



About the Group

The *Ashdown Forest Research Group* was formed by a small group of enthusiastic amateur local historians who attended two courses given by Professor Brian Short at the Ashdown Forest Centre in 2010 and 2012, the first about the historical communities of Ashdown Forest, the second about the methods that could be used to research the history of the area. Initially the group was formed with the aim of completing a census-based research project – looking at the changing population of Forest Row in the 19th century – that we had begun during the second course but which we were unable to finish before it ended.

Since then the group has continued to meet on a regular basis and it has researched, individually and collectively, many aspects of the history of Ashdown Forest. Projects have included improvements to transport and communications around Ashdown Forest brought by turnpike roads and railways; demographic and occupational changes in the 19th century; 19th century forest families; fires on the forest in the early 20th century; and the provenance of the three barns that now house the Ashdown Forest Centre. Our most ambitious project, which we began in 2014 and was inspired by the centenary of the First World War, was to write case studies on all the men who fell during the war and who are commemorated by the war memorials at Forest Row, Hartfield and Coleman's Hatch – 113 in total. The project and its website has since been listed by the Imperial War Museum. Our most recent projects have been to research the Airman's Grave on the Forest and the circumstances surrounding the crash of a Wellington bomber in 1941 that the 'grave' is a memorial to, and the fundraising campaign in 1987 that enabled the Forest to be purchased by East Sussex county council, which led to a well-received exhibition by the group at the Ashdown Forest Centre in 2022.

Our emphasis is very much on doing research and publishing it. Numerous articles by members of the group have appeared in *Ashdown Forest News*, the magazine of the Society of the Friends of Ashdown Forest. We have given talks on the history of Ashdown Forest to the Conservators, the Friends of Ashdown Forest, and local groups. In April 2018 we led a well-received walk around Forest Row for the Sussex Archaeological Society, entitled '*Forest Row: a changing Forest-Edge village*'. We have held three exhibitions at the Ashdown Forest Centre.

The group currently has six members. It meets on Tuesday mornings at the Ashdown Forest Centre at Wych Cross about every two months. There is no formal structure to the group and there is no charge for taking part. We simply get together to discuss and progress the various Ashdown Forest-focused projects that we have collectively decided to take forward. Meetings tend to be lively, entertaining, and productive. There is no compulsion to take part in any particular piece of work. Participation in the group is purely voluntary. Group members can and do pursue their own research interests away from the group.

We're particularly grateful that Professor Brian Short continues to take an active interest in our group and provides us with encouragement and advice, and to the Conservators for providing the group with the use of its meeting space.

The group's website gives more information about the group and lists its publications (all of which are available for download):

www.ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk

Anyone interested in joining our group is invited to contact us by email. The address is:

enquiries@ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk

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