The Thomas Brassey Society

MINUTES OF THE FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT THE QUEEN HOTEL, CHESTER ON THE 23rd APRIL 2022

Total number of Member Attendