

Society for the Relief of Distressed Travellers' opened in Castle Street in 1844 and, managed by Thomas Butler, an ex-soldier born in Kidlington, had a much longer life. Such establishments usually offered a night's free accommodation to a traveller on condition that he left the town the next day. At the bottom of the hierarchy of choice were the union workhouses, whose authoritarian regimes were a source of dread to the poor, but whose casual wards did provide some guarantee of tolerably clean overnight accommodation to the itinerant.

The Ward family lodging house

The lodging house of the Ward family in Banbury lasted as an institution, usually one of ill-repute, for more than half a century, although it changed locations. It originated in 'Waterloo', a collection of about fifteen houses in the parish of Banbury but at the Northamptonshire end of the bridge that conveyed the main road leading eastwards over the River Cherwell. Waterloo was regarded by 1834 as 'that great public nuisance', and the shoemaker George Herbert recalled that it was 'a lot of disreputable inhabitants, lodging houses and otherwise, of the lowest character'. Waterloo was demolished, to the satisfaction of Banbury's respectable citizens, when the Great Western Railway was built through the Cherwell meadows in 1846.¹¹

The earliest documentary reference to Waterloo appears to be the baptism in August 1831 of the daughter of a labourer who lived there. The first known lodging house in the settlement was kept by Benjamin Trusty, an umbrella maker and hawker, who had moved to Banbury about 1827, and was living in Calthorpe Street in 1828. He was recorded as a lodging house keeper at Waterloo in the parliamentary election of 1837. He had no lodgers on census night in 1841, but his lodging house was being used as a base for crime in 1844. Another lodging house in Waterloo in 1841 was kept by Thomas and Elia Robinson, and had twenty-one inmates.

Thomas and Bridget Ward, natives of Co. Mayo, the former born in 1800-01 and the latter in 1795-96, settled in Banbury about 1836. Thomas Ward, like Trusty, was described as a lodging house keeper in the poll book for the election of 1837. The Wards, who occupied two adjacent cottages, gave shelter to twenty-one lodgers on census night in

¹¹ *Banbury Guardian* 21 May, 4 June 1846; Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, p.10; G. Herbert, *Shoemaker's Window: Recollections of Banbury in Oxfordshire before the Railway Age* (3rd ed., ed. B. Trinder, 1979), Banbury: Gulliver Press, p.80 (2nd ed., also ed. B. Trinder, B.H.S. 10 and Phillimore, 1971).