

FAMILY NAMES ON THE FOREST

DESCRIPTION OF ENUMERATION DISTRICT.						288
County and Parliamentary Division of	Within the limits of the Parliamentary Boundary of the City or Borough of	Within the Municipal Boundary of	Superintendent Registrar's District	Registrar's District	No. of Enumeration District	
<i>Sussex - East</i>	—	—	<i>East Grinstead</i>	<i>East Grinstead</i>	<i>291</i>	
<i>Description of Enumeration District.</i>						
<i>All that part of the Parish of East Grinstead which lies to the East of the</i>						
<i>Downside Road leading from Wycharde to Forest Row Bridge bounded on</i>						
<i>the South by the Blean Medway and bounded by the Parishes of Manesfield</i>						
<i>and Hastfield</i>						

Are you called Bowrah, Comber, Everest, Farnes or Gander? If so, the chances are that your ancestors have had connections to this area for a very long time. Hider, Kenwood, Shoemsmith, Staplehurst, Tester, Todman, Waters and Wickenden are other strongly local surnames. All of these appear on the 1851 census for Forest Row, and were almost unique to the south-east in the latter years of the 19th century.¹

One other name deserves special mention: Heasman. 45 people recorded in Forest Row in 1851 bore this Sussex name, spread between 9 households, representing nearly 8% of the population. A possible origin for the name is 'man from the brushwood' – very appropriate for Ashdown Forest.



The Heasmans were typical Forest inhabitants in 1851, employed on the land as farm labourers, in woodcraft industries or as servants; some of the wives earned extra as needlewomen. The earliest traces of the family in East Grinstead parish date from the middle of the 17th century, and by 1851 they were kin through marriage to the Huggett, Martin, Mitchell, Richardson, Tester and Todman families, all of whom (with the exception of the Huggetts) were represented by at least four households in 1851. Between them, this interconnected group of families made up almost a quarter of the inhabitants of the enumeration district in one huge extended clan. I doubt Forest Row could demonstrate anything like this kinship web today.

By 1881 the Bowrah, Gander, Kenwood, Shoemsmith, Staplehurst and Wickenden families had gone from the Forest, but the Heasmans, Testers and Todmans were all thriving. There were still nine Heasman households containing 36 souls, 26 Testers in six households and 13 Todmans in three households. The group of families outlined in the paragraph above still made up about a quarter of the population. New names in 1881 included Luxford, for whom perhaps Luxfords Lane is named. Jones also nearly made the top ten.

¹ <http://qbnames.publicprofiler.org/> University College London research project

Out of a population of over 1,100 in 1901 there were only 19 Heasmans left in Forest Row spread between three households, and their kinship group represented less than 10% of the community. Of the rest of the Sussex names listed at the beginning of the article, only the Coomers, Hyders, Testers, Todmans and Waters remained. For these families the influx of incomers coupled with the growth in population may have been as alien to them as some people find the demographic mix in London today.

<i>Top 10 names</i>		
1851	1881	1901
Heasman	Heasman	Miles
Mitchell	Mitchell	Mitchell
Martin	Card	Heasman
Tester	Tester	Martin
Richardson	Waters	Card
Jenner	Miles	Edwards
Todman	Jenner	Jenner
Comber	Blackstone	Charman
Bowrah	Martin	Baker
Blackstone	Cook	Underwood

In 1851, although the majority of people living in the Forest Row part of East Grinstead parish had been born in Sussex, nearly a quarter of the family names recorded weren't local to south-east England at all. Most of these, though, were represented by a single person – presumably with itchy feet or a good reason for leaving home, so the impact on the local population was small. In 1881, though, more than a fifth of the people living in Forest Row had been born outside Sussex, and by 1901 the proportion of 'foreigners' had risen to a third, though I suspect the Jenners born in Berkshire, Devon and Surrey, the Martins born in Essex, Staffordshire and Surrey and the Heasmans born in London may have had their roots closer to home. There was a wide range of new surnames, often only represented by one household. Of the indigenous inhabitants, the Card family had probably grown the most, from one family in 1851 to 8 households with 28 individuals between them in 1901.

Some family names left a permanent mark on the landscape. The road leading to the broom-yard once run by the Card family is still known as Card Hill, while Inkpen Lane presumably recalls the Edward Inkpen or Inkpin who lived at Highgate in 1851. Although not marked on modern maps, an area named Heasmans can be identified between Ashdown and Pixton Hill farms.



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