



with TOM MORTON

the right track

stories of the the railways

by Claudia Brand

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my younger aunt Irene was the personal assistant of the stores manager at GWR," said Dr Carter.

Freda as well as Irene achieved eminence when they were given the prestigious Brunel Medals for their work at the railways.

In 1921, Freda (1897-1994) was awarded the Brunel Silver Medal, the first woman from any of the railways' regions to achieve the honour. Irene (1900-1982) followed her a year later.

"Both were absolutely proud of their work and it's quite an achievement what they received.

"They were very pleased and thrilled to get the Brunel medals," Dr Carter said.

"Unfortunately they didn't say much about their work.

"They were extremely good in believing that their work was completely confidential.

"And of course, as a personal assistant, Irene was very faithful to her manager."

In an interview with the Evening Advertiser in 1984, Freda said: "I really loved my job and it opened many doors to opportunity that my sister and I would not have otherwise had.

"There were very few women in the railways in those days and it was a fascinating place to be."

Not only that - but she was sponsored to study accountancy and other office skills at the London School of Economics. She also made full use of travelling with her Great Western railway pass.

Mrs Carter still has vivid memories of her aunts travelling: "What they did was most unusual.

"They had passes from Great Western and travelled to an enormous amount of places throughout Europe. That was not common for women during these times."

● Freda and Irene's work covers just a small sector of what women were doing at GWR. If you can help Helena with further information please contact railwaywomen@tiscali.co.uk.



RAILWAY WORKERS Left, Freda Dening is pictured in the second row, third from right Below, Irene Dening is pictured on her retirement from her job as personal assistant of the GWR stores in 1960. She had been working there since 1914



men. It was hard work'

again, even a six mile cycle ride, often in the blackout, did not worry me.

"Sometimes it was hard work, especially on frosty mornings, with the distant signal 1,675 yards away.

"We had lots of troop trains, including the ambulance trains from Southampton after the D-Day landings, ammunition trains from the Midlands to Southampton Docks and supplies for the Army Depot at Tidworth.

"From Collingbourne we had goods traffic to and from an Army Medical Centre at Everleigh, so we were kept quite busy.

"Most of the men treated us as equals and were very helpful; the Steventon signal men helped us with the rules and signalling code so we had a good start before actually doing the job.

"There was a real feeling of comradeship among us and we felt we

were doing a good job to help the war effort.

"While at Collingbourne, I took a correspondence course in railway signalling (and passed!).

"I took the written exam at Swindon Junction. Sadly through illness I left the signal box to work as a clerk in Savernake booking office.

"I stayed there until after my marriage in 1948."



MEETING UP Doreen Stevens, nee Spackman, with Helena Wojtczak, who is writing a book about women railway workers