

Two visits to London 1777 and 1800

The Hardy family were based in Coltishall, a few miles north-east of Norwich and then Letheringsett in north Norfolk a few miles inland from the sea in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The family and their employees owned and ran a successful brewing enterprise, producing malt, and distilling and transporting beer to public houses. At Letheringsett they were also shippers of agricultural produce, supplying markets as far afield as Liverpool from minor Norfolk ports such Blakeney and Cley. Tragically, their first ship sank and all souls aboard were lost. Mrs Hardy and her children diarised business and family life in straight-forward factual terms, giving many details about day to day events as well as unusual tours south to Cambridge and London, often mixing business with pleasure on their visits.



Norfolk wherries, like the one owned by the Hardy's. Wherries on Breydon, attributed to John Sell Cotman 1782–1842

The first visit to London via Essex, 21-29 September 1777



James Pollard, The 'Tally-Ho' London - Birmingham Stage Coach Passing Whittington College, Highgate. Painted 1836. Image courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London. Image released under [Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND \(3.0 Unported\)](#)

ON 21 September Mary, accompanied by her children, set off for London, travelling by horseback during the evening from Coltishall to Norwich. That night they took 'a Coach', leaving at 12am. It is reported that they had 'a fine night', presumably meaning the overnight journey was comfortable. The Hardy's luggage may have been sent ahead by boat and thence by sea.

They breakfasted at Copdock in Essex (45 miles travelled), then passed through Colchester, and dined at Ingatestone (84 miles), before arriving in London at 7pm on the 22nd of September. They took up lodgings at Leadenhall Street (109 miles) on the night of arrival.

Whilst in London they visited Westminster Palace, St Paul's Cathedral, and saw a play (the 'Jealous Wife & Deserter') at Drury Lane Theatre – an itinerary not unlike one a visitor to London might follow today. The diary describes an extremely busy sight-seeing schedule over the next few days, often during balmy weather, when a hackney carriage was called on to return from Greenwich. Mr Hardy also viewed hops at a city market, but opted not to buy any.



View of St Pauls from the Thames, by Daniel Turner, painted 1790. Image courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London. Image released under [Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND \(3.0 Unported\)](#)

On Sunday 28th September they set off in 'the Coach' from London at 12 midnight for Norwich. This time, they breakfasted at Sudbury (55miles), dined at Botesdale (85 miles), and got into Norwich (112 miles) at 6.30pm. They returned home to Coltishall by horseback, so following a similar return route.

The Hardy family were prosperous, and their journey was a well-planned and financed one, and there is no hint of any complaint of discomfort or delay whatsoever in the account. Overall they travelled close to 110 miles between Norwich and London Leadenhall Street in nineteen hours, which with stops along the way works out at an average speed of 5.8 mph. On the night-time stretches, when rest stops were presumably brief, the average speed works out as similar, assuming they breakfasted between 8-9am.

Source: Margaret Bird (ed.), *The Diary of Mary Hardy, 1773-1809, Vol 1: Public house and waterway*, (London, 2013).

The second visit to London via Cambridge and Hertfordshire, May 1800

Twenty-three years after the visit described above, the Hardy family visited London for a second time, this time taking in Cambridge and Hertfordshire where they visited friends and saw the sights. By this

