly your kite? Or not being allowed to feed ducks on a trip to the park? In wartime, civil liberties can be severely restricted but the effect that this has on children and their development can go unrecorded. Thanks to National Lottery players, we are able to support this imaginative project that will shine a light on the lives of young people at home whilst the conflict raged abroad.”

More information is at the [London Play website](#).



[Young girls playing in 1914 IWM Q34151](#)

[Growing up in wartime – it wasn't child's play!](#)