

How to trace your railway ancestor

Step 1: Find the railway company they worked for

For this you will need to find your ancestor's address. A census search should supply this information if not already known: census information is held at the National Archives.

Once you know where your ancestor lived, you will need to find the location in a railway atlas (see the bibliography). In most cases the railway line nearest the home address would be the company your ancestor worked for. This becomes harder to find out in urban areas which are served by more than one company. You may need to research more than one company's records in this case.

Step 2: Work out dates of employment

Before 1923 there were over 100 different railway companies; between 1923-1947 there were four; after 1948, just one. It will help your research if you have an idea of when your ancestor worked on the railways. If you don't know, add 14 years to their date of birth. Many railway employees began their working life very young as apprentices.

Step 3: Research locations of company records

It's 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 National Archives, Kew, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk .
- For staff records of Scottish railway companies, visit the National Archives of Scotland, www.nrscotland.gov.uk
- For staff records of railway companies in Northern Ireland, visit the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni
- The records of manufacturing and supply companies may still be with the company or deposited with a local authority records office. To find these records, search the National Register of Archives, www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra
- Most railway workers will have belonged to one of the Trade Unions. Trade Union records are held at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick,

RAILWAY MUSEUM

There have been several books written to help you research your railway ancestors: see the bibliography.

Step 4: Background research

A visit to the National Railway Museum can help bring your ancestor's story to life. In Search Engine, our library and archive centre, you can read up on the history of the railway company your ancestor worked for; listen to oral history recordings from people doing similar jobs; see photos of the location where they worked; and hold tools similar to those they handled.

You might also find these items from the collection useful:

- Staff magazines for those companies that produced them of the major railway companies of the 20th century. These magazines feature staff promotions, retirements, awards and often have employee photos. They also provide an insight into what life was like working on the railways.
- If your ancestor served in the armed forces in the First or Second World Wars and was unlucky enough not to survive, we have copies of many of the Rolls of Honour.
- If your ancestor was involved in a railway accident, we have the official Accident Reports that you can consult. Not all accidents were recorded or given their own report, but for the serious accidents involving loss of civilian life, individuals are often mentioned.
- Our Railway Work, Life & Death project, a collaboration with the University of Portsmouth, features details of railway worker accidents that were investigated by the state between 1911 and 1915. www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk/
- We have examples of certificates and books presented to staff when they won an award or retired. Maybe your ancestor's achievements are in our collection.

Whatever role your ancestor worked in the railways, you will find something in our Collections to link with your past.

Bibliography

All books can be consulted in Search Engine.

Atlas

- British railways pre-grouping atlas and gazetteer. 5th ed. London : Ian Allan, 1967. ISBN: 0711003203
- Cobb, M. H. The railways of Great Britain : a historical atlas. Shepperton : Ian Allan, 2003. ISBN: 0711030022 (vol. 1.); 0711030030 (vol. 2.)
- Jowett, Alan. Jowett's railway atlas of Great Britain and Ireland : from pre-grouping to the present day. Wellingborough : Patrick Stephens, 1989. ISBN: 1852600861

Research guides

- Edwards, Cliff. Railway records : a guide to sources. Richmond : Public Record Office, c2001. ISBN: 1903365104
- Hawkings, David T. Railway ancestors : a guide to the staff records of the railway companies of England and Wales 1822-1947. Stroud : History Press, 2008. (New ed.) ISBN: 9780750950589
- Richards, Tom. Was your grandfather a railwayman? Bristol : T. Richards, 2002. (4th ed.) ISBN: 1860061613

To search for additional titles that may help in your research, browse our Library Catalogue, www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/librarycatalogue

Useful Addresses

The National Archives, Kew, RICHMOND, Surrey, TW9 4DU
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

National Records of Scotland,
HM General Register House, 2 Princes St, EDINBURGH, EH1 3YY
www.nrscotland.gov.uk

The Public Record Office of Northern Ireland,
66 Balmoral Avenue, BELFAST, BT9 6NY
www.nidirect.gov.uk/proni www.proni.gov.uk