

size of the debts. In terms of competitiveness, such a reliance on piecemeal individual orders from different customers, no matter how loyal those customers might be, placed Cave and his colleagues at a major disadvantage. Because most of what they produced was probably made to measure, rather than bespoke, they had less opportunity to build up a stock, and were perhaps less responsive to fashion. Since all their output was handmade, there were no economies of scale and no possibility of, for example, machine-cutting and stitching. A further disadvantage was that as the tanning and leather industry itself became concentrated in a relatively few areas and in the hands of a smaller number of suppliers, it was much harder for small shoemakers to obtain their essential materials at competitive rates because those rates required bulk purchase, which was not what they wanted. That, in turn, implied higher retail prices, though that difficulty would be to some extent offset by the lack of a middleman – the retailer or shopkeeper – and by the more modest overheads of a domestic trade conducted in a backroom or workshop. But if William Cave was in any sense typical of Banbury's shoemakers in the 1870s, their vulnerability to the large-scale, fashion-responsive and economically more adaptable competitors from Northampton and the other East Midlands footwear centres is very obvious.

| <i>place</i> | <i>number of debts</i> | <i>place</i> | <i>number of debts</i> |
|-----------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Tysoes (all) | 40 | Greatworth | 2 |
| Banbury town | 11 | Wellesbourne | 2 |
| Neithrop | 9 | Claydon | 1 |
| Drayton | 6 | Deddington | 1 |
| Bodicote | 5 | Epwell | 1 |
| Farthinghoe | 4 | Gaydon | 1 |
| Hanwell | 4 | Halse | 1 |
| Wroxton | 4 | Harbury | 1 |
| Bourton (Great) | 3 | Marston St Lawrence | 1 |
| Grimsbury | 3 | North Newington | 1 |
| Shenington | 3 | Shotteswell | 1 |
| Sibfords (both) | 3 | Shutford | 1 |
| Burdrop | 2 | Warmington | 1 |

Fig.2 The location of William Cave's debtors in 1875.