



# Life and Leisure on the Forest 1850-1914

*A collation of text and images from the Group's exhibition  
Ashdown Forest in a Time of Change: 1850-1914,  
which was held at the Ashdown Forest Centre  
from 5 July to 31 August 2017*

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# Preface

In July and August 2017 the Ashdown Forest Research Group held its second exhibition at the Ashdown Forest Centre, Wych Cross.

Entitled “Ashdown Forest at a Time of Change: 1850-1914”, the exhibition covered a diverse range of topics that illustrated some of the profound changes that were taking place to the Forest and its communities in the period from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through to the outbreak of the First World War.

We have now collated the text and images from the exhibition into a series of booklets based around these topics. They comprise:

1. Ashdown Forest at a Time of Change: A Timeline
2. Aspects of Change in Forest Occupations
3. Life and Leisure on the Forest
4. Changing Architectural Styles on the Forest Edge
5. The Development of Railways around Ashdown Forest

These booklets are being made available for download as PDFs from the website of the Conservators of Ashdown Forest – the address is on the back page.

If you wish to contact the authors of any of these booklets, please get in touch via the group's email address – also given on the back page.

## Women Playing Stoolball

Sometimes stoolball is called “cricket up in the air,” as the ball is bowled, not on the ground as originally, at a milking stool, but, as we all know, at a board a foot square fixed to a post, the top of which board is four feet eight inches above the ground. The wickets are placed 16 yards apart; the bowlers bowl in overs, underhand, 10 yards from each wicket. The bat is like an enlarged table tennis bat, and the ball is somewhat smaller and not so hard as a cricket ball. Any fair-sized open space will do for a stoolball field, for the game does not require level ground, as does cricket – hence the sacrilegious use of churchyards in olden times.



*Stoolball being played at Chailey, near Ashdown Forest, c.1900.*

*(Source: theweald.org)*

Women were first reported as playing stoolball in England in the 1700s. It was a popular game in Sussex in the 1860s to 1880s.

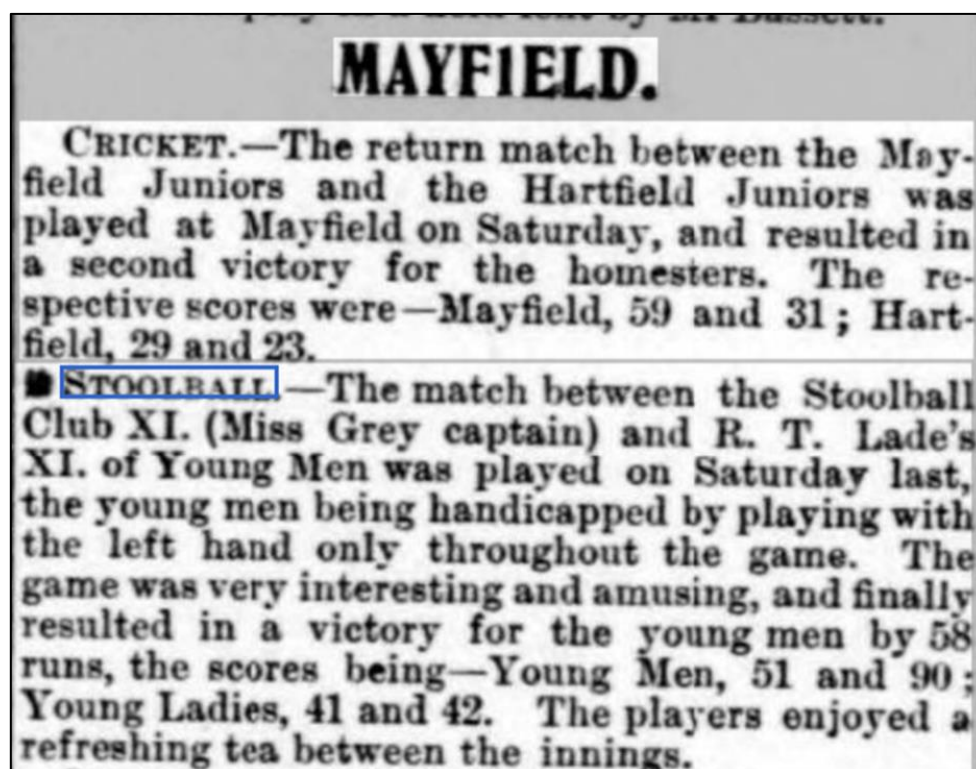
Mr H Powys Adams, writing from Thames Ditton, says that his father, a former Sussex vicar and an old Cambridge cricketer, was a keen supporter of stoolball. "Many an interesting match was played at his vicarage near Uckfield."



