



About the Group

The *Ashdown Forest Research Group* was formed by a small group of enthusiastic amateur local historians who had 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 community of Forest Row in the 19th century – that members had begun during the course but were unable to finish before the course ended.

Since then the group has continued to meet and to pursue this and other research. The group explores many historical aspects of Ashdown Forest, its effects on the people who have lived or worked on the Forest and its fringes, and the impact the lives and occupations of this scattered community have had on the Forest's landscape. The research has largely been focused on the 19th and early 20th centuries, and on the communities lying on the northern side of the Forest, in particular Forest Row and Hartfield (largely for practical reasons because the group's current members reside there or close by).

Projects by individual members of the group have included improvements to transport and communications around Ashdown Forest brought by turnpike roads and railways, and their impact; demographic and occupational change in the 19th century; the connections that existed in the 19th century between families on the Forest; a Commoner's view of the fires that broke out on the forest in the early 20th century, and the provenance of the three old barns that now house the Ashdown Forest Centre at Wych Cross. The group's most important collaborative project was to mark the centenary of the First World War by writing case studies on all the men who fell during the war and who are commemorated on the war memorials at Forest Row and Hartfield. This has involved the

production of 113 case studies and associated articles, and the creation of a dedicated website, and was completed in November 2018. We have also recently been helping the Conservators of Ashdown Forest by sorting through and cataloguing documents in their archives with a view to providing advice about what should be retained for historical reasons.

Our emphasis is very much on doing research, and publishing it. Several articles by members of the group have appeared in *Ashdown Forest News*, the magazine 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 2015 and 2017 we held exhibitions of our work at the Ashdown Forest Centre. And in April 2018 we conducted a well-received guided historical walk around Forest Row for the Sussex Archaeological Society entitled '*Forest Row: a changing Forest-Edge village*', held in conjunction with the conference it held the previous day, '*Ancient to Modern: the Changing Landscape of Sussex*'.

The Conservators of Ashdown Forest have kindly lent their support to the group, providing us with meeting facilities and a page on their website. The Group now also has its own website: <http://www.ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk/> where its publications may be viewed and downloaded.

The group is quite small: it currently has five regular members. It meets on Tuesday mornings at the Forest Centre about every two months. There is no formal structure to the group and there is no charge for taking part. We simply get together and discuss and progress the projects we have collectively decided to do. Meetings tend to be lively, entertaining, and productive. There is no compulsion to take part in any particular project work, and participation in the group is purely voluntary. Group members are free to pursue their own research interests away from the group. We gratefully acknowledge the active interest that Professor Short continues to take in our group and the advice that he provides.

It should be noted that a number of people, while not regular members of the group, have asked to be kept in touch by being put on a circulation list to receive our meeting notes and other communications.

Anyone who is interested in joining our group or wishes to find out more is invited to contact us by email at info@ashdownforestresearchgroup.uk

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