

A Shepherd of the Downs



We all recognise the lamb as a symbol of Spring, but did you know that shepherding was an important part of country life in the South Downs until World War II?

Discover this historic local tradition as you walk around the museum.



Shepherds spent much of their lives alone with their flock and dog in nature, sheltering in a simple hut.

How would living like this make you feel?

Listen to this song about shepherding, passed down through at least six generations of the Copper family from Rottingdean, near Brighton. Their strong Sussex accent has also disappeared!



*A shepherd of the Downs being weary of his port,
Retired to the hills where he used to resort.
In want of refreshment he laid himself d _ _ _ ,
He wanted no riches, nor wealth from the Crown.*



*He drank of the cold brook, he ate of the tree,
Himself he did enjoy from all sorrow was _ _ ee ,
He valued no girl be she ever so fair,
No pride nor ambition he valued no c _ _ _ .*



Walter Wooler, from Pyecombe, East Sussex

Shepherds used to wear a loose top called a smock. Special stitches gathered the fabric into decorative patterns. **Look at the example*:** which body part do you think this portion of the smock covers?



*Image courtesy of The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading (MERL 55/121)



The local Southdown sheep was small and had a woolly face. It provided people with two important things: **find them among the pictures below.**



protection from predators



wool



meat



pulling power for a cart

Turn over to explore more about shepherding in the museum collections!

Shepherding around the museum...



In Spring, shepherds brought their sheep in from the hills for lambing. Lambing pens were made using dried hop garlands or hazel hurdles. **Find out how hurdles were made at the Greenwood Village (no. 18).**



West Sussex Record Office, Garland N4956

This old shepherd wearing a traditional smock and hat posed for local photographer, George Garland, in 1931 at Findon Sheep Fair.

This one-day event every September was an opportunity for the often solitary shepherds to socialise and sell their flocks.



Find the sheep shears in the Tools and Trades History Society (no. 13). In Summer, shepherds trimmed the fleece off their sheep to sell at market. An expert could shear 40 sheep in a day using this simple hand tool!



At the Walking Stick Maker (no. 15), find a Pyecombe hook. Shepherds used it to manage their flock. **Which part of a sheep's body do you think it pulled?**



Sheep grazing the Downs over a long period created a rare habitat we call 'chalk grassland'. Many short, tender plants have adapted to living here.

Look out for these species at different times of year:



Cowslip (April-May)



Common spotted orchid (May-June)



Bird's-foot trefoil (June-July)



Narrow-leaved everlasting pea (July)