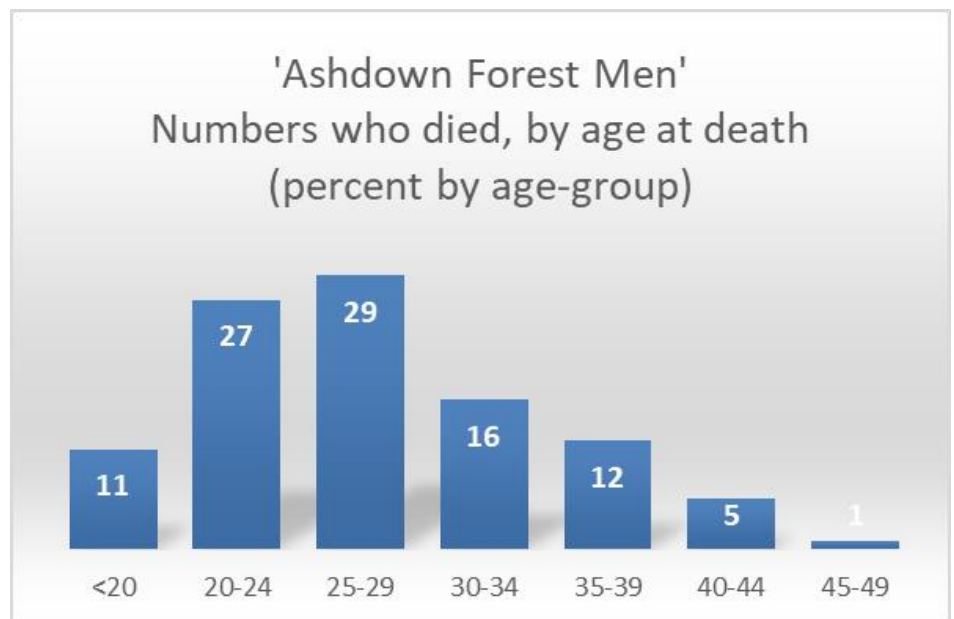


# Researching the Men of Ashdown Forest who fell in the First World War

MARTIN BERRY

The Ashdown Forest Research Group – a group of volunteers who research the historical geography of Ashdown Forest – is currently engaged in a major project to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.

The task we have set ourselves is to write profiles of all the men who died while on military service during the 1914-18 war and who are commemorated by the war memorials at Forest Row and Hartfield and in the books of remembrance at the churches of Holy Trinity in Forest Row, Holy Trinity at Coleman's Hatch, and St. Mary the Virgin, Hartfield.

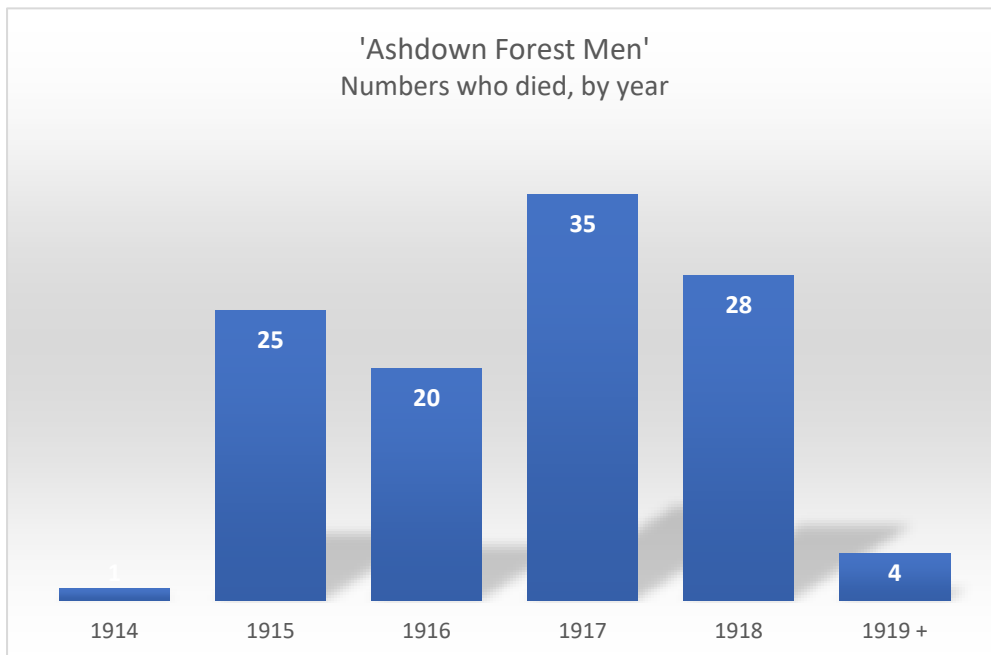


Our first collection of studies was published on 4 August 2014, exactly 100 years after war was declared. They are being written in order of the date of the men's deaths, and we will soon reach the end of 1917. The studies describe the war service of the men and the circumstances in which they died; they also delve into their family backgrounds and explain their connections with the local area. We expect to produce 116 in total.

