

Walter Bridger – Fishbourne

Walter Bridger joined the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway in 1868, age 16. In 1873 he was a shunter (someone who coupled and uncoupled wagons); an accident at Three Bridges station cost him his left leg.

The railways might have maimed people, but they often looked after them afterwards. Walter kept working for the Company, as a signalman, including at Fishbourne Junction.



Walter Bridger at Fishbourne signal box. Courtesy Tony Elkin

Walter was also a Parish Councillor, a member of the Primitive Methodist Church, and Sunday School teacher. He retired in 1919. His son Walter was a signalman but died in an accident at Clapham Junction. His daughter Charlotte was a ticket collector at Chichester during World War 1.

Portsmouth Area Railway Pasts

Portsmouth Area Railway Pasts was a collaboration between the Havant Local History Group and the History team at the University of Portsmouth. We researched the lives of railway workers around Portsmouth and Havant before 1939.

Our starting point was records in the 'Railway Work, Life & Death' project, which looks at the dangers of railway work before 1939. Those accidents left records which allowed us to see the daily realities of working life on the south coast's railways.

They helped us identify specific railway employees to research. This leaflet shares a few of their stories – fuller versions are available on our website. We're also keen to hear from you if you know more about any of the people: please get in touch!

Our thanks to all who have helped in the project, particularly the descendants of the railway workers. We were funded by the University of Portsmouth Centre of Excellence for Heritage Innovation.

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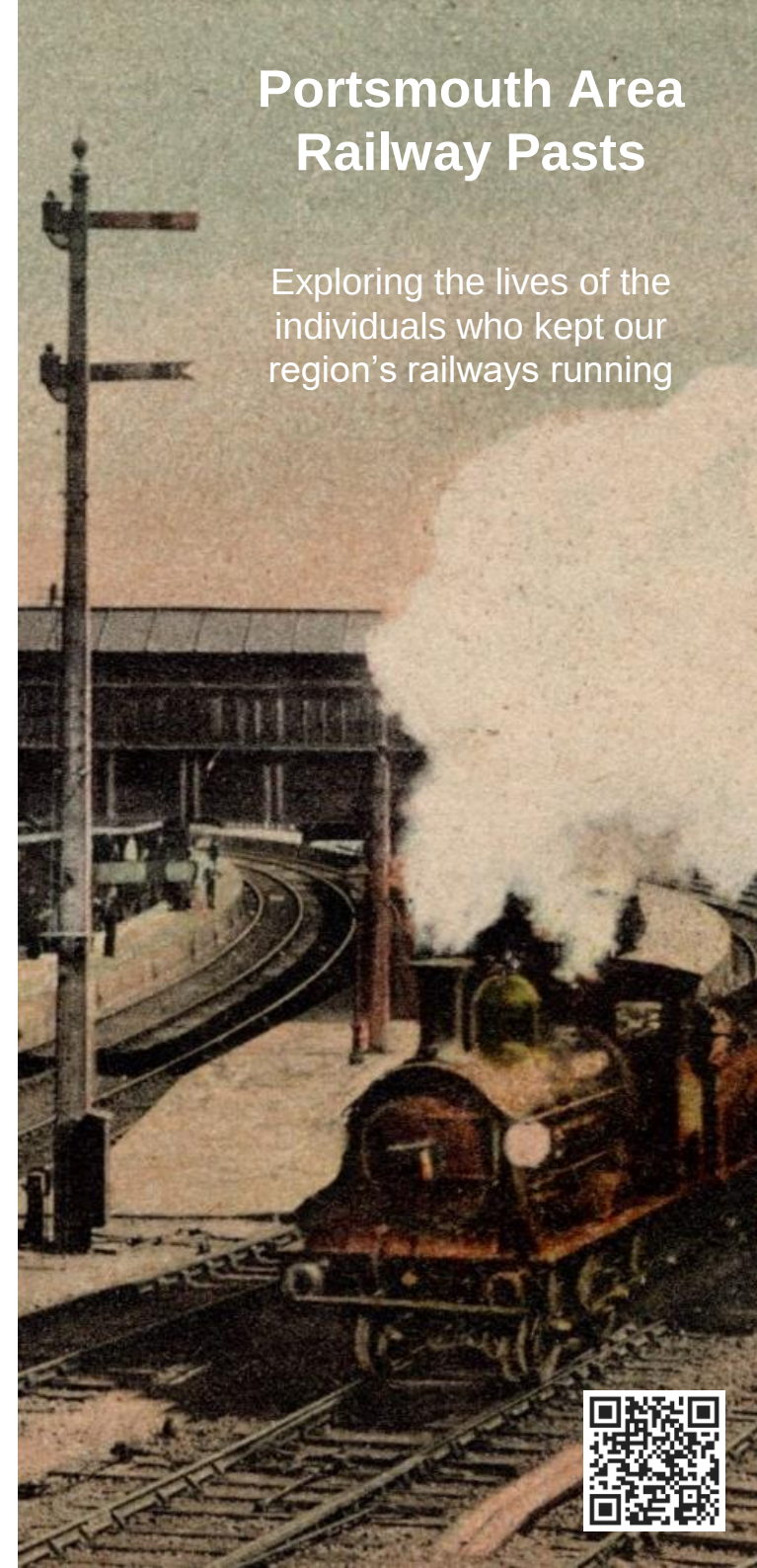
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Portsmouth Area Railway Pasts

