

SENT TO COVENTRY: The Great Migration of Banbury Plush Weavers

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Patterns of migration during the Industrial Revolution were complex. Movements of skilled workers were vital to economic development and census returns show colliery managers (or viewers) from Northumberland and Co. Durham settling in other coalfields, Cornishmen making their homes wherever there were non-ferrous ores to be extracted, and pattern makers, iron moulders, turners and fitters from Lancashire, Yorkshire, Shropshire and the Black Country working at foundries in market towns throughout England. Skilled pottery workers moved to and fro between North Staffordshire and other centres of the trade, and puddlers and iron rollers between the Black Country and Shropshire. There were also movements of less skilled people, principally of the young, into the industrial towns that were growing in the second half of the nineteenth century, taking up shoemaking in Kettering or hosiery manufacture in Leicester. Such movements of industrial workers overlay older patterns of short-distance migration, of apprentices in retailing and such urban crafts as tailoring, normally recruited by masters in towns no more than 50 miles away, and of female household servants, who normally found places within the circuit of their local carrier's cart. It has long been part of the received wisdom of Banbury's history that some of the town's plush weavers migrated to Coventry.¹

This article attempts to quantify that movement. The census returns for 1861 have been examined for the whole of the county of Coventry, including the parishes of Bedworth, Exhall, Foleshill and Stoke. The plush weavers and skilled ancillary workers in the trade born in the Banbury region have been identified (see Table One, page 230). The results show that the received wisdom is well-grounded, that many plush workers and their families did indeed move to Warwickshire in the 1840s and '50s, and that by 1861 they dominated the industry. More than a hundred plush weavers and dyers with birthplaces in Banburyshire have been identified in the Coventry area in 1861,

¹ V. Hodgkins & C. Bloxham, *Banbury and Shutford Plush* (Banbury: Banbury Historical Society, 1980), p.8.