*The Balcombe stoolball team c. 1900. We can imagine that teams on the forest wore similar attire.*

According to the Forest Row Girls' School logbook in 1863, a Mrs Hoper presented stoolball bats inscribed with the Prince of Wales' feathers and his motto "Ich Dien" to commemorate his wedding (to Alexandra of Denmark).

Major W W Grantham, soldier and King's Counsellor (son of the late High Court Judge, Mr Justice Grantham), of Balneath Manor, South Chailey, south of Ashdown Forest, is credited with reviving stoolball in Sussex in 1917.



(Source: Kent & Sussex Courier 14.07.1899)

Major Grantham, whose eldest son had been badly wounded in France, was on service as Sussex Representative at the Military Tribunal. His intense desire was to provide some sport for the battered heroes of the war in our military hospitals. Cricket and tennis were games too strenuous for the men who had lost an arm or a leg, or were otherwise disabled, yet they needed outdoor recreation, and stoolball seemed the very game that they could play. Major Grantham brought a mixed team of men and girls to play a team of Pavilion "Blues," all of whom had lost an arm.

The Bishop of London captained a team from the Princess Louise



Special Military Surgical Hospital, connected with Chailey Heritage, Sussex, a school for children with disabilities situated a few miles south of Ashdown Forest.

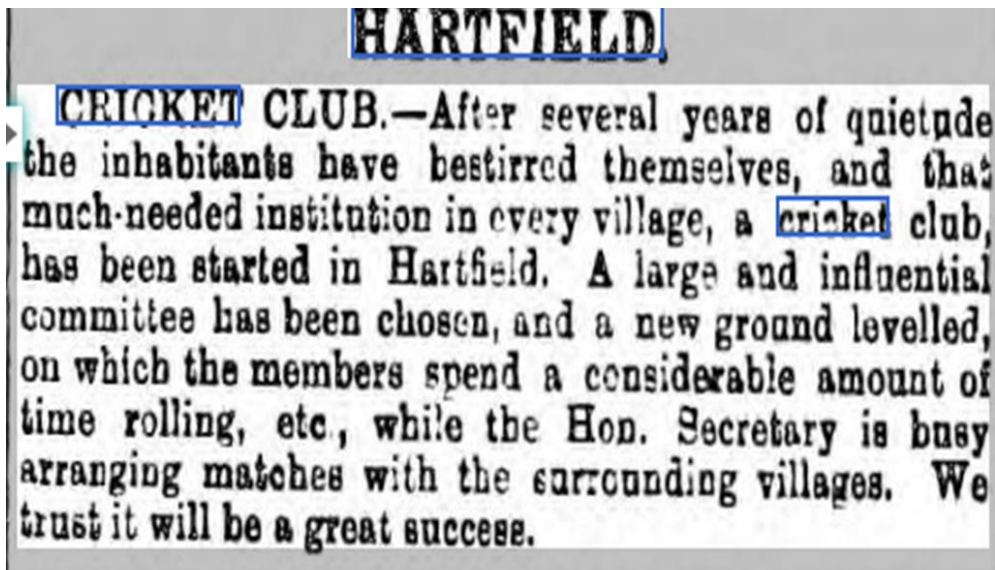


*The Bishop of London and the Matron of the Girls' Heritage, Chailey, Sussex, playing stoolball.*

(Source: M.S. Russell-Goggs, "Stoolball in Sussex", Sussex County Magazine, Vol. II, July 1928.  
<https://www.stoolball.org.uk/history/story/stoolball-in-sussex-by-russell-goggs> )

## Cricket on the Forest

Cricket has been a popular sport on Ashdown Forest for over two hundred and fifty years. Most villages fielded teams including Hartfield, Withyham, Coleman's Hatch, Fairwarp and Nutley. The Forest Row club was established in 1886.



