

affiliations. The carriers' routes listed by the Rushers are the best means of delineating the extent in the nineteenth century of the nebulous but acutely perceived '*pays*' of 'Banburyshire' that was undefined by conventional political, ecclesiastical or administrative boundaries. It incorporated parts of six counties, five Anglican dioceses and 15 poor law unions, and land that drained into the Thames, the Severn and the Wash.³⁰ Richard Jefferies wrote of the 'kingdoms' centred on market towns that had no visible boundaries, that were unrecognised on maps, and fitted into no political or legal limits, but that could be recognised by peculiarities in the landscape, even by the design of farm gates.³¹ Mr Tulliver, in George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, when contemplating sending his son to boarding school, remarked that 'we won't send him o'reach of the carrier's cart'³². When the young Joseph Ashby was repairing the road from Southam to Banbury at Michaelmas in the early 1880s he observed many sorts and conditions of humanity riding in carriers' carts or walking in their best clothes to Banbury Fair. He was told by one man that he had not missed a fair for 40 years and by another that he would know that he was old when he could no longer get to Banbury for the fair. In his teens Ashby was so excited by the energy surging around Banbury market that he compared the town with Nijni Novogod, of which he had read in a school book.³³ The magnetic forces exerted by towns demand analysis in any historical period, whether in classical antiquity or twenty-first century China. Country carriers were a feature of English history for about 150 years, but that period was one in which market towns generally and Banbury in particular displayed remarkable vitality, and carriers provide the best indication of how that vitality extended into their hinterlands.

³⁰ Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire; dioceses of Oxford, Peterborough, Lichfield & Coventry, Worcester, Gloucester; poor law unions centred on Banbury, Bicester, Woodstock, Witney, Chipping Norton, Brackley, Towcester, Daventry, Northampton, Stratford-upon-Avon, Shipston-on-Stour, Southam, Rugby, Warwick and Buckingham.

³¹ R. Jefferies, *Hodge and his Masters* (Fitzroy edn., Macgibbon & Kee, 1880), vol. I, p.36; vol. II, p.127.

³² George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, (Nelson edn, nd), p.5.

³³ Ashby, *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe*, pp. 27, 112.