Looking at the cohort as a whole, a number of features stand out. I've picked out just two here as examples.

It may surprise you to learn that the men in our cohort weren't necessarily particularly young when they died. As the graph above indicates, the age-group in which most died was 25-29. In fact, the mean age at death was 27½, and almost a fifth of those who died were aged 35 and over – the oldest was 46.

Also, as the graph on the next page shows, if you look at the pattern of deaths over the course of the war there is a clear weighting towards the later years.

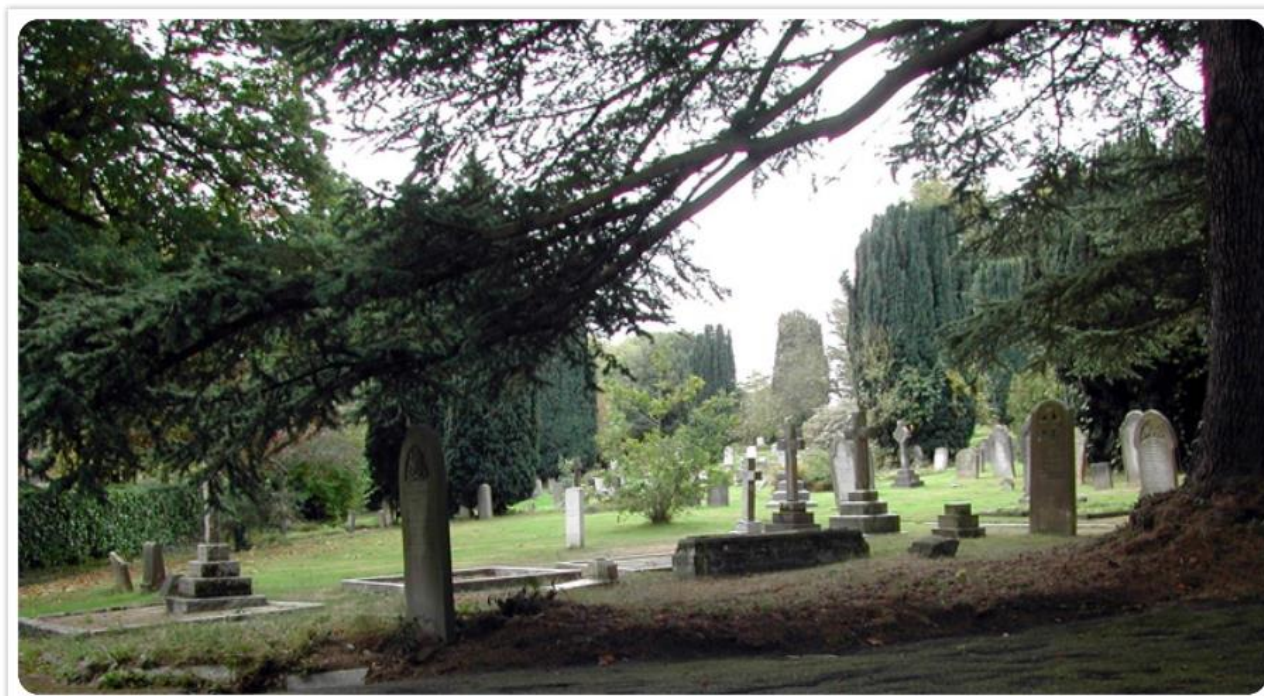


That said, there was also a spike in spring 1915, linked to a rise in casualties on the Western Front. A brief lull ensued in early 1916 followed by a surge in the summer of that year, partly a result of the deadly

impact of the Somme offensive that began on 1 July 1916. Thereafter, the death toll among our cohort climbed steadily, reaching a peak in mid 1917, before falling off slightly in 1918. It may seem strange to see that a small number of deaths occurred after the war, in 1919, but these arose from wounds sustained during the war.

The case studies are being published on the internet on a rolling basis. They can be accessed via the group's web page on the Forest Centre's website, address below:

<http://www.ashdownforest.org/enjoy/history/AshdownResearchGroup.php>



*Forest Row cemetery*