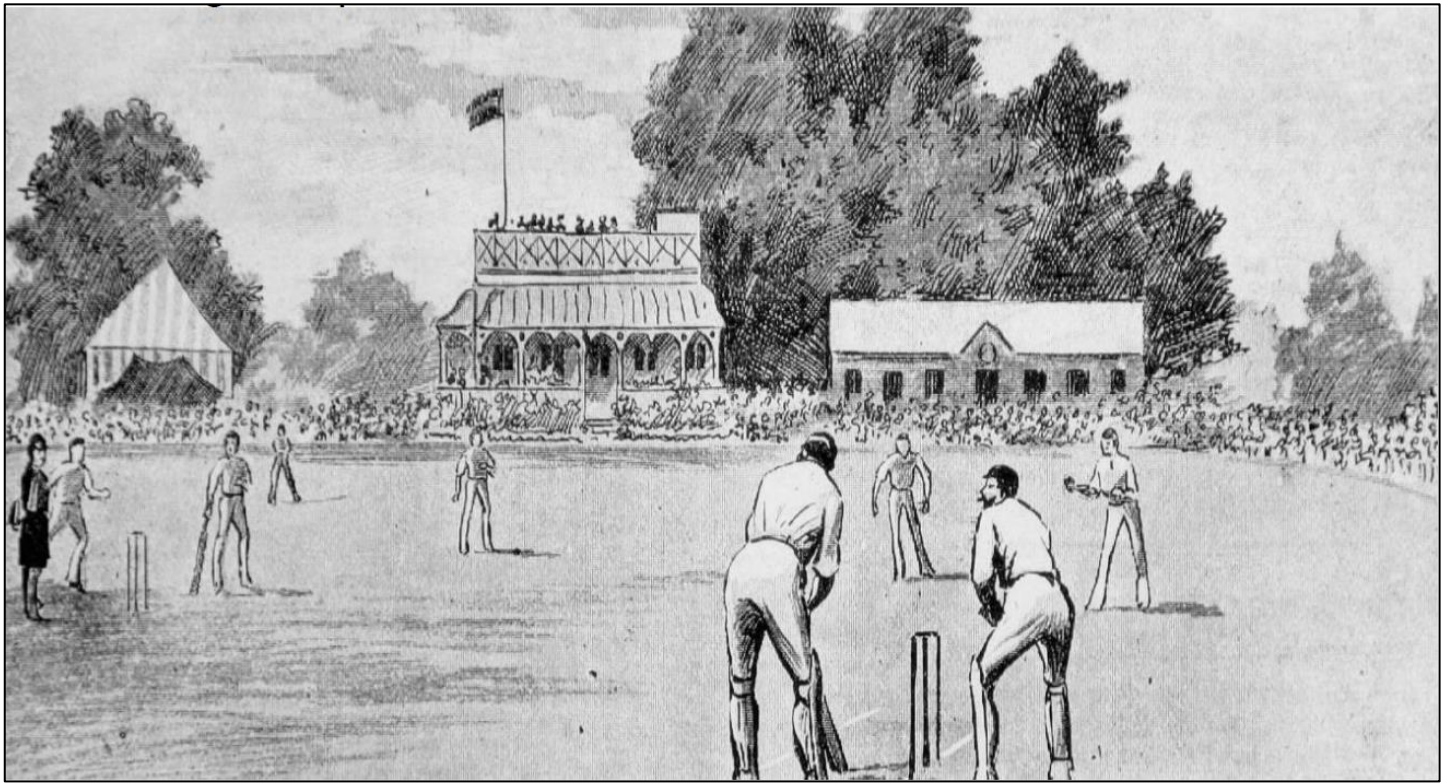
*(Source: Sussex Agricultural Express 27.4.1894)*

Sheffield Park on the edge of the Forest has very strong links to cricket. The first recorded match took place in 1845, on a specially built ground a short distance from the lakes. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Sheffield was a passionate cricketer, and sponsored Lord Sheffield's XI. One frequent member of the team was cricket legend WG Grace, who was a good friend of the Earl and played for his side on several occasions.

