**THE LOCOMOTIVE DRIVERS**

The working and domestic lives of the men who drove the trains, 1850–1885

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**ORIGINS**

Between 1850 and 1885, expansion of UK railway networks and services demanded a 10-fold increase in numbers of engine drivers. Early railway practice of recruiting from mining and other industries was no longer sustainable. So who were the new recruits for this new occupation? Where did they come from? What were their family backgrounds? What skills did they possess?

**CAREERS**

Railway companies were tough employers and strict disciplinarians. Within railway employment, engine drivers were an elite, yet the job was dangerous and the hours long, and transgressions could be punished with demotion or summary dismissal. What were the working lives of drivers? What training or benefits did they receive? Was this really a career with potential to progress?

**COMMUNITY**

Railways resisted unions, parliamentary regulation, and health and safety legislation. Unlike factory workers, footplatemen worked in small teams, dispersed across networks. Did drivers develop an occupational community? Were they acquiescent or truculent? Were all companies the same to work for or were there local variations in terms and conditions?

**FAMILIES**

Victorian engine drivers were all men, mostly married with children. Who were the families of the engine drivers and what were their living conditions? Did they live close to the engine sheds or in pleasant and distant suburbs? Was accommodation provided by railway companies or were families constantly moving house? Did children follow fathers on the railways? Did wives have jobs?

**IDENTITY**

Because of relatively high pay and apparent job security, Victorian engine drivers have often been casually categorised as part of a ‘labour aristocracy’. How far is this a true reflection of their circumstances? How real was their job security? Did their skills fit them for other jobs? Did they retire to a life of ease or to penury? Were their children upwardly mobile in terms of class?

This research PhD started only in February 2017 and currently there are many more questions than answers. Research is constrained by a shortage of surviving and reliable records of both railway companies and the individuals they employed. Potential outputs of the research are the creation of a database of engine drivers and the development of a methodology that will facilitate future study of other occupational groupings.