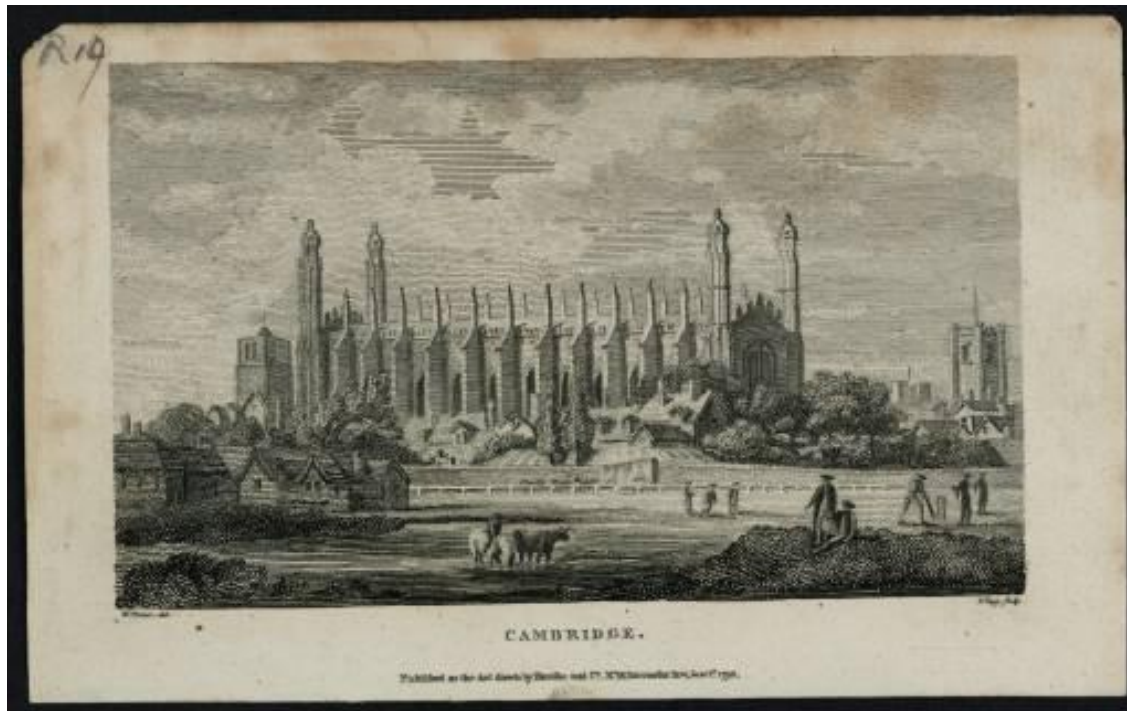
time the Hardys were retired, and their children had become local gentry in Letheringsett, where Mr Hardy senior had earlier bought a brewery.

On Friday 9 May, Mr and Mrs Hardy set off for Fakenham in their gig (a horse drawn vehicle used for private carriage, see picture below) On the morning of the 10th at 7:30, they took a post chaise (a coach for private hire, so like a stage-coach but more expensive and you could go exactly where you wanted when you wanted, rather than being timetabled on a fixed route) southward to Swaffham (16 miles travelled), then onto Brandon (32 miles), and thence to Barton Mills (41 miles), to Newmarket (50 miles), and finally to Cambridge (63 miles) – arriving at 4pm. They walked along the ‘Backs’ just behind the long line of university colleges on the River Cam. They later lodged at the Hoop Inn.



A man and a woman in a gig arriving at an inn, attributed to Henry William Bunbury 1750 – 1811. Image courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London. Image released under [Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND \(3.0 Unported\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)

This first leg of the tour, from Fakenham to Cambridge, took 8.5 hours and totalled 63 miles by post-chaise, and this implies an average speed of 7.4 mph (with stops).



The view from 'the backs' in Cambridge in 1795. After [Joseph Mallord William Turner](#) 1775–1851. Image courtesy of the Tate Gallery, London. Image released under [Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND \(3.0 Unported\)](#)

After visiting acquaintances in Cambridge and visiting and dining at St Johns, and later drinking with '2 young gentlemen' at the Inn, the next day at 9am the couple departed on 'a very warm morning' by post-chaise for Royston (14 miles travelled). Here they dined and then set off again at 1pm to Baldock (23 miles), and to Hitchin (33 miles) – arriving there at 4pm. They could not lodge at the Inn, possibly due to lack of capacity, and instead found accommodation with an acquaintance. After a prolonged stay at Hitchin, on the evening (time not given) of May 15 they caught a post-chaise toward London, changing at Hatfield (48 miles), continuing to Barnet (57 miles), and thence to London (69 miles) where they arrived at about 7pm.



On the road to Gretna Green painted by Heywood Hardy (1842-1933). The reference to Gretna Green suggests that the passengers in this speeding post-chaise were eloping for a hasty marriage unsanctioned by their parents.

From Cambridge to London in total the couple travelled about 69 miles, including a long stay in Cambridge and Hitchin. From Fakenham to Cambridge the speed averaged 7.4mph; from Cambridge to Hitchin the average journey speed was 4.7mph, which includes dinner at Royston. After, from Royston to Hitchin via Baldock involved a direct journey of 19 miles, taking 3 hours, meaning the average speed was 6.3mph. Travelling from Hitchin to London involved a 36 miles journey by post chaise; if they left at 4pm in the 'evening' from Hitchin, then this last leg only took 3 hours, implying a speedy average of 12mph into London, and finally to dinner and bed – ready for another tour of London.

In 1800, the average speed the Hardys travelled – where it can be measured reasonably accurately and including rest stops and interchanges – was 7.6 mph, which contrasts with the 5.8 mph recorded 23 years earlier.

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