

When William Stout of Lancaster set up his own business as a shopkeeper in Lancaster in 1688, he first commissioned a joiner to fit out his shop. He then set out on a borrowed horse, with a number of other shopkeepers, for London, carrying the princely sum of £120 (several years' wages for an unskilled man) in cash, where he planned to buy goods to stock his shop. He set out at the beginning of April. He does not say so, but it is likely that he made the journey then because any earlier in the year the 'foundrous' state of wet and muddy roads would have made for a very difficult journey. No doubt he rode a horse because at this date no coach service yet operated between London and Lancaster. The journey of around 250 miles took him five days, so he was able to average 50 miles per day.



Roadside Inn, George Morland, painted 1790. Image courtesy of Tate Gallery, London. Image released under [Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND \(3.0 Unported\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)

On arrival in London, he lodged at the Swan Inn (pictured below) in Lad Lane (now Gresham Street), and purchased £200 worth of goods, paying for half in cash and taking the rest on credit. He then had all his purchases loaded onto the Edward and Jane ketch (a two-masted, square-rigged sea going boat) the master of which was one James Myer. He notes that it took him a week to get all his goods on board the ship.

The Swan with Two Necks Inn, Ladd Lane in the 1820s



Source and further information on the Swan with Two Necks, see:

<https://knowyourlondon.wordpress.com/2015/09/04/swan-with-two-necks-inn-lad-lane/>

Stout then rode back to Lancaster via Stony Stratford, Northampton, Leicester and Sheffield. In Sheffield he made further purchases of 'Sheffield and Birmingham manufactures', likely all kinds of metal goods, for which he paid £20. Soon after he arrived back in Lancaster, possibly one week later, the ship from London arrived, having taken seven days on the journey.



William Collins, Sunday Morning, exhibited 1839. Image courtesy of Tate Gallery, London. Image released under [Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND \(3.0 Unported\)](#)

By 1689 Britain was at war with France, the Nine Years War (1688-1697). Stout reports that the French had seized at least 500 English ships in the first year of the war, which he noted represented a grievous loss to merchants. As a result, shipping services from London stopped operating and all goods had to go by land. Stout tells us that the Cheese from Lancashire and Cheshire, which had formerly keep twenty ships busy, were no longer employed and all the cheese had to go to London by waggon. He does not say so, but it is possible that the Edward and Jane, which had brought his goods back from London the previous year, was one of these twenty ships and, having taken cheese to London, brought back whatever cargoes local merchants and shop-keepers wished to move from London to Lancaster. The waggons to which Stout alludes would have been operated by commercial carriers making regular trips and delivering all manner of goods, much like a modern day courier service. Such services usually operated between inns.



A carrier's waggon, painted by Thomas Rowlandson, c.1790. Public Domain Image.

Now the waggons, which took cheese to London, brought groceries and other goods from London as 'back carriage.' But these waggons travelled no further than Standish (now on the north-western edge of Greater Manchester) because the carriers wanted to take 'canel' (a premium coal that was prized for domestic fireplaces) back into Cheshire from there. Stout had to pay 3-5 shillings (a shilling was 12 old pence and there were twenty shillings in a pound) per hundredweight (112lb or 50.8kg in summer for transporting goods from London to Standish. He then had to pay a further 1s 6d (there were 240 pence in a pound) per hundredweight to get goods from Standish to Lancashire. He notes that goods worth 20s per hundredweight and under he purchased from elsewhere. By this he probably means that he did not purchase goods with a value of less than 20s per hundredweight from London, as they would not bear the cost of carriage. Some iron he got from Furness and Cartmell. Swedish iron ore (probably of higher quality) came overland via York or Leeds, presumably having come up the river Ouse by boat, possibly after transhipment from a sea-going vessel at Hull.

In 1690 he bought his own horse prior to setting out for London around the middle of May. Again the time of year may indicate a desire to avoid travelling in the wetter, and hence muddier, months. His route went via Preston and Dunchurch. On the last day they journeyed 50 miles from Passiter (not identified) to London, which on his previous journey suggests a speed of 50 miles per day. However he notes that they arrived in London 'late', as a result of travelling so far in a day, which suggests a longer than average day's riding. At a place he calls Cony, which was probably Colney Hatch just outside Barnet, in the north of London (now just off the M25), Stout and his companions had an unsettling encounter with a group of men he suspected were highway robbers. They were relieved to encounter the King and his baggage train, on their way to war in Ireland, which prevented any attack by the robbers who finally went another way at Finchley Common.

As in 1690 he sent his goods by carriers' waggon to Standish, this time at 3s 6d or 4s a hundredweight. Some ships were now operating but only in convoy. This means there would have

been military escorts, and consignments of goods would have been delayed by the need to wait for the convoys to depart. Stout describes the convoys as 'tedious', noting that journeys could take six months and were still at risk from French pirates in the Irish sea. He intimates that no cheese was being shipped this way because of the risk that it would go off before arriving in London. Clearly he judged the delays and risks as unacceptable and decided to stick with the more expensive land carriage.

He returned to Lancaster on 'the Yorkshire road' via Sheffield where he made further purchases. As in the previous year, he describes getting home 'that week's end.' Exactly what he meant by this is not absolutely clear, but it certainly indicates that the journey took no more than seven days each way including the visit to Sheffield. He notes his total expenses on the trip as being the same as the first time, around £3. He remarks that he was away for three weeks and spent one week in London, so the journey may have taken as much as seven days each way, suggesting an average daily distance of 36 miles per day, but probably more given his visit to Sheffield.

Source: *Autobiography of William Stout, of Lancaster, Wholesale and retail Grocer and Ironmonger*

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