

previously.¹⁸ Four railway labourers were recorded in that year with James Atkins, natives of Bristol, Cardiff, Stratford-upon-Avon and Wiltshire, but many more would have been in the town a few years earlier. At the time of the 1871 census some work was in progress on the Northampton & Banbury Junction Railway, but it was some distance from the town, since the company, which opened in the following year, used the existing tracks of the London & North Western Railway from Cockley Brake Junction near Greatworth into Merton Street Station. There were no railway labourers staying at Banbury's principal lodging houses in that year but there were five at the *Black Horse* public house in Bridge Street. Three who were staying at Tobin's lodging house in 1901 were probably passing through the town, since the Woodford-Banbury branch of the Great Central Railway had been completed in June of the previous year.

The Poor Law bastille, the workhouse, built by the local Board of Guardians established by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, was a feature of the outskirts of Banbury as of most market towns, yet in almost every union only a minority of paupers was accommodated in the workhouse. The new Poor Law had been designed to constrain the relief afforded from public funds to able-bodied males and their dependants, and made scarcely any specific provision for other categories of pauper, the elderly, the lame, the blind, single mothers and children.¹⁹ There was much reluctance amongst the working class to apply for poor relief, and for the person or family with minimal resources the common lodging house offered a marginally less humiliating alternative to the workhouse.

Many inmates of Banbury lodging houses might otherwise have been in the workhouse, although the information available in the census returns is too sparse to draw firm conclusions. It was considered shameful for a family to seek accommodation in a lodging house, which was regarded as the last resort before the union workhouse. Some families, like that of a Bicester-born miller who, with his wife and three locally-born children, was in Lodging House Yard in 1891, could well have been driven there by poverty, but others, such as a Bristol-born bricklayer and his wife staying with James Atkins in 1851, who had

¹⁸ B. Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, pp.77-81.

¹⁹ F. Driver, *Power and Paupers: the workhouse system 1834-84* (1993), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.1; A. Kidd, *State, Society and the Poor in Nineteenth Century England* (1999), London: Macmillan, pp.27, 34.