

a 16-year-old apprentice shoemaker in 1830, provides the best account of the disturbance of which he was one of many spectators. Curiously, the riot is not mentioned in Alfred Beesley's *History of Banbury*, published only eleven years after the event. As one of our 2011 Local History Prize contributions, our member Mrs Joyce Hoad, of Swalcliffe Enoch descent, submitted transcripts of several eye-witness accounts of the Oxfordshire riots, preserved in The National Archives,² which give vivid first-hand impressions of what happened. We are reproducing below those relating to the Banbury area.

The background to what came to be called the Captain Swing riots was described by Hobsbawm & Rudé.³ The introduction of threshing machines threatened to diminish the already low incomes of agricultural labourers in southern England, since on many farms the flailing of grain provided steady if ill-paid employment through the winter months. The situation was complicated by the application of the Speenhamland system of the poor law, by which paupers were directed to work for farmers in return for their relief. Once a pattern of protest was established other grievances were appended to the threat of threshing machines, the introduction of new machinery in the paper mills of south Buckinghamshire, moves towards enclosure on Otmoor, political questions in Banbury and a host of local issues. Disturbances began in Berkshire in mid-November, in the villages around Thatcham and on the eastern edge of the county adjoining Windsor Forest. Between 21 and 24 November there were outbreaks on the Oxfordshire border near Wallingford and in the Vale of the White Horse, as well as attacks on paper mills around High Wycombe and Bourne End (Wooburn). Rioting subsequently spread into Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire. There were also numerous incidents in Norfolk, Sussex, Kent, Hampshire and Wiltshire. As in similar situations throughout history those in government were suspicious that riots were caused by itinerant agitators. An Oxford newspaper on 27 Nov 1830 reported that strangers were trying to excite the labouring poor to acts of outrage,⁴ but it seems more likely that the disturbances were the result of imitation by poverty-stricken people led by local men who were experienced in challenging authority on other occasions.

² TNA: ASSI 6/2, 1830-31.

³ Hobsbawm & Rudé, *Captain Swing*, 104 seq.

⁴ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 27 Nov 1830.