

The *VCH* analysis returns to the later role of the shoemakers, noting that the number recorded in *Rusher's Lists* increases from 17 in 1832 to 29 in 1850, some 16 of the latter being described as 'manufacturers' (the usual term for those tradesmen who employed more than their own family members, and who traded with a more than purely local market). It also indicates that in 1851 more than 100 people in the town and its hamlets in Oxfordshire were engaged in shoemaking so that this was, with weaving, the largest of the 'traditional' trades.³ Trinder's analysis is more detailed, suggesting that numbers of shoemakers grew during the 1850s, reaching 182 at the time of the 1861 census, but then fell steadily to 135 in 1871. His research, conducted in the late 1970s, predated the release of the 1881 census, but unquestionably a further decline took place. Barrie Trinder also points out that in terms of size some of the shoemaking establishments in mid-Victorian Banbury were towards the upper end of the 'domestic' level of production – in 1861 William Shearsby employed 13 people and Amelia Dumbleton 10 – but that the crucial progression from this to small factory units never materialised.⁴

The 1870s and 1880s saw economic and commercial stagnation in the town, a period meticulously described by Trinder under the chapter heading 'Going Downhill'. He highlights the range of economic consequences of the protracted agricultural depression, crucially important in a town so dependent on its rural farming hinterland, and also shows how emigration and rural depopulation, uncertainty in manufacturing, and widespread poverty within the town sapped the strength of the community. Although in this period Banbury may have benefited in relative terms from the even more rapid decline of places such as Deddington, nobody with any sense would have put money on its future prosperity. Yet, as Barrie also indicates, the hinterland served by Banbury was huge, and in the mid-century the growth of the town's role as a railhead encouraged the carriers to expand the network of routes which they plied, so that by 1881 there were 191 carriers making a total of 438 journeys each week into Banbury.

Among the traders who were chilled by the cold winds of competition was the shoemaker William Cave, who more or less went bankrupt in 1875. He was born in Banbury in 1830, the son of Thomas Cave, cordwainer (born 1800) and his wife Mary (born in the same year, also in

³ As fn. 2, *Banbury [VCH]*, p.66.

⁴ Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, p.90.