

## BANBURY: METROPOLIS OF CARRIERS' CARTS

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For 150 years Banbury was celebrated as much for carriers' carts as for cakes and cockhorses. The historian William Potts (1868-1947) was one of many Banburians who took pride in the number of carriers travelling to the town. In 1860 the *Banbury Advertiser* calculated that 167 carriers made 395 weekly visits and enquired 'Is any other little town so visited?'<sup>1</sup> The *Lists* published by the Rusher family between 1796 and 1906 enable the progress of the trade to be charted with a degree of precision impossible elsewhere. Pigott's Directory in 1830 listed long-distance transport undertakings serving Banbury and added: '*Besides the above there were upwards of one hundred carts from the different villages in the neighbourhood; an account of which is annually corrected and published, and is generally distributed about the town*'. This study uses Rusher's publications, with other sources, to assess the significance of the Banbury carriers, and to investigate questions about country carriers nationally. It takes further the work published in 1976 by the late Professor Alan Everitt which was stimulated by the discovery of the notebook of a carrier who in the 1890s travelled from Walton-by-Kimcote to Leicester.<sup>2</sup> Since the mid-1970s enumerators' returns have become available from four censuses, while many trade directories are published on disk and on the University of Leicester's *Historical Directories* website <[www.historicaldirectories.org](http://www.historicaldirectories.org)>.

Everitt drew attention to references to country carriers by Charles Dickens, George Eliot, W H Hudson and Thomas Hardy but made only passing reference to a novel that deals specifically with the trade. *Cripps the Carrier* was published in 1876 by Richard Doddridge Blackmore (1825-1900), author of *Lorna Doone*, son of the curate-in-charge of Longworth, Berkshire.<sup>3</sup> His mother died soon after his birth and his

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<sup>1</sup> *Banbury Advertiser*, 1 Nov 1860.

<sup>2</sup> A Everitt, 'The Primary Towns of England', *Local Historian*, vol 11 (1975); A Everitt, 'Country Carriers in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Transport History*, new series, vol 3 (1976).

<sup>3</sup> R D Blackmore, *Cripps the Carrier: a woodland tale* (London: Sampson Low, 1876).