

## Tom Knight's Smock

A hundred years ago, it was usual to find herds of cattle clumping down country lanes. From summer to autumn, men called drovers moved livestock from place to place to find them the best pasture to graze on. Once fattened, the animals were sold at markets along the way. Droving was responsible work and the animals had to be kept in good condition. Roads were hard and stony, so most animals were shod to prevent them going lame. So cattle wore iron shoes, turkeys' feet were tarred and geese were fitted with leather boots. Sheep drovers carried a sharp knife so that hoofs could be trimmed regularly. It is possible to locate the position of old drove roads. Road names, such as ridgeway, drift, cold harbour or lane are all good indicators. Occasionally, pine trees were planted outside inns so that drovers could locate them easily.



Tom Knight, 1848 DROVER

Tom Knight.  
A drover from Marsh Green,  
Edenbridge, Kent.  
Image © The RH7 History Group,  
Lingfield, Surrey.

Drovers were generally trusted individuals and managed their own accounts. Landowners often asked them to make payments on their behalf or accompany their children to London. Tom Knight was a drover and on occasion, embarked on long tramps to Wales. He was born in Lingfield in 1819 and lived in Marsh Green near Edenbridge. Like other country folk, Tom wore a smock, a detail of which is shown here. It is made of linen and was waxed to keep him dry in wet weather. The smock went out of fashion in the nineteenth century as rural workers began to wear shirts and trousers. Rumour has it, that Tom was the last man in Edenbridge to wear one.

Drovers usually wore hide leggings over their trousers to prevent them getting muddy, or tied strings called 'yarks' below their knees.

Tom once ran into grave danger when a blood vessel burst in his leg. Luckily, his life was saved by a doctor from Lingfield, who was so moved by the incident, that he felt compelled to preach the good word to the local community. The meetings proved to be very popular with the local Presbyterians. Eventually, a decision was made to build a church for them at Marsh Green.

Detail of smock  
belonging to Tom Knight.  
Eden Valley Museum Collection.

