

Market town lodging houses served as dormitories for farm labourers who trudged daily to work in closed parishes up to six miles distant. Towns where this was particularly prevalent in 1865 included Basingstoke, Much Wenlock, Stone and Eccleshall. In 1864 a Fellow of the Society of Arts described the town where he lived as crowded with agricultural labourers who had to walk several miles to their work on estates where there were no more than two or three cottages.¹⁷ Census enumerators usually took care to distinguish between agricultural labourers and general labourers doing any available unskilled work. There were farm labourers in Banbury's lodging houses – five in Waterloo in 1841, and five at Tobins' and eight at Wards' in 1851, but thereafter the numbers were small. Banburyshire was not a region where gang labour was prevalent on farms, and Banbury's lodging houses consequently housed fewer agricultural labourers than those in towns in counties like Shropshire or Lincolnshire where it was more usual. Drovers were specialised agricultural workers who naturally made much use of lodging houses, in Banbury as elsewhere. They included a Towcester-born drover staying with Henry Johnson in 1861, and an Irishman and a native of Cleobury Mortimer who were in Lodging House Yard in 1881.

Between 1830 and 1851 a network of main line railways of some 6,000 route miles was built in Britain, which grew to over 20,000 route miles by the outbreak of World War 1. Railway construction consistently employed thousands of men throughout the reign of Queen Victoria – nearly 40,000 were recorded in the 1851 census. Navvies were naturally itinerant, going from one part of the country to another as lines were finished and the construction of others commenced. They made use of many kinds of accommodation, camps with huts and tents, inns, lodging houses and private homes that did not normally take lodgers. Navvies were normally called 'railway labourers' on the census returns. The numbers to be found in the lodging houses of a particular town naturally varied with the rate of railway construction in the district. In 1851 the railway from Banbury to Birmingham was still not open, although most of the engineering work near the town had been completed several years

¹⁷ British Parliamentary Papers, 1865, XXVI, 7th Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, Appendix 6, Dwellings of Rural Labourers, pp.102, 259-260, 267; *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, vol. XVII (1864), p.476.