

Vehicles of every size, shape, and description, from the roughest farmers' waggons, carts and vans, were all brought into requisition to meet the many requirements of the day. Many thousands of persons walked long distances—from twenty to thirty miles, there and back—to attend the Fair. The greater part of the domestic servants only left their places once a year, and this was therefore their only holiday of the year. There were then no Registry Offices for servants, no such arrangement as a month's wages, or a month's warning. All stood in the streets in groups, seeking new masters and mistresses, the farmers seeking grooms, waggons, and shepherds, who stood waiting to be hired. Some had bunches of whipcord, horse hair, or wool in their buttonholes, which represented their respective callings. Dairy maids in those days were largely sought after, for the railway milk cans and their transit by rail were yet unknown. Such were the immense crowds waiting on the pavement between the bottom of Butcher's Row and the bottom of Parson's Street that shopkeepers were compelled to erect hoarding in front of their windows to prevent the pressure of the crowd from breaking them. Hiring was a busy feature for several hours during the Fair,—the usual time for the hiring contract being one year, the payment of one shilling over to the servant being the seal of engagement, which was as binding as the King's shilling is when taken by the raw recruit from the Sergeant; the forfeiture of this bond, except by mutual consent, was punishable by imprisonment.

Large refreshment booths were to be found in the Fair and other parts of the town. It was in earlier times permissible for householders to open their houses for the sale of beer and food during the fair under not very stringent conditions. Large green boughs were erected over the street doors. These special refreshment places were called "Bower Houses," open only during the Fair. Prodigious quantities of ham, beef, and pickled salmon were provided to feed the many thousands of visitors assembled. Parson's Lane, Horse Fair, and High Street were a great throng of people.

Banbury was highly celebrated for its Cheese Fair. Very early on the morning of the Michaelmas Fair a large number of farmers' wagons and other vehicles began to arrive from Warwickshire, Worcestershire and other districts, and large cargoes of cheese might have been seen stacked all over the Cornhill. Great commercial activity prevailed in this part of the Fair during the day. Our local cheesemongers and many others from a large district were busily engaged tasting, weighing, buying and carting away to the purchasers' warehouses, and consigning to other towns. This Fair in Banbury has ceased to exist since the middle of the 19th century.