

children born at Northampton, Wisbech and Bromyard, were obviously accustomed to an itinerant way of life. A few unmarried mothers with their children are recorded in Banbury lodging houses, for example, Julia Murphy, a 35-year-old Irish cotton spinner who had a son aged two, also born in Ireland, who was staying with the Wards in 1851. There were rather more widows seeking shelter with their children, including, at Tobins in 1871, Mary McDonald, a 40-year-old washerwoman from Edinburgh, who had children aged four and two born at Workington. Lodging houses in many towns provided shelter for the very old – one man supposedly aged 105 was staying at the establishment kept by John Cox in Holyfields Yard, Oxford, in 1861. There were relatively few very old people in Banbury's lodging houses, but they included William Bannister, a 92-year-old blind fiddler, born in Northamptonshire, who may have been travelling with a 40-year-old blind spirit refiner of Cornish origin.

Lodging houses were nodes in a pattern of retailing that provided for most country dwellers and many of the urban poor. Hawkers, usually assumed to be traders in towns, and pedlars, who by custom sold their wares in the countryside, formed one of the largest occupational groups amongst lodging house inmates. The scale of this informal network can be judged by the number of hawkers and pedlars recorded in the 1851 census – 30,553, rather more than the total of non-specialist shopkeepers (29,800), and to that number should be added some of the 7,299 people classified as 'General Dealers, Hucksters and Costermongers' and most of the 956 dealers in small wares. One historian of retailing considered that the number of itinerant traders continued to grow until the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Joseph Ashby maintained to his children that there were fewer pedlars visiting Tysoe in the early years of the twentieth century than in the days of his childhood, when he recalled a foreign-looking female pedlar with a tray full of cottons, a bearded itinerant draper with rolls of cheap fabrics and packs of black woollen stockings, and sellers of bibles, tracts and religious pictures.<sup>21</sup> Hawkers sold fabrics, particularly linens, haberdashery, medicines, crockery, hardware, baskets, stationery, books, brushes and matches. In some

---

<sup>20</sup> M.J. Winstanley, *The Shopkeeper's World 1830-1914* (1983), Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.6.

<sup>21</sup> M.K. Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe* (1961), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.201-02.