

For all its faults the UBD provides positive and substantially accurate information about transport that, if interpreted with scepticism and imagination, illuminates the pattern of country carrying emerging at the end of the eighteenth century. It shows, unsurprisingly, that inter-urban regional carriers linked most large towns with their smaller neighbours. It further reveals that carriers providing local services visited many towns, although most lists do not distinguish country carriers from other transport providers. From Downton in Wiltshire two carriers took passengers and goods the six miles northwards to Salisbury on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays and four carts a day took goods from Nuneaton and places en route into Coventry. The list of 'Carriers to and from Leicester every Saturday' totals 40 departures, most them to nearby villages, such as Blaby, Bruntingthorpe and Wigston, while middle-distance stage wagons serving Loughborough, Melton Mowbray and Nottingham are listed separately. It is unsurprising that a carrying network was emerging in the 1790s at Leicester, subsequently one of the principal carrying centres of the Midlands, but the UBD entry for Nottingham, which by the 1850s had even more carriers, lists only five local departures. The 30 or so carrier journeys into Bury St Edmunds include some from nearby villages such as Hartest, Walsham-Le-Willows and Barnham, while Exeter was visited by carriers from Dawlish, Exmouth and Honiton. Country-based carriers serving market towns were indeed emerging in the 1790s.

Some entries in the UBD suggest that country carrying as practised in the nineteenth century developed from earlier practices by which carriers from small communities travelled to large towns, where they spent one or two nights before returning to their bases, sometimes making overnight stops en route. Joshua Gear of Barton-upon-Humber sent one or two carts every Tuesday to Louth, returning on Thursdays. Three carriers from Attleborough set out on the 14-mile journey to Norwich every Friday evening returning on the following Saturday evenings. Thomas Crawford, 'common carrier', travelled 12 miles every Tuesday from Easingwold to York, where he made connection with a London waggon. He went home after the arrival of the return service from the capital on Thursdays. As late as 1854 the compiler of a county directory found it worthwhile to stipulate that a Swerford carrier accomplished his 14-mile return journey to Banbury in the course of one day suggesting that his predecessors may have stayed overnight.