

WHO WERE THE CENSUS ENUMERATORS?

The decennial census was a masterpiece of Victorian organisation, involving the collation of a vast amount of information relating to who was in every household in the country on Census night, normally a time in April or May.

A crucial role was played by the local enumerators. They had to make sure the questionnaires went to every household in their district – even if it was someone occupying a tent or caravan on the Forest! The enumerators were therefore selected for their local knowledge, intelligence, education, reliability and respectability. For a small fee plus expenses, they collected and sometimes helped complete each household's census form and then sent the information to the Census Office.

The enumerators employed in Forest Row provide examples of the people chosen for this important task.

The enumerator in 1851, William Wells, was the owner of a wheelwright's shop, two cottages and a cider-making premises. He recorded his immediate area and "Ashdown Forest", the only address given to the scattered dwellings he covered. As a local man he would have been able to find them all and verify the entries for each.

By 1881 the enumerator was John Hammond Hooker, a licensed victualler at the Railway Hotel, who was married with four children. Born in Tonbridge in 1839, he had moved initially to Ashurstwood to work as a carrier – grooming horses - around 1871. As a publican, working near the station, he would have been well-known in the village.

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