

Swindon's Railway Village

In brief, Swindon's Railway Village is a well-preserved example of an early planned railway village created by a Victorian industrial business, the Great Western Railway Company. It is one of the most significant industrial housing estates of its period and has been described as, "...an almost complete planned railway settlement of the 1840s and early 1950s, unrivalled in its state of preservation by Crewe, Wolverton and Derby, England's other surviving railway company settlements - all three of which have seen the loss of many of their earlier buildings".

The terraced housing, church, vicarage, school, shops, public houses and park were designed and constructed in a compressed period of time between 1841 and 1848. Other buildings were added during the next 30 years as need and opportunity dictated. The original concept has survived largely intact and, although some demolition has taken place, the relationship between the constituent parts remains substantially as it was in the 1840s, providing a unique example of early Victorian planning and architecture.

Swindon's rapid growth in the second half of the 19th century is due solely to the decision of the GWR to site a locomotive repair centre close to the, then, small market town of Swindon. Following the establishment of the works, 'New Swindon' grew around the railway village and expanded rapidly until it was incorporated with 'Old Swindon' (i.e. the original market town - today's Old Town), as the municipal Borough of Swindon in November 1900.

The historic core of the original GWR locomotive works, containing many industrial buildings of special historic and architectural interest, was designated as the Swindon Railway Works Conservation Area in 1987.

Taken together, the Railway Village Conservation Area and the Railway Works Conservation Area contain the most significant surviving railway establishment of its time in the world and has been described as "one of Britain's finest monuments to the early days of the railway age".

In 1999 the Secretary of State included the former GWR Paddington to Bristol mainline railway (selected parts) in the Tentative List of the UK's nominations for World Heritage status. The Swindon Railway Works and Railway Village is cited in the document as one of seven outstanding individual elements associated with Isambard Kingdom Brunel along the line of the original GWR Bristol to Paddington railway.