

establishment on Rock Hill kept by Thomas Holtham, a joiner. Lodging houses flourished in the vicinity of Blenheim Palace at Woodstock, where an Irish 'dealer', John Madden, had twenty-eight inmates in 1851, and there were a dozen in another house kept by one John James. There were large lodging houses in Abingdon and Henley-on-Thames, and even in tiny Watlington there was a modest establishment with four inmates in 1851, kept by a dealer in marine stores born in Newry, County Down, and his wife, who came from County Tipperary.

The number of common lodging houses diminished in the second half of the nineteenth century as more respectable alternatives, such as temperance hotels, proliferated, as the practice of going 'on the tramp' fell into decline, as village shops began to sell most of the goods that had previously been handled by pedlars, and as patterns of agricultural employment changed. Nevertheless, in the 1930s George Orwell described institutions that had all the characteristics of Victorian common lodging houses,²⁷ and Banbury's most prominent establishment continued until the same decade.

Banbury was a flourishing market town in the mid-nineteenth century, and it is unsurprising that its lodging houses were well-populated and long-lived. The Wards' establishment lasted between forty and fifty years, and that in Lodging House Yard had a continuous existence for about a century. Like lodging house keepers in many towns, the Wards and the Tobins had Irish origins, but at no time did they cater primarily for Irish inmates. Banbury's lodging houses were particularly important as stopping places for skilled men 'on the tramp', and for hawkers and pedlars. They also provided accommodation for some people who might otherwise have been driven to the workhouse, and for some farm workers, but to a lesser extent than in some other towns. The available data shows less evidence than might be expected of popular entertainers staying in Banbury, although it is obvious that German bands were regular visitors to Lodging House Yard, and none whatsoever of military lodgers, but this may result from the lack of festive occasions in the town in the early spring.

Common lodging houses were found in every market town in mid-nineteenth century England, even in communities that were icons of

²⁷ G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1962 edn.), Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.5-16; G. Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1963 edn.), Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp.186-88.