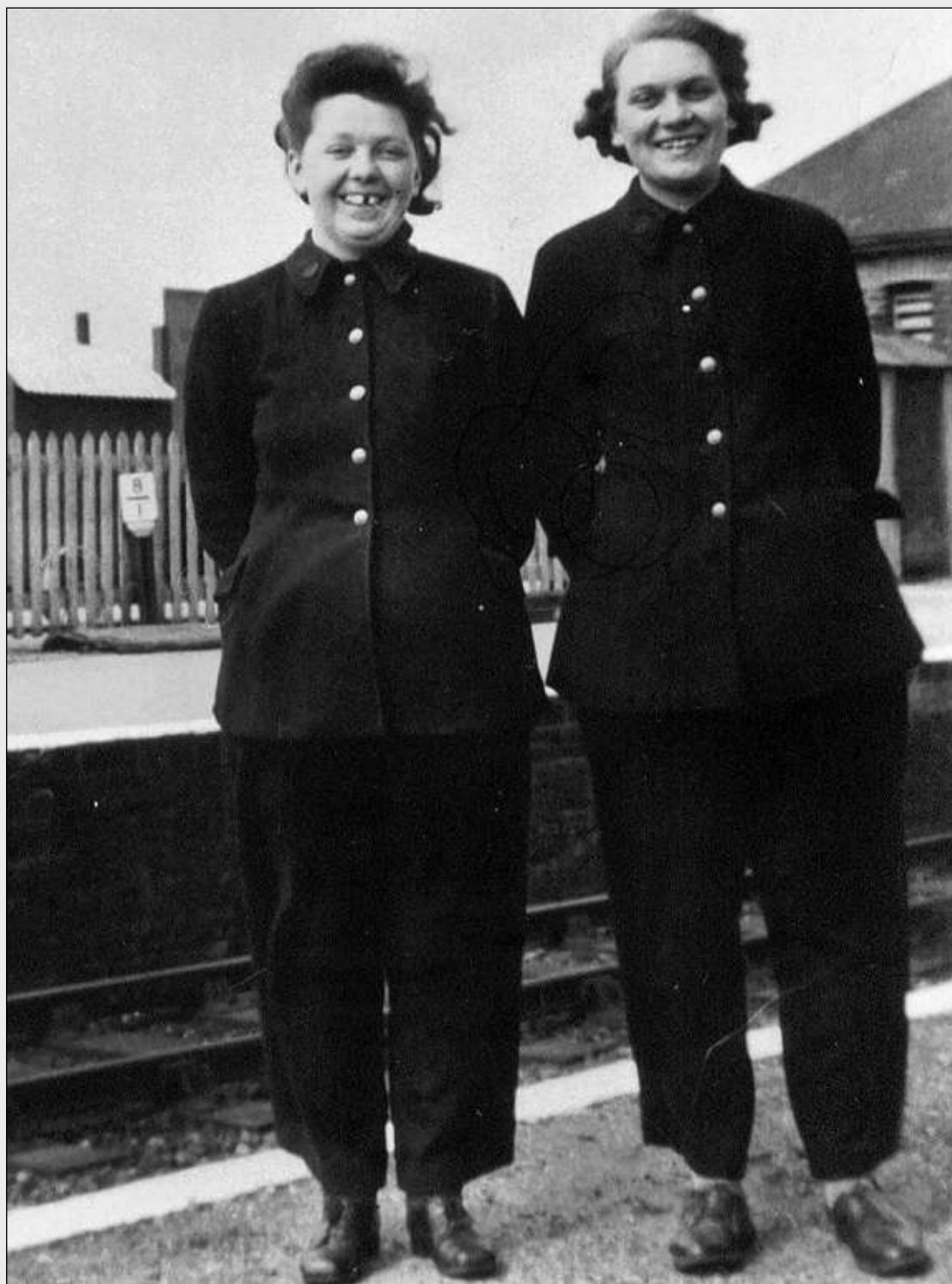


EMBER when...

Women on



FRIENDS Doreen Spackman and Thelma Durnford during their days on the railways

Writer to tell females on

WHEN you think of the railway works in Swindon the first image that comes to mind is that of sweating, coal and oil-covered men.

But Helena Wojtczak is trying to show a different face of the industry that put Swindon on the world map.

For 16 years, she has been working on a book about women employed on the railways.

"There were thousands of women who have worked there over the years," she said.

"They were employed in the workshops during the Second World War, they painted the wagons, did French polishing and panelling; they worked in canteens, laundries and offices.

"Unfortunately, there aren't any records of the railways and much of the information isn't available."

Helena, 46, of St Leonards in Sussex started her research for the book when still working at Southern Railways herself.

In 1997, after a 20-year career working for the railways, her company was closed down.

"Now, I have enough time to work on the book and at the moment I'm working crazily because I'm determined to finish it in summer.

"I have a great personal interest in the topic," she said.

She is interested to learn about women working in all areas of the industry, and has sent out an appeal via the Adver to see if anyone can help in Swindon.

As the former centre of the railways, it could prove a valuable source of stories about the Great Western Railway.

"I'm especially interested in women who worked on the railways during the Second World War and I still need contemporary witnesses from this period," she said.

Barbara Carter, of Old Town, may be able to help. Both her aunts, Freda and Irene Denning, worked at the GWR during the first half of the last century.

Freda joined in 1911 and Irene, three years later.

"I know my elder aunt Freda was in charge of the typists' office and

'We did the same jobs as the

ANOTHER tale of women on the railways comes from Doreen Stevens, of Wroughton.

When the Second World War started Doreen (nee Spackman) was in domestic service in Berkshire.

As that was not a reserved occupation she had to find war work or enter the Forces.

Someone told her they needed a woman porter at Steventon Station,

so she got a job on the railways.

A few months later, her friend Thelma Durnford joined her.

"That was the start of some of the happiest days of our lives," said Doreen.

She worked on the railway from 1941 to 1949.

"We did the same jobs as the men except for sheeting the wagons.

"We loaded grain and other things into the trucks and unloaded goods for RAF Harwell (now the power station).

"During daytime and harvest we took it in turns to man a farm crossing box, Berrycroft, about a mile down the line from the railway station.

"Once I was asked to take my uncle's turn in the Causeway

Crossing Box at Steventon to enable him to take his annual leave, as there was no relief man available.

"This gave me a taste for the signal box, so when the District Inspector asked if I would take a post as signal woman, I jumped at the chance and went to Collingbourne.

"It was good to be near home