

unpopular yeomanry were stood down on Wednesday 15 December. Participants who were arrested were tried during 1831. Richard Cotton, a boat-builder, who was active at both Neithrop and Bodicote, was sentenced to seven years' transportation, while two who participated in the disorder at Neithrop were imprisoned for 15 months. George Herbert reveals that not all the ringleaders were arrested, and that one went to America to avoid being charged.

The reasons for the disturbances were complex. Those that involved fires – at Neithrop and Bodicote – attracted the attention of spectators. George Herbert described a town in the 1820s and '30s where shopkeepers and craftsmen worked long hours, and where rat catching in barns or the arrivals of itinerant entertainers quickly drew spectators appreciative of diversions from the tedium of working life. For many the riot was one such diversion. Herbert referring to the crowd watching the fire, remarked 'I of course as a boy was present among them', and recalled that 'pretty near the whole inhabitants flocked up to the fire'. William Mander observed in his affirmation that the crowd were '*mostly boys*'. The records which refer to a 'mob' at Neithrop do not distinguish between committed rioters and many who simply wished to watch a spectacle.

It was nevertheless appreciated at the time that in Banbury there were political motives. Herbert recalled that there were riots against machinery in other parts of the country and that '*as Banbury was always a Radical place, the people here thought they must follow suit*'. Philip Green, the Tadmarton sweep, was said in court to be a former sailor and a 'great admirer of Cobbett whose productions he is in the habit of quoting in the public houses he frequents'. There was furthermore a tradition of disorder in Banbury in the 1820s. There were riots during the election of 1820 and when the commissioners under the Improvement Act attempted to line South Bar with trees.⁶ Six months after the Neithrop riot, physical force determined that members of the corporation likely to vote against the Reform candidate in the general election on 2 May 1831 were kept out of the town, and the anti-Reform candidate, Colonel Henry Hely Hutchinson, was forced to flee across the River Cherwell towards his home in Northamptonshire. The mayor wisely decided not to inflame the situation by bringing in the yeomanry or the regular army.⁷

⁶ Lucas, B K, 'Banbury: Trees or Trade?', *C&CH*, vol 7 (1979).

⁷ Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, 47-49.