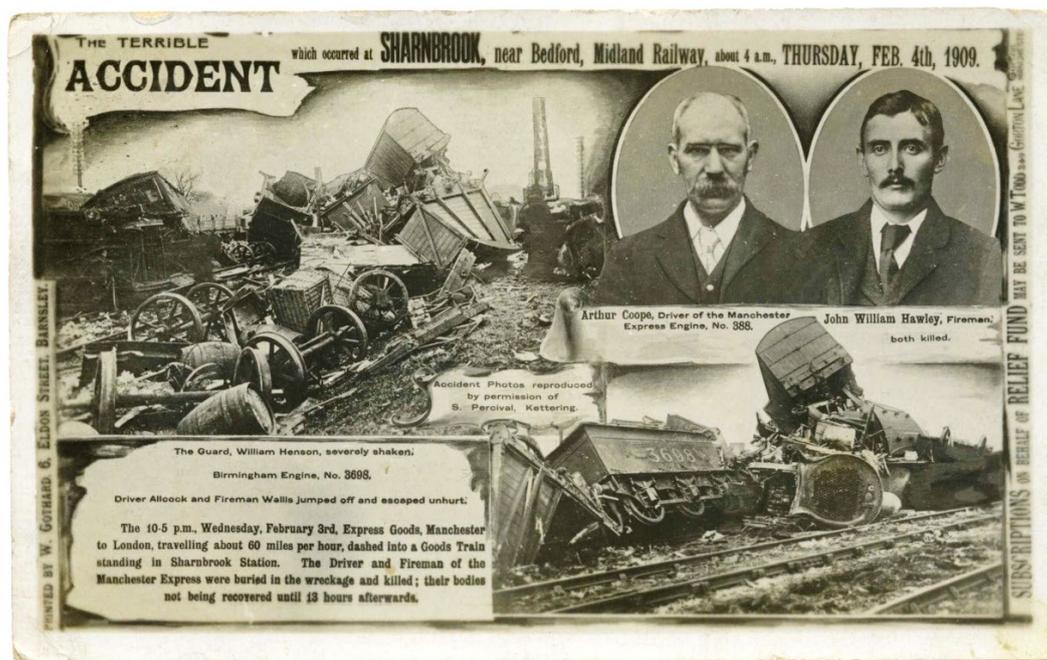


RAILWAY WORK, LIFE & DEATH

Revealing the working lives and accidents of British & Irish railway staff, 1855-1939

What was it like to work on Britain and Ireland's railways from 1855 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 interested in railway history, family history, local history, labour history, social history and many other topics.



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

The Railway Work, Life & Death project started in 2016, as a joint initiative of the University of Portsmouth and the National Railway Museum (NRM). We wanted 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) and the Nation Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT).

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 amazing 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 115,000 records are available for you to use. Our teams are now working on bringing in an estimated 35,000 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 it will interest all of you, as well as take you beyond what you were initially looking for and open up new areas you might not already have considered.

The database is available FREE from the project website, on 'The Accidents' page. In addition to the database, the project website has a wealth of information and detail, including regular updates featuring some of the cases, guest blogs and findings from the records.

When you do make use of our resources, please let us know! There's a quick feedback form on the website, or you can send us an email (railwayworkeraccidents@gmail.com). The more we hear from you, the more we can do to tailor things to your needs. 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 115,000 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. Records from the RMT's predecessor unions, the ASRS and NUR, detail support provided to union members after accident, ill-health and old age. This features accidents from across the UK - including, of course, what is now Ireland, as the period so far available pre-dates the formation of Eire/ Northern Ireland.

Get involved!

We're keen work with you, particularly on guest posts for our blog. These are a really great way of bringing your railway worker stories – whether from your family history, your local history research, or something else – to a wide audience. Just get in touch with us about your idea!

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 resources when you've used them.

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? If you share your feedback and questions, we'll get back to you with some responses.

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 Chris Heaton, NRM Administration Volunteer. The project is being led by Karen Baker (NRM), Mike Esbester (University of Portsmouth) and James King (MRC), with help from James Cronan (TNA) and colleagues at the RMT. The project has arisen from Mike's research, which has been supported by the University of Portsmouth and the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK.

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