

**THE TRADE (AND DEBTS) OF  
A BANBURY SHOEMAKER IN THE 1870s:  
WILLIAM CAVE  
and his solicitor George Crosby**

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In *Victorian Banbury* Barrie Trinder discusses the decline of the town's traditional small crafts during the mid-Victorian period, as they were challenged by competition from larger units of production beyond Banbury.<sup>1</sup> He notes how a growing number of shops sold articles manufactured elsewhere, and that in some sectors there were no significant moves towards the establishment of a factory system of production which would have been more able to compete on equal terms.

Among the trades which are singled out in this analysis is shoemaking, which was once one of Banbury's most important occupations (and is forever immortalised in the view from Herbert's window). In the *Victoria County History* the earlier importance of the trade is analysed, drawing upon the evidence of the Banbury wills (shoemakers and cordwainers being the second largest category among the occupations of Banbury will-makers 1551-1820) but pointing to a dramatic reduction in relative significance after 1640.<sup>2</sup> Until that date they were, by a considerable margin, the largest category of tradesmen, but thereafter their dominance was rapidly eroded, and this is correlated with the parallel rise of the Northampton shoemaking trade. It is suggested that the town had hitherto produced shoes for a geographically wide market, but that Northampton's rise put an end to that since the market was 'captured by the rival town'.

Nonetheless, shoemaking, and the very closely related leather trade, remained an important element in the overall economic structure of the town, and the *VCH* article suggests, quite reasonably, that this was at least in part a function of Banbury's continuing pre-eminence as a trading centre for cattle and other livestock, the horse fairs and cattle fairs being of course of national importance.

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<sup>1</sup> Barrie Trinder, *Victorian Banbury* (BHS vol.19; 1982), especially pp.89-90.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Crossley (ed), *Banbury: A History* [reprinted from *VCH Oxfordshire* vol.10, 1984 by Oxon County Libraries; originally published 1969] pp.63-64.