



How to Research Your Railway History

Have you managed to trace an ancestor who worked on the railways? This guide will help you to find out more information about their job, where they worked and any other details pertaining to their career.

Step 1: Find the railway company they worked for

To start you will need to find out where your ancestors lived. This can be done by completing a census search. Census information is held by the National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

Then you will need to find out the nearest railway to the home address, and this would be the company they worked for.

Step 2: Work out the dates of employment

Working out the dates of employment will narrow down the number of railway companies. If you don't know, add 14 years to their date of birth. Many railway employees began their working life as apprentices at this age.

Step 3: Research locations of company records

It is important to note that records may not have survived and that those that do exist may be held by more than one organisation.

- For staff records of railway companies in England and Wales, visit the staff record guide at the National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/railway-workers)
- For staff records of Scottish railway companies, visit the National Archives of Scotland (www.nas.govuk/guides/railway.asp)
- The records of manufacturing and supply companies may still be with the company or deposited with a local authority record office, search the National Register of Archives (www.discovery.nationalarchies.gov.uk/)
- Most of the railway workers will have belonged to one of the Trade Unions. Trade Union records are held at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/subject_guides/family_history/rail)



Resources:

- National Railway Museum's SEARCH Engine (Library and Archive Centre). Here you can research the history of the railway company, listen to oral history recordings from people who worked on the railways, see photographs of the locations people worked, and hold tools similar to those these people handled.
- In addition, they hold: staff magazines produced by railway companies, Roll of Honour of those that served in WWI and WWII and sadly did not survive, railway accident reports, and examples of certificates and books presented to staff when they won an award or retired.
- Imperial War Museum holds film footage of the railways during WWII, specifically film recorded by the Southern Railway's Film Department. They also hold posters, pictures and oral history recordings.
- Hampshire Records Office holds a number of records for Eastleigh Works. The records include plans, staff lists, photographs and correspondence.
- Local libraries hold a number of railway based books. These are always a good place to start.