

SWING IN BANBURYSHIRE:

New light on the riots of 1830

*Based on information provided by Joyce Hoad,
edited by Barrie Trinder*

The English people were re-familiarised with the phenomenon of rioting during the summer of 2011, when over a period of four or five days demonstrations allied with looting spread from North London to other parts of the capital and to some provincial cities. Riots throughout history have tended to follow predictable patterns and while records of the Captain Swing disturbances of 1830 provide little evidence of the opportunistic theft commonplace in 2011, the pattern of imitation, the often indistinct lines between participants and spectators, and the charging and conviction of previously law-abiding citizens are common features.

The riot at Banbury on Tuesday 29 November 1830 impressed all who knew the town. A brief account of it was published by Dr Pamela Horn in 1967, and it is mentioned in most histories and memoirs, as well as in national surveys of the Captain Swing disturbances.¹ Thomas Ward Boss obviously felt obliged to refer to it in his *Reminiscences of Old Banbury*, but he was only five in 1830 and his account is inaccurate in many details and may be derived in part from reports of the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 in Manchester. Sarah Beesley (née Rusher), who was 18 in 1830, provides no first-hand recollections, but reproduces from the *Banbury Guardian* an account written about 60 years afterwards by one of the participants, the policeman William Thompson. George Herbert,

¹ Horn, P, 'Banbury and the Riots of 1830', *Cake & Cockhorse [C&CH]*, vol.3 (1967), pp.176-79; Trinder, B, *Victorian Banbury* (Chichester: Phillimore, & BHS.19, 1982); Potts, W, *A History of Banbury* (Banbury Guardian, 1958), p 191; Herbert, G, *Shoemaker's Window: Recollections of Banbury before the Railway Age*, ed C S Cheney & B S Trinder (BHS.10, 2nd edn, 1971; 3rd edn, Banbury: Gulliver Press, 1979), pp 77-80; Beesley, S, *My Life* (Banbury: privately published, 1892), quoting *Banbury Guardian*, 11 June 1891; Boss, T W, *Reminiscences of Old Banbury* (1903), reproduced in *C&CH*, vol.16 (2004), pp.50-77; Hobsbawm, E J & Rudé, G, *Captain Swing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin University Books, 1969), pp 113, 118, 186; Beesley, A, *The History of Banbury* (London: Nicholls & Son, 1841).