

constantly in need of new tools, while operators of steam ploughing and threshing engines required parts, and the many building workers who lived in the countryside obtained paint, putty, locks, nails and piping from Banbury's ironmongers.

Several carriers who travelled considerable distances to Banbury did purely rural rounds, collecting or distributing goods on the preceding or subsequent days. John Harvey of Whichford, after visiting Banbury on Thursdays in 1851, went through Stourton, Cherrington, Long Compton, Toddenham and Barton Heath on Fridays, while Joseph Higham from Woodford went to Preston Capes every Tuesday, and George Mansfield from Fringford did a circuit on Fridays through Hethe, Cottisford and Stratton Audley.

It was generally assumed that carriers conveyed passengers. W H Hudson enjoyed rising early to ride to Salisbury, overtaking carriers' carts, 'each with its little cargo of packages and women with baskets and an old man or two'. Thomas Hardy describes in *The Woodlanders*, '...a slight noise of labouring wheels, and the steady dig of a horse's shoe-tips ... there loomed in the notch of sky and plantation a carrier's van drawn by single horse. The vehicle was half-full of passengers, mostly women ... This hour of coming home from market was the happy one, if not the happiest of the week for them...' In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* Michael Henchard sat himself in the darkest corner at the back of a carrier's van in which most of the other passengers were women going short journeys. Joseph Ashby's mother in 1870 reserved seats for herself and her son on the carrier's cart return trip from Banbury to Tysoe, but, with other families, the pair walked the outward journey along field paths.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, a servant from Beckley walked into Oxford but hoped to ride home with Zachary Cripps. Walter Clark remembered that around 1900 young people from Adderbury found it exciting and pleasurable to make the three-mile journey to Banbury in Plackett's carrier's cart rather than on the train.

A carrier required an unblemished reputation for probity and the multiplicity of small transactions that he undertook necessitated functional numeracy. Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) recorded that carriers in Surrey in 1904 carried notebooks, but that 'older men who could neither read nor write could remember and would fill their vans with

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<sup>13</sup> M K Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe 1859-1919: A Study of English Village Life* (Cambridge University Press, 1961); p 26.