Exploring the lives of the
individuals who kept our
region's railways running



Albert Darnell – Petersfield

On 15 March 1904, London and South Western Railway (LSWR) shunter Albert Darnell, 37, was at work in Petersfield goods yard. He had come to work from Guildford, where he lived with his wife and daughter.

Railway work was 24-hour – Albert started his shift at midnight. At 4.30am, in pitch darkness, Albert was walking through the sidings when he tripped and fell over a point lever. Fortunately it was only a minor accident – he suffered bruising.

The state-appointed Railway Inspectorate investigated Albert's accident. They recommended that the LSWR should make sure shunters had hand lamps before passing through sidings in the dark.

Sadly Albert's first wife, Susan, died in Petersfield in 1905. He later remarried, and died in 1936.



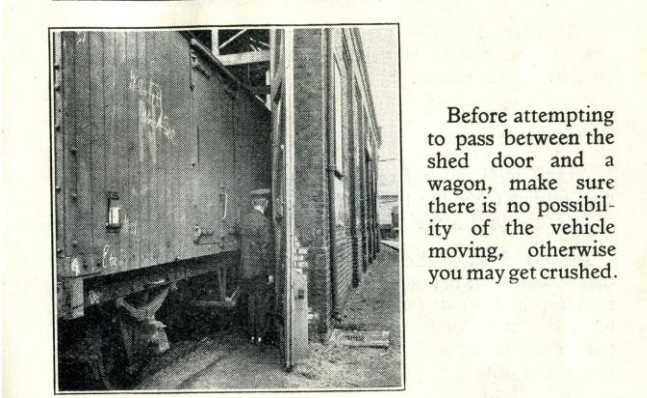
Southern Railway handlamp, following LSWR style & similar to the type that Albert Darnell should have had in Petersfield in 1904.

Science Museum Group. Image no. 1981-7048

John Hooker – Havant

John Hooker was born in Hambledon in 1848. He was a bricklayer and coachman before joining the railway in 1879. He worked for the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway, as a goods porter at Havant.

In May 1893 the *Hampshire and Sussex News* reported “a shocking accident”. John, now a shunter, had got jammed between a horse box and the goods shed entrance. He was taken to Portsmouth hospital on the next train; though bruised no bones were broken.



Before attempting to pass between the shed door and a wagon, make sure there is no possibility of the vehicle moving, otherwise you may get crushed.

Posed 1930s staff safety photograph.
Courtesy Railway Work, Life & Death project.

Under a year later, John's right forearm was crushed between wagon buffers. According to the *News* this was his seventh accident.

In April 1905 John died at home, from what the doctor diagnosed as 'extensive aortic degeneration, due doubtless to hard work'. The joint railway staff arranged a concert at Havant Town Hall, in aid of the “widow and orphans of the late John Hooker, who died after working for 26 years at Havant Station”.

George Brand – Portsmouth

George Brand served in the Navy between 1899-1919, including at the Battle of Jutland. He joined the railway in Portsmouth as a goods shunter.

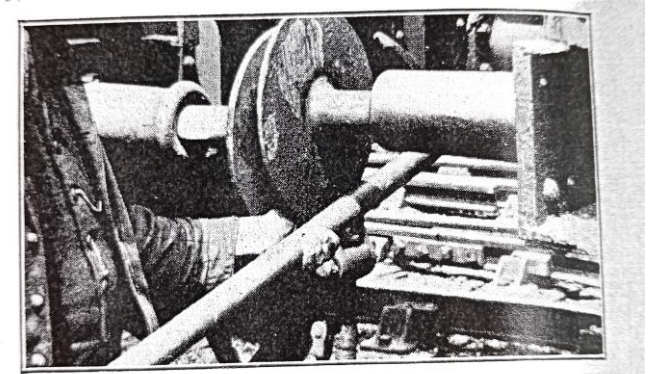


Fig. 4.—Link of coupling slips from hook of shunting-pole, and hand flies up between the buffers.

Posed staff safety photograph, c.1918.
Courtesy Railway Work, Life & Death project.

Shunting was a dangerous job, working amongst moving wagons. George was injured multiple times at Portsmouth and Southsea station. In 1920 his thumb was crushed between buffers; in 1929 his back was bruised.

By 1931 George had been promoted to Head Shunter, but in an accident sustained a fractured skull and other injuries. He survived and worked on the railway until retiring in 1952.

George married Annie Porter in 1913. She worked as a corset factory machinist – like many Portsmouth women. They had two children. George died in 1963.