

Kennet & Avon and Cromford canals. In the Lincolnshire Fens, where most villages were accessible along drainage channels, 21 'market packets' sailed to Boston for Wednesday and Saturday markets while 52 carriers travelled to the town by road .

Railways, like canals, were too rigid a mode of transport to rival country carriers who could call at hamlets and farms, although the opening of railways caused falls in carrier services from places served directly by rail. In Banbury in the 1850s services from Brackley fell from 11 weekly to four, those from Buckingham from six to two, and those from Cropredy from 13 to six, while direct carrier links to Abingdon and Leamington came to an end. Nevertheless the overall effect of railways was usually to stimulate trade in the market towns they served, and in Banbury, as in most places, carrier services increased after a momentary decline.

Preconditions.

Banbury's market in the 1790s was acknowledged as the best within 30 miles 'particularly for farmers, graziers, corn, cattle, butter, eggs, cheese, butchers' meat and other things'. The canal link to Oxford from 1790 put the town on the principal waterway route from southern to Midland England, and national carrying companies established warehouses on the local wharfs.

The management of the roads radiating from Banbury passed to turnpike trusts between 1744 and 1802.⁸ In a national context the roads passing through Banbury were of secondary significance. None was as busy as the ancient Watling Street through Stony Stratford and Towcester, and Banbury never equalled Oxford as a focus for stage coaches. The primary importance of the improvement of the roads through Banbury was for regional and local traffic. Their usefulness to country carriers was increased by the roads laid out by the commissioners who enforced the numerous enclosure acts passed for north Oxfordshire and the southern parts of Warwickshire and Northamptonshire between 1758 and 1835. Arthur Young remarked of Oxfordshire in 1813 that 'when you are at one town, you have a turnpike road to every other town'.⁹

⁸ A Rosevear, *Turnpike Roads to Banbury* (Banbury Historical Society, 2010).

⁹ A Young, *General View of the Agriculture of Oxfordshire* (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1813), p.324.