The most famous match in which Grace participated was in 1893, when the burly batsman hit a ball so far over the boundary rope that it hit a tree in the nearby woods. Sheffield Park also hosted notable matches against the Australian team.



For a match in 1896 over 25,000 spectators watched the match, and among the spectators as was the future Edward VII.



*W G Grace playing at Sheffield Park in 1893*

Lord Sheffield had a number of pavilions built around the ground for his guests and visiting players to use. The ground was also used to entertain local people. On May Days, for example, Lord Sheffield would feed large groups of the community and grant them access to all parts of the ground, including the pavilions. One story tells of a mile-long picnic laid on by Lord Sheffield for the local Sunday school children.

## Ladies Golf on Ashdown Forest

The **Ashdown Forest & Tunbridge Wells Ladies' Golf Club** was founded in 1889, barely six months after the formation of the main club and was only the second of its type to be formed in Great Britain, after Sunningdale Ladies. It once the longest ladies' golf course in England it was the first ladies golf club in Sussex.

The course designer was William Lee, other founder members being the Secretary, Miss H E Andrews; the Captain, Miss Marianne J P Birch; and her brother Robert, Secretary to the Gentleman's Club. Ladies had the privilege of playing on a nine hole, 1275 yard course for an entrance fee of three Guineas (£3.15) and an annual subscription of 31.11s 6d.



*Ashdown Forest & Tunbridge Wells Ladies' Golf Club. The Captain, Miss Marianne J P Birch is second left, middle row. The Secretary, Miss H E Andrews, has her hand on her hip. The future captain Mrs Green is front right.*

The Secretary, Miss Andrews complained to a reporter from the East Grinstead Observer in March 1890 about the "rough state of the putting greens". This resulted in the foresters reforming them.

The Sportswoman's Library, published in 1898 described the Ashdown Forest Ladies Course as

*"a very tricky green abounding in heather. In fact, when on the long course, what with the fir trees scattered here and there, the burns and the heather stretching for miles on every side you can imagine yourself anywhere but the heart of Sussex."*

Matches included mixed doubles. In October 1896 they got their own club house.

In 1893 the Club was a major backer behind the "Ladies Golf Union", which established an Annual Championship.

The Ladies' uniform, comprised an ankle-length wasp waisted skirt (with restraint band around the knees), and a "brass buttoned, scarlet serge tunic of the ordinary golfer's pattern with a sage green collar" all topped with a striped tie and straw boater ribbon to match. The stiff collared blouse worn with or without the tunic came with fully fashioned sleeves that had to be held back by elastic bands in order that the wearer did not use of her sight of the ball during her backswing. Head gear, other than the boater, consisted of a scarf and hat arrangement popular with lady motorists of the day"





*Ashdown Forest & Tunbridge Wells Ladies Golf Club Open Meeting – 1894*

The *Times* reported that the Ashdown Forest Ladies organized an open meeting in the summer of 1894. All the best known lady golfers of the south attended. There was considerable talent within the club and in 1895 Misses Andrews, Birch and Martin participated in the Ladies Championship held at Portrush. Miss Andrews came in 11<sup>th</sup> place. The Ashdown Forest lady golfers also won the Kent and Sussex Challenge cup.

Upon the outbreak of the First World War, a huge training camp was established at Tompsetts Bank, at the top of Chapel Lane. The camp would process more than 30,000 men over the four years and prepare them for the battlefields of the Somme, Ypres and beyond. The then Ladies Course was restricted to only a few holes

covering the area that is now the location of the holes 2-6.

The 500 horses and men were controlled from an HQ in Sycamore Cottage, Tompsetts Bank. They had to be trained for trench warfare and naturally ribbons of deep trenches sprang up across the Ashdown Forest. The scars from horse artillery movements ruined what would now be the 17th and 18th holes; these areas were abandoned until long after the war had ended.

