

100-year old photos uncover family life on railway

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The National Railway Museum (NRM) in York has received a donation of photos 100 years old, depicting a family of railway workers.

The photos of the West Midlands rail family were taken by George Stainton, an engine fitter and driver for the London & North Western Railway from 1871, and some from his sons, George and Samuel.

They show George's family in front of different steam locomotives, alongside his colleagues, mainly at Bescot Junction Works, near Walsall. The 21 photographs, discovered in the back of a wardrobe, provide a unique snapshot of life on the railways at the turn of the century.

They have been donated by Sue Stainton, the great-granddaughter of George, who found them following the death of her father.

After finding the photos, Sue and husband Mark decided to learn more about the family history. They were able to uncover names, addresses, job roles and more about Sue's ancestors in order to try and piece together the story behind the pictures.

Sue said: "It's been wonderful to find these photographs. I've learnt so much about their lives by finding all of this. Giving the collection to the National Railway Museum means that the information can be shared with others, but also that it can be preserved."



"We knew about the old camera, and my father mentioned that he and his uncle had taken photographs before, so we knew a passion for photography ran in the family, but we had no idea that these photographs existed until we found them in the wardrobe."

The Stainton photos will be added to the national collection and housed at the museum's Search Engine archive alongside an estimated 1.75m images which document railway history.

The Stainton family's connection with the railway started with Sue's great, great-grandfather, Samuel (the elder) back in July 1856 when he became a porter at Dudley Port station. Three of Samuel's sons, including George snr (the collection's photographer), joined the railway at different times and in different roles.

George Stainton joined the railway as an engine fitter and by the 1881 census had become an engine driver living in Walsall.

The railways were passed down through the generations, as two of George's children worked as engine stokers and then as engine drivers.

Sue's father, Samuel 'Don' Stainton, never worked on the railways – after his father refused to let him join. However, his passion for locomotives and the railways remained. Sue added: "My father, Sam Stainton, absolutely adored it here [the NRM] – it was his cathedral. He loved trains all his life, but sadly unlike his father, grandfather, and uncle, he wasn't allowed to drive them. But he always adored trains and was so passionate about them.

"I think my great-grandfather would be amazed that his photographs have ended up here, and I know that my father would be very proud indeed."

Alison Kay, archives manager at the NRM, said: "We're so grateful to Sue Stainton for her generous donation of these wonderful images of her great-grandfather and his family.

"The images paint a vivid picture of the railways at the time and the fact we know so much about the people in the photos is a rarity for us. The stories about the family are wonderful and we hope that Search Engine visitors will engage with them and find them as fascinating as we do."

