



Tracing your Great Western Railway Family Tree

Great Western Railway Records

The Great Western Railway employed 1000s of workers from the mid 1800s to the late 1940s. Both men and women were employed in all sorts of roles from Engine Driver to Clerk and Station Manger to Locomotive Cleaner. The network covered London to the South West, Wales, the Midlands and the North West. It therefore allowed workers to move fairly easily between jobs and locations.

Staff Records

The majority of staff records are held at the National Archives at Kew. Although fairly patchy in places this is a good first port of call for anyone wanting to find out more details on a GWR employee.

National Archives
Ruskin Avenue
Kew
Richmond
TW9 4DU

Tel: 0208 392 5200
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Some of these staff records have been put online at www.ancestry.co.uk. The records also cover the other major railway companies, as well as the GWR.

However, some staff records are held at local records offices. So if your ancestor was employed at one location for a long time his or her records may be kept with the records office associated with that area. For example the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre hold some staff records for Swindon Works employees.

Not all staff records have survived, but if found can provide a good insight into that persons career – job title, promotions etc.

STEAM has some GWR staff registers for the Swindon Works. These cover mainly positions such as Foremen, Clerks and Draughtsmen. The names in these registers have not yet been listed, but the registers are available to view.

Census Reports

Census reports were first introduced in 1841 and have been compiled every 10 years since. These reports are very useful as they provide age, marital status, address and job title for individuals. At present you can view the 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, and 1911 censuses online, as well as in local records offices and many local studies libraries.

www.ancestry.co.uk (1841-1891)
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk (1901)
www.1911census.co.uk (1911)

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last Birthday)		PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE				PERSONAL
		Males	Females	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	
James Davison	Head	28		Married				2
Mary Ann Davison	Wife		29	Married	2	2	0	0
Elizabeth Davison	Daughter		7	Single				0

You can often determine from census reports whether or not your ancestor worked for the railway as some job titles were unique to the railway industry, and to certain towns.

First World War Records

We hold at **STEAM** a number of records listing GWR employees who died during the First World War.

- *First World War Roll of Honour*
- *Book of First World War, War Dead* – lists Great Western Men who were missing in action or killed in the war. Records name, regiment, date and location of death and position within the GWR. This is available online at www.steam-museum.org.uk/collections
- *Great Western Railway Magazine (1914-1919)* – monthly updates of GWR employees who died during the war. Listings also include photographs of the men who died.

Photographs

STEAM holds 1000s of photographs within its Picture Library. There are a number of staff photographs ranging from the late 1800s to the 1960s. Volunteers at STEAM have identified some personnel within these photographs and they are available to view in the Museum's Library and Archive. A large selection of these are available through the STEAM Picture Library website at www.steampicturelibrary.com.

Great Western Railway Magazine

STEAM holds a full set of GWR Magazines from 1900 to 1949 (a patchy set from 1880s). This magazine was published for company staff and therefore reports news items relating to staff matters, which includes promotions, examination results, social club activities and obituaries. These are available to view in the Museum's Library and Archive.

Reference Material

The Library at **STEAM** holds a large collection of GWR publications, ranging from general histories to detailed reports on individual lines. Some influential employees are mentioned within these publications.

The Library also holds some information on the first residents of Swindon's Railway Village (from the 1840s) and their occupations within The Works and new town.

We would also recommend that anyone wishing to find out more on their family tree should obtain a copy of *Was Your Grandfather a Railwayman?* By Tom Richards which is an excellent guide to holdings of other records offices and archives. We hold a copy at STEAM.

Researchers may find the following places hold useful information related to the GWR:

- STEAM Picture Library www.steampicturelibrary.com
- National Archives (at Kew) www.nationalarchives.gov.uk
- Swindon Local Studies Library
www.swindon.gov.uk/info/20026/libraries/302/local_studies_local_history_and_genealogy
- Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre <http://www.wshc.eu/>
- The National Railway Museum Library & Archive Centre
<http://www.nrm.org.uk/researchandarchive/archiveandlibrarycollections>
- Census records (available through a number of online sources, including www.ancestry.co.uk and www.findmypast.co.uk)

Visiting the STEAM Library

The Library is open on Mondays and Thursdays 11.00am to 3.00pm by appointment only. If you would like to visit please contact the Curatorial Department by e-mailing steamlibrary@swindon.gov.uk or on 01793 466608. Visits to the Library are dependent on the availability of the volunteers who assist the Curatorial Team).

Visiting the STEAM Archive

Visits to the STEAM Archive are severely limited at present. If you believe that the STEAM Archive may be the only source of the information you are interested in, then please contact the Curatorial Team by e-mail steamlibrary@swindon.gov.uk or on 01793 466608. Please state within your enquiry that you believe the STEAM Archive is the only source of the information you are interested in.



Image of GWR workers on Rodbourne Road, Swindon in about 1920. This image is one of the may available through the STEAM Picture Library website www.steampicturelibrary.com.