Trenches were dug and huts erected on the land between the 7th and 15th holes, the results of which can still be seen today with the contouring of the land. In 1926, a stone monument was erected behind the 13th green in memory of the some 4,000 men from the camp who were killed in action. The War Memorial is still in situ and is appreciated by walkers and golfers to this day.



*Ashdown Forest Ladies Golf Club, Ashdown Forest – 1906*  
(Source: Private collection)



## Children's Leisure and Pastimes



*Forest Row Troop Boy Scout Troop – 1913*

*(Source: Tim Down's records)*

Robert Baden-Powell had his first scout camp on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, Dorset in 1907. A year later he published '*Scouting for Boys*' and the movement was born. In its first census in 1910, scouting had almost 108,000 participants; over 100,000 were young people. Robert Baden-Powell's cousin, Thomas Baden-Powell lived in Newick, East Sussex, on the southern fringes of Ashdown.

Scout troops from Brighton and Westminster had been camping on Ashdown Forest in 1913 and 1914 near Hindleap Warren. In

1916 the Fulham Boys Scouts were allowed to camp after checking with the military authorities. Scouts continued to camp on the Forest from London and Sussex after the Great War.

The early years of the century were full of diplomatic and imperialistic problems for the British government which led to the formation of organisations such as the Cadet Corps, the Boy Scouts and the National Service League in order to train young boys and men for national defence. In 1907 a Cadet Corps was formed in Forest Row, based on the village hall. In November 1907 their weekly programme was: Monday - boxing and fencing; Tuesday - physical drill and running maze; Wednesday - bible class and drill; Thursday - shooting on a miniature range; Friday - class for commissioned officers; Saturday - football. The charge was 2 pennies a week or 2 shillings a quarter. In 1910 the Forest Row Cadets were under the command of Captain Taylor.



*The Square & Church, Forest Row – 1910  
(Photograph by Photochrom Co. Ltd. Source: theweald.org, from a private collection.)*





Although the picture above falls outside our timeframe of 1850 to 1914 we can imagine that dancing around the maypole was a regular fixture on the Ashdown Forest during the period.

This photo depicts Frank Hyder's children at the Convent School in Coleman's Hatch c. 1920. Frank Hyder was killed in April 1916 on the Western Front. Frank lived in Coleman's Hatch before the war and worked for Messrs H&E Waters of Forest Row.

*"Dancing round the Maypole are Elsie Ellen Hyder, her two sisters Marge and Charlotte and father William Awcock plus a lad called Weeding."*

Attendance at schools on Ashdown Forest during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was often affected by

severe wintry weather. Illnesses such as diphtheria, measles and scarlet fever added to absences. Golf tournaments at Ashdown Forest Golf Club created so much trouble for schools that the teachers asked that no boys or girls should be employed as caddies.



Forest Row Girls' School No. 4 (Class 4 ?), c. 1900

Top row: fourth from left, Nelly Parker. Second row: second from right, Frances Bishop  
 Third row: second from left, Hetty Weeding; fourth from left, Edith Parker; sixth from left, Edith Bishop  
 Front row: extreme right, Ernest Bishop  
 Also on photograph: Florence Grisbrook and Bessie Baldwin

The occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria on 22 June 1897 began with a thanksgiving service in the church. A procession of children and other villagers was formed and led by the Forest Row Brass and Reed Band. They marched to the home of Mr Banister at Stone House Park. There were about 400 people who were given tea and the children were presented with a medal. Afterwards there were sports and fireworks followed by a bonfire lit at 10 pm.

The Ashdown Forest Research Group is a group of enthusiastic volunteers who research the historical geography of Ashdown Forest. We focus particularly on the people who have lived and worked on the forest, and their impact on it, and the impact that the forest has, in turn, had on them.

Articles based on this research have been published in Ashdown Forest News and elsewhere. We also give talks and hold exhibitions of our work.

For more information about the group, a list of its publications, and contact details, please visit our page on the Ashdown Forest conservators' website:

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

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