

London Apprentices in 16th - 18th centuries from Banbury and surrounding areas.

Apprenticeship has been a standard way of ensuring training for children from the medieval period to the present day, even if it was not called that in the earlier period. Initially it was regulated only by the guilds in the larger cities, and in the country was no doubt often the result of informal arrangements. But increasingly, in the Tudor and later periods, it became the generally accepted means of providing formal, technical training, especially for second and subsequent sons. First born sons could expect to inherit a business or trade from their fathers, and be trained by them, but subsequent children needed to be able to earn their own livings.

Tudor concerns about social management led to the *Statute of Artificers* in 1563. Based on the rules of the medieval guilds, this statute was intended to control the supply and remuneration of trades and regulated the conditions under which apprentices were indentured, to ensure that while providing unskilled labour, they were adequately housed and trained and that at the end of the period the young adult could make a living and, in some cases, had the opportunity to become a freeman of a guild. The act was not repealed until 1814, by which time apprenticeship had changed dramatically following the industrial revolution and the explosion of the population.

The majority of children were apprenticed locally by their parents or through the parish in the case of paupers, but others were sent further away or even to London, where apprentices gained the reputation of causing trouble and riots. Tracking down their records remains a difficult task. Banbury borough records contain no lists of those who were apprenticed in London and as a consequence, information has to be garnered from elsewhere. In 2006 some of the lists of boys apprenticed to London Livery companies were reproduced in *Cake & Cockhorse*ⁱ under the names of the parish from which the apprentices came and subsequent information has been published from time to timeⁱⁱ, but the difficulty remains that original lists tend to be compiled in the date order in which apprentices were indentured or the stamp duty paid; finding an individual, without that date information is like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. The combined lists in the accompanying database makes it easier to track down Banbury apprentices in London, but it is not exhaustive.

Parish and non-conformist records contain some information about the children of the poor who were apprenticed and The National Archives holds voluminous records of the stamp duty paid on apprenticeship indentures, 1710-1814, (TNA IR/1)ⁱⁱⁱ. The Livery Companies of London are also among the best sources of information and Cliff Webb has published many lists of the apprentices from the records of the different Companies. In addition, there is now a searchable database of apprentices and freemen for ten of the London Livery Companies^{iv}, with more to follow. The British Record Society has already published lists of the Merchant Taylors Company apprentices and is in the process of publishing similar lists for the Haberdashers Company.^v These have the additional value of a comprehensive indexes of place

names, making it possible to extract the names of apprentices who went from Banbury and the surrounding parishes to masters in London, during the later sixteenth century up to the end of the eighteenth century.

The following database is a compilation of the sources available including the information given for each entry. Most include

- The surname and first name of the apprentice
- The place where the family lived
- The father's name and his profession or trade († indicates the father has died)
- The name of the master
- The date on which the indentures were signed
- The source from which the apprenticeship information was taken.

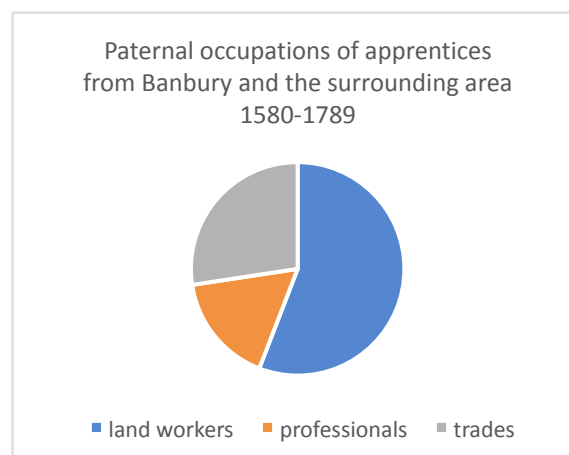
Additional information is available for some of the **apprentices** which includes

- Whether they were a second son
- The length of term for which they were signed up if other than the standard 7 years
- The index number in the Merchant Taylors' records

