

# RAILWAY WORK, LIFE & DEATH

Revealing the working lives and accidents of British & Irish railway staff, 1880s-1939  
[www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk](http://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk) @RWLDproject

What was it like to work on Britain and Ireland's railways from the 1880s to 1939? How were tens of thousands of employees injured or killed? Who were these people?

The 'Railway Work, Life & Death' project has been delving into these questions, creating an important new resource for anyone researching railway history, family history, labour history and many other topics.



Every year for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, thousands – sometimes tens of thousands – of railway workers were injured or killed in accidents in Britain and Ireland. Finding out more about some of these accidents involved was difficult.

Late in 2016, as a joint initiative of the University of Portsmouth and the National Railway Museum (NRM), the 'Railway Work, Life & Death' project started to try to make railway worker accident records more accessible and see what we could learn from them. Since then we've been joined by the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick (MRC) and we're working with The National Archives of the UK (TNA).

We're using records produced by the state, railway companies and trades unions and which documented accidents to staff and their aftermath. These reports are a fantastic resource, giving us plenty of detail about who was involved and working practices, as well as what happened and the lasting impacts on individuals and their families.

Our volunteer teams at the NRM, MRC and TNA have been transcribing surviving records, made freely available as a database via our project website. They've done excellent work, for which we're very grateful; so far around 4,500 records are available to check.

Our teams are now working on extending the coverage back to the 1880s and as late as 1939, to bring in an estimated 70,000 further accidents.

### Who will be interested in the project and its findings?

All sorts of people: railway enthusiasts, family historians, academics, those in the current railway industry, museums and archives professionals and more. There is so much detail in the cases that have been documented – we're confident that it will interest all of you, as well as take you beyond what you thought you were looking for and open up new areas you might not already have considered.

When you do make use of the resource, please let us know! There is a quick feedback form on the website, or you can send us an email ([railwayworkeraccidents@gmail.com](mailto:railwayworkeraccidents@gmail.com)). The more we hear from you, the more we can do to tailor things to your needs – plus it helps us to make the case for continued support and that the project should be extended to include more cases.

### What do we cover?

The ease of searching and level of detail in the database are key advantages – hopefully you'll get answers to your questions, as well as generating new ones.

The data available so far gives details for around 4,500 individuals, such as date of accident, name of people involved, sex, age, location of accident, occupation, employer, time of accident, nature of casualty (fatal/ type of injury), type of accident and details, cause of accident, time on duty, and any recommendation for changes following investigation. This features accidents from across the UK - including, of course, what is now Ireland, as the period so far available (1911-23) pre-dates the formation of Eire/ Northern Ireland.

### When will the data be available?

It's available now! See 'The Accidents' page of the project website. In addition to the database, there's a wealth of information and detail on the project website, including regular updates featuring some of the cases, guest blogs and findings from the accident reports.

### What next?

We're currently extending our coverage – over the next few years we're bringing in around 70,000 more cases into the database, from the 1880s to the Second World War. They'll dramatically increase our knowledge of work and accidents on British and Irish railways.

We're also hoping to introduce a tool through which you can submit details of accidents to railway workers that you're aware of – to increase our understanding of cases already in the database or to capture cases that have otherwise escaped the formal record.

Also, to make it more likely we'll be able to extend the project further, we need to be able to show that what we've done so far has been valuable to you and that there's appetite for more. Please send us your feedback on the existing resource when you've used it.

### Get in touch

We want to hear from you: how has the project been useful to you? What have you found interesting, or that you didn't know before? What questions has the project sparked? What would you like to see us do next? Do you want to help with the development of the project? If you can contact us with your feedback and your questions, we will get back to you with some responses. See: [www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk](http://www.railwayaccidents.port.ac.uk)

### Project people

Thanks to our wonderful volunteer teams at the NRM, MRC and TNA. Without them, this resource wouldn't be available. The NRM team is ably supported by Craig Shaw, NRM Administration Volunteer, and at Portsmouth Stuart Taylor has done indispensable work ensuring the data is standardised and accurate. The project is being led by Karen Baker (NRM), Mike Esbester (University of Portsmouth) and Helen Ford (MRC), with help from Chris Heather (TNA). The project has arisen from Mike's research, which has been supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK.