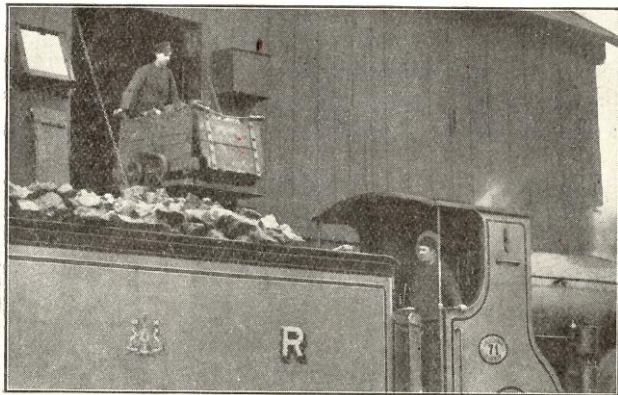


Fireman Frederick Stockwell, 1918

Frederick Stockwell joined the Great Western Railway (GWR) as an engine cleaner in 1905, aged 18. He came to Didcot as a fireman in 1911. In a reserved occupation, he remained at work during World War One.

Early on the morning of 2 January 1918 he was adding coal to the tender of his engine, in the old engine yard (roughly where the entrance to Didcot is now).

As he stood on the engine it began to move. Fred was crushed between the cab and the coal tip and killed.



Coaling with everybody well clear.

Posed 1920s staff safety photograph showing the type of issue which killed Fred Stockwell.

Courtesy Railway Work, Life & Death project.

Fred had married Annie Bushell in 1915; their son Stanley was born in 1916. After Fred died Annie worked as a ticket collector at Didcot. She later remarried, to Bill Lewthwaite, a GWR driver and Fred's friend.

With grateful thanks to Tony Stockwell, Fred's grandson, for his help in telling Fred's story.

The Railway Work, Life & Death project: revealing ordinary people's surprising stories

This leaflet focuses on a few of the hundreds of ordinary people who worked at Didcot before it was preserved.

The leaflet was produced by the Railway Work, Life & Death project. We're a volunteer-driven social history project, researching the lives and stories of British and Irish railway workers before 1939.

We do this via the accidents they had – and the records they left behind. Often it's the only way we can find out about these people. Our amazing volunteers have created a free database of over 115,000 railway workers for you to explore.

Our project is a collaboration between the University of Portsmouth, National Railway Museum and Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. This leaflet was funded by the University of Portsmouth's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Some of the records used in this leaflet are preserved by the Great Western Trust at Didcot and we're grateful for their support.



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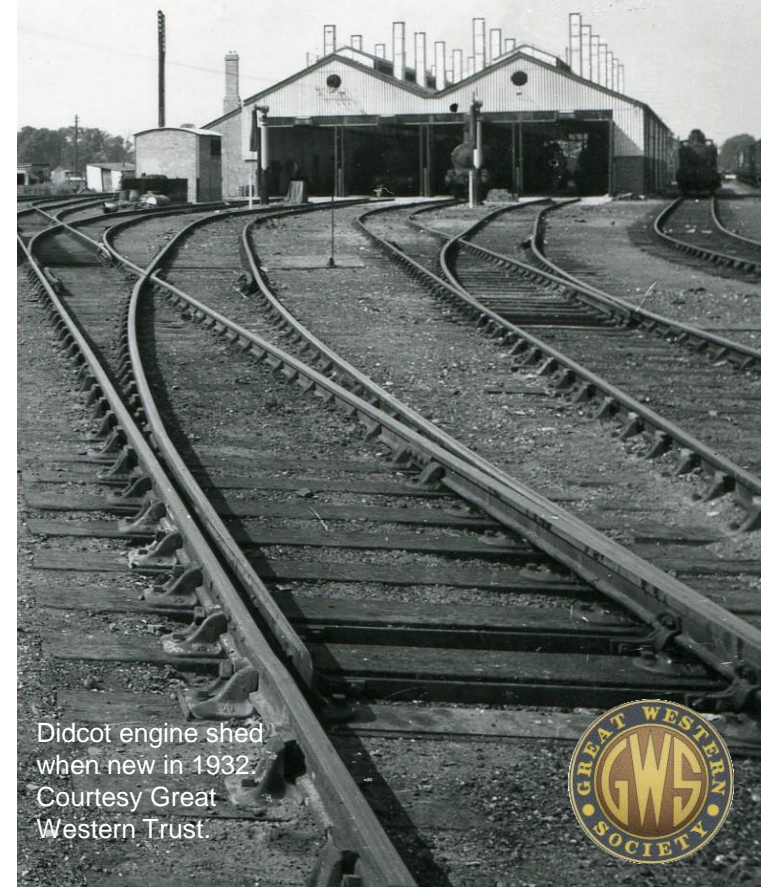


[@rwldproject.bsky.social](https://www.bsky.social/rwldproject)



Didcot's railway workers & their accidents

Exploring the stories of the individuals who kept the Great Western Railway running



Didcot engine shed when new in 1932.
Courtesy Great Western Trust.



Driver Ernest Edmonds, 1935

Railway staff were part of their local communities. Many took on civic responsibilities – and Great Western Railway driver Ernest Edmonds was a great example.

He was a Justice of the Peace and local councillor. Tragically on 27 March 1935 he died in an accident at Didcot engine shed.

Ernest was oiling a steam engine, getting it ready for its day's work. To do so, he was underneath the boiler, reaching some awkwardly placed parts.

IS IT SAFE



TO go under an engine without being **absolutely sure** you are properly protected? (See also picture on p. 1.)

Posed staff safety photograph, c.1924.

Courtesy Railway Work, Life & Death project.

Another engine nudged Ernest's loco, pinning him against the boiler and crushing him. He died four hours after the accident.

As a tribute, a new local park in Didcot was named in Ernest's memory – Ernest Edmonds Park, still part of Didcot today.

Labourer Benedetto Pariselli, 1915

Finding an Italian working at Didcot in 1915 was not what we expected – but there he was!

Benedetto Pariselli arrived in the UK in 1911 with his wife, Rose. Both came from Cassino. We don't know why they came to the UK, but they raised a family here, initially living in Oxford.

From 1915 extra labour was needed in the Didcot area – to build a huge army ordnance depot to supply the First World War. Benedetto was one of the men employed; he started with the Great Western Railway in March 1915.

On 9 April 1915 he was tipping a side tip wagon, when he slipped and fell backwards. He twisted his right leg and slightly hurt his back. He returned to work on 12 April.

His accident record is held in the Great Western Trust's archives, in the Museum building at Didcot. It shows that Benedetto's shift was 11 hours long, with 30 minutes each for breakfast and lunch.

He was 24 at the time of his accident, and was being paid £1.10.7 per week – around £165 now.

According to the record, he had a 'good' character, but hadn't been in the country long enough to access National Insurance benefits. He needed 12 years residency to qualify.

Carriage cleaner Mabel Elliot, 1916

Women worked on Britain's railways from the earliest days – usually in roles seen as 'appropriate.' The First World War opened new opportunities and expanded some existing ones – including carriage cleaning.

The Great Western Trust's archives, at the Museum building at Didcot, contained a surprise in one volume of accident records. Her name was Mabel Elliott, and she was a carriage cleaner at Didcot from 1916.



GWR women carriage cleaners, First World War.
Courtesy Daily Herald archive, Science Museum Group.

On 27 October 1916 Mabel, age 33, cut the little finger on her right hand. She was cleaning coaches in No. 6 carriage siding – roughly where Didcot engine shed is now. She was off work for a month.

Mabel wasn't alone at Didcot. National Union of Railwaymen records show that at least 19 other women worked at Didcot after 1916 – including ticket collector Annie Stockwell, widow of fireman Fred Stockwell.