Additional information on some of the **masters** which includes

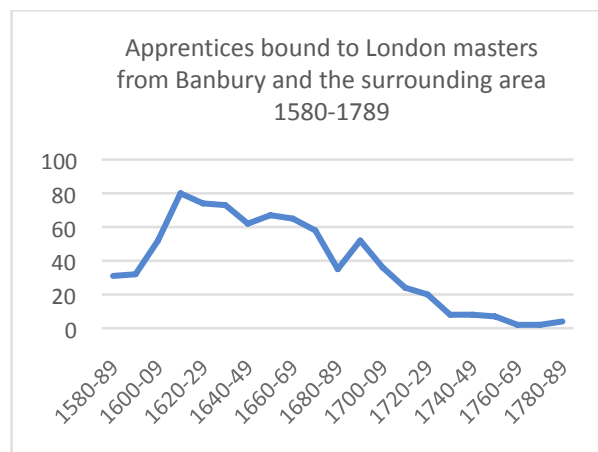
- The location where they lived/worked
- Their profession (more common after 1660)
- Whether they took in more than one apprentice from the area

Databases now enable researchers to extract more than the purely factual information originally recorded; however, the data must be treated with caution as it is highly unlikely to be complete. Probably it is better to look for trends rather than exact information – e.g. the professions of the fathers of those apprenticed is usually given in the registers of the Livery Companies but it would be unwise to do more than assess the relative size of each category. Thus the proportions are indicative, rather than the actual numbers -



Land workers in this context includes, yeoman, husbandmen, farmers and labourers; the professional group includes esquires, gentlemen and clerks; the trade group includes tailors, bakers, masons, carpenters, butchers, shoemakers, mercers, weavers, maltsters and innkeepers although there were other tradesmen noted but only a handful in each case.

Other issues include the reliability or completeness of the data; information kept by the major Livery Companies may or may not be complete and there may be additional information which has yet to be discovered. The graph of apprentices from Banbury and the surrounding area appears to show a high peak in the 1620s, dwindling during the course of the following 100 years to almost nothing by the end of the eighteenth century. It would be interesting to see comparative information from other rural areas.



Looking at the apprenticeship figures for the individual Livery Companies it is very clear that the early seventeenth century hike in numbers was almost entirely due to recruitment by the Merchant Taylors. It was one of the largest and most prestigious companies and many of the apprentices were the sons of local tailors, in numerical terms, though even in villages such as Adderbury, where many of the apprentices went to the Merchant Taylors, the father tailors were well outnumbered by the yeomen. Paternal occupations were less influential as the century wore on and by the eighteenth century they were no guide to the training the son might receive.

Although this database contains over 800 names of children apprenticed from Banbury and the surrounding villages and small towns during a couple of centuries, it is likely to be a small proportion of those who were sent away from home to learn how to earn their living. Some links may be made, particularly between those who were sent to London and who subsequently had either family members sent to them for training or children from the same location, but it would be necessary to know a great deal more about individual circumstances to be able to make more connections. Nor is much known about what happened to the apprentices once their indentures were completed; some may have remained in London having become freemen of the guild to which they were attached, others may have returned home, yet others may have wandered away or died. Additional information can be found by using other sources such as the publications in the Banbury Historical Society's Record series, the Oxfordshire Family History sources, Ancestry, Findmypast or the publications of the Livery Companies which also note which apprentices became freemen.

What is available here is largely due to the indefatigable efforts of Cliff Webb and Jeremy Gibson, the invaluable publications of the British Record Society and the very substantial amount of work undertaken by those who have compiled the website of the London Livery Companies.

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May 2021

ⁱ *Cake & Cockhorse* (vols 16.9. and 17.1., 2006).

ⁱⁱ *Cake & Cockhorse* (vol 20.4. for disputes in the Lord Mayor's Court in London) and Appendix F in *Banbury's People in the 18th century*, Gibson, J ed. (BHS 36,2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ Individuals can be found on a searchable database at https://search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records-in-education-and-work/and_apprentices

^{iv} See <https://www.londonroll.org/>. The records of the following guilds have already been added to this database - The Bowyers' Company, The Clothworkers' Company, The Drapers' Company, The Founders' Company, The Girdlers' Company, The Goldsmiths' Company, The Mercers' Company, The Musicians' Company, The Salters' Company, The Stationers' Company and The Tallow Chandlers' Company.

^v *The Merchant Taylors Company of London: Apprentices 1583-1800*, Apprenticeship Series vol 2, Parts 1-3 edited by Michael Scott, assisted by Cliff Webb et al., 2109 and *The Haberdasher's Company Membership Records* edited by Cliff Webb, vol 1 (2020) and vols 2 and 3 to be published in 2021 and 2022.