

# Railway Ancestors

Imagine that you are living in Cornwall in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. You need to journey to York, but how long would it take you to get there – and how would you travel? If you travelled by coach and horses, you were bounced around on unmade roads for most of the time. It would have taken you 2 or 3 days to make the journey, stopping at hostleries overnight whilst running the risk of being ambushed by highwaymen. Not a comfortable thought, is it? However, once trains and railways came along, the country opened up and travel was transformed.

Parliament agreed to the building of 93 new railway lines in the 12 years from 1825 and by 1900, Britain had 22,000 miles of rail track. The age of the Railways had arrived and your ancestors may well have been involved in the creation of this new age.

## What did they do?

From labourers to skilled engineers, the occupations involved in building and operating the Railways were – and are – many and varied. Here, are just a few that you may come across:

**Brakesman** – Operated the braking mechanism, on the train.

**Fireman** – Responsible for tending the fire for the running of a steam engine.

**Milesman** – A man who worked on the railway line who had a set length of track to keep in good order.

**Navvy** – A labourer who worked on building the railways. At one stage in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one in every hundred people who worked were working as Navvies.

**Platelayer** – Responsible for all aspects of track maintenance such as replacing worn out rails or rotten sleepers, packing to ensure a level track, weeding and clearance of the drains etc.

**Pointsman** – Operated the railway points to enable trains to move from one track to another

**Shunter** – Moved rolling stock around railway yards

**Tiemaker** – A man who made the wooden 'ties' or sleepers.

**Yardman** – A man who worked generally as a labourer in a railway or goods yard

Please be aware that this is just a small list of occupations that your railway ancestors might have done. You will probably find a lot more!

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If you have a question about your Railway ancestors, we have a forum where you can post those queries. Register for FREE at <http://www.genealogy-specialists.com/> and tell us about the ancestor that you are researching. The members will do their best to help you.

If you would like to discover more about your Railway ancestors, whether building the railways or operating the trains and stations, the types of work that they did or want to know more about their lives, listed below are some products that will certainly help you - and all of them are available from [www.parishchest.com](http://www.parishchest.com). Just pop the reference number in the website search box to see the details:

- Britain's Railway Architecture & Heritage Ref: CSB-43092
- British Locomotives 1894 Ref: YBM-SKU108-Y00139
- Fire and Steam (DVD) Ref: FTL-DVD08229
- My Ancestor was a Railway Worker Ref: SOG-1198x
- Railway Map of Great Britain and Ireland 1907 Ref: OHB-02
- Railway Staff Database and Railway Company Details Ref: RLY-RSD
- Railwaywomen: Exploitation, Betrayal & Triumph in the Workplace Ref: HPL-BK01
- Steam Railways Explained Ref: CSB-0121
- The Life of Brunel (DVD) Ref: FTL-DVD06219
- 1862 Biography of George Stephenson Ref: YBM-SKU79-Y00044
- 1922 The Railway Year Book Ref: ANG-ARA 53

Many more products are also available from Parish Chest that would be specific to the area that you are researching. There are maps of the railways as well as journals specific to various geographical areas. Use the website search box to pop in key words such as **Railway** or **Train**. You never know what you might find!