

Five weekly waggon services travelled from Banbury to London by three different routes, four went to Birmingham and a cart plying between Oxford and Coventry called weekly. This was characteristic of the pattern of road transport across England by the 1780s. Kendal was linked by waggon with London, Carlisle, York, Newcastle, Sheffield and Manchester. Waggon from Salisbury went to London but also to Bristol, Plymouth, Oxford, Southampton and Gosport. Provincial trade directories from the 1780s provide evidence of these regular flows of long-distance road transport, but they also reveal traces of complementary movements, daily journeys into towns by rurally-based carriers, returning on the same days, usually with carts rather than wagons. Sadler's Hampshire directory of 1784, for example, shows that Rook's cart left Bishop's Waltham for Havant every Tuesday morning.

Beginnings.

The earliest evidence about country carrying that is in any respect comprehensive comes from the *Universal British Directory* (subsequently the UBD), 'a fund of useful and important information equally interesting to the Nobleman, the Gentleman and Man of Business', that was published in London in five volumes from 1791. The directory is a disordered accumulation of data, uncertain in its chronology, and inaccurate on matters of fact. It refers, for example, to the cotton manufactory established by the late Sir James (*recte* Richard) Arkwright at Cranford (i.e. Cromford) near Matlock. Some anecdote-rich accounts of some towns, including Gravesend, Thaxted and Ulverston are excessively long; other places are dismissed briefly. Semi-digested nuggets of information from other sources include demographic statistics from the parish registers of Honiton and Liverpool. Of Doncaster the compilers declared 'we think it unnecessary to particularize the stage coaches or wagons as they are passing through almost every hour of the day', which appears to negate the purpose of a directory. The first volumes of the UBD are concerned with London and information in later volumes relating to the provinces appears to date from the mid-1790s. The people of Shrewsbury were said to be looking forward to the olive branch of peace and to the completion of navigations, suggesting a date after the outbreak of war in 1793, and before the opening of the Shrewsbury Canal in 1797. Rowland Burdon's iron bridge at Sunderland had been 'begun some years ago' (in fact in December 1792) but remained incomplete, suggesting a date before its formal opening in August 1796.