

The numbers of Irish lodging house keepers and lodgers in Banbury were small in comparison with those found in other places, in such diverse small towns as Ramsey, Huntingdonshire, and Newport and Bridgnorth in Shropshire, for example. It seems likely that Irishmen set up lodging houses in towns that before the Famine of the 1840s were traditionally stopping points for Irish harvesters. Many lodging houses established in the 1840s or '50s remained for several decades in the hands of Irish families, but only a few continued to cater primarily for Irish inmates. Banbury was not, like many market towns, a base from which gangs of Irish farm labourers went out daily to work in the surrounding countryside. There were only 78 people of Irish birth in the town in 1851, less than one per cent of the population, and while the Wards and Tobins were characteristic Irish lodging house keepers, Banbury had an unusually small Irish community for a town of its type.¹⁵

Inmates

At a national or regional level the inmates of common lodging houses can be classified into ten principal occupational groups:

- itinerant skilled workers
- farm labourers
- railway navvies
- actual or potential paupers
- the military
- itinerant retailers and craftsmen
- scavengers
- popular entertainers
- general labourers
- beggars and tramps

Most of these groups can be found amongst the inmates of Banbury's workhouses. The data that follows is derived from census returns, but they can give only a limited picture of lodging house life. Except in 1841 the censuses for which returns are available were taken in March or April, and so show nothing of the migrations of harvest workers. The 1841 census that was taken in June lists many itinerant Irishmen who were haymaking the Lincolnshire Fens. Fairs drew many lodgers to towns. The census of 1841 was taken on the eve of the Charter Fair on

¹⁵ B. Trinder, *Market Town Lodging House*, p.37-42; B. Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, p.45.