

## AN INTRODUCTION TO HAMPSHIRE DROVE ROADS

By

Eleanor Kingston

The need to drive cattle and sheep to new pastures and markets has existed for, at least 6,000 years and the drove ways that were used must be some of the oldest tracks in the country. In the thirteenth century cattle were driven from Wales to markets in England and in the late sixteenth century they were also driven from Scotland and shipped from Ireland to markets in the Home Counties. Here the animals were bought by graziers who fattened them for the London markets. The droving of cattle and sheep reached its heyday in the eighteenth century when the growth of population in the large cities led to demands for more food from the rural areas. At this time Merino sheep were also imported via Southampton to supplement the Royal flocks at Windsor and in the nineteenth century they were exported through Portsmouth to New South Wales and imported from France for the London markets. All movements necessitated the driving of animals over vast distances via long-established droving routes. However, the coming of the railways in the nineteenth century led to sheep and cattle being moved by rail and to the subsequent decline in droving, Innkeepers, ferrymen, blacksmiths and drivers alike suffered through this loss in trade.

Drove roads often followed ancient trackways and sometimes ran parallel to turnpikes in order to avoid paying tolls and to prevent the stones used in maintaining the roads from damaging the animals' hooves. Drove roads were from 40 - 50 feet in width and were often hedged to prevent the animals infiltrating local flocks and herds, and from straying into cultivated crops. The routes were way-marked with evergreen trees which were easily visible at all times of the year. These trees included holly, laurel and particularly in Hampshire, yew, all trees growing freely above the hedge line. Scots pine and larch were also used as waymarks along the route and clumps of these trees also denoted stopping places at inns and farms, the word 'clump' being associated with drove roads. Droving inns were called 'butts' and had adjoining paddocks of about 8 acres where the animals rested on their journey. Tree lined ponds were also situated along the route for the watering of animals.

Drovers had to be licenced and were amongst the most respected members of the farming community, being entrusted with documents and money from the sale of animals and were closely linked with early banking. They were required to be married, over 30 years of age and a householder. Scottish drovers wore the kilt or trews and Welsh drovers the traditional smock, their trousers protected from the wet by long woollen stockings, covered by leggings made of brown paper and waterproofed with soap.

As well as cattle and sheep, horses, pigs and geese were also driven to market, although **geese** were not driven great distances. Oxen were thrown on to their sides and shod in order to protect their hooves, and geese were driven through tar and sand to protect their feet. A typical Welsh cattle drive would consist of 300 - 600 animals split into manageable groups of approximately 200 each, and flocks of sheep would consist of between 1,500 and 2,000 animals. They would travel between twelve to fourteen miles a day and the journey from North Wales to Kent would take three weeks. Usually a man on horseback would go ahead to warn farmers to keep their animals clear of the tracks for fear of mixing the herds and flocks and to arrange overnight lodging and fodder. Three to four 'sidesmen' with dogs would keep the animals together and on the move, and other travellers would join the drove for company and protection.

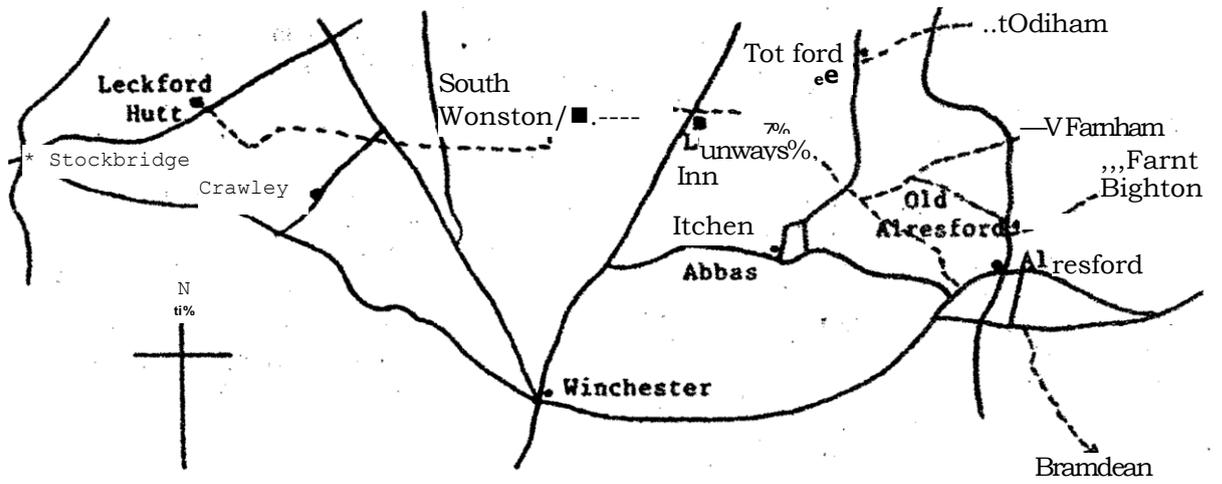


Main drove roads across Hampshire follow an easterly direction from the borders with Dorset, Wiltshire and Berkshire, having originated in South Wales and the West Country. The droves headed for the fairs at Weyhill and Alresford and to the market towns of Hampshire, Surrey, Sussex and Kent.

Leading into the main drove roads there are feeder droves, originating in the villages along the way. From these, local sheep and cattle could be driven to fairs and markets by following the main droves, and once again they follow an easterly direction. There are also local drove ways by which animals reached nearby meadows and pastures. As mentioned earlier, animals were also driven to the ports of Southampton and Portsmouth, but these have yet to be studied.

Evidence that Welsh drovers frequented Hampshire's towns and villages may be seen at a cottage in Stockbridge where an inscription in Welsh on an outside wall denotes that grass, pasture, beer and shelter were available there. A good example of a main drove and its feeder droves, well way-marked with holly and yew, starts north-east of Stockbridge at the Leckford Hutt, a typical eighteenth-century droving inn with an adjoining paddock which would hold 100 sheep and a stance of Scots pine at the start of the drove on the opposite side of the road. Running eastwards from the Leckford Hutt and avoiding various turnpikes established in the mid-eighteenth century, the drove passes north of Crawley where it is known as the Ox Drove, and a stance of pines at the top of the lane leading to New Barn Farm at Crawley indicates a probable stopping place for drovers.





•— Route of droves in central Hampshire