

## BERNHARD SAMUELSON'S RETAILING VENTURE IN SHROPSHIRE

*Barrie Trinder*

Sir Bernhard Samuelson was one of the most influential of nineteenth century Banburians. The 29-year old son of a Jewish mercantile family, who had been born in Hamburg, leased the foundry previously worked by James Gardner from 1 September 1849, and called it the Britannia Works. He then had 27 employees, but the number increased tenfold within a decade, partly due to a license that Samuelson secured to manufacture the McCormick reaper, the American machine shown at the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace in 1851. Samuelson became MP for Banbury at a by-election in 1859, lost the seat at a general election a few months later, then won it in 1865, held it until the borough lost its separate representation in 1885, and was representative of the Banbury division of Oxfordshire in the parliaments of 1885, 1886 and 1892. At a national level he was a distinguished advocate of technical education, and was highly respected in the House of Commons. From 1854 Samuelson began to invest in ironworks in the Cleveland region of Yorkshire, where in the 1870s he sustained severe losses as he attempted both to establish a large works for the manufacture of wrought-iron and to set up a steel-making plant.<sup>1</sup>

These aspects of Samuelson's career are well-known, but none of the published accounts of his life refer to a retailing enterprise in Shrewsbury based in a small depot in Castle Foregate that he took over in 1860 from one John Cartwright. Initially he concentrated on selling mowing machines, apparently much needed in Shropshire as numbers of itinerant Welsh and Irish haymakers were diminishing.<sup>2</sup> He demonstrated his Banbury-made machines at several trials in Shropshire in 1861 and 1862.<sup>3</sup> The business was nevertheless said to be

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<sup>1</sup> For Samuelson's career see Trinder, B., *Victorian Banbury* (1982, BHS 19 and Chichester: Phillimore), which includes references to articles on particular aspects of his life. See also the article on Samuelson in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>2</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle* 27 Jan, 27 July, 3 Aug 1860.

<sup>3</sup> *Shrewsbury Chronicle* 5 Apr, 23 Aug, 20 Sep 1861; 22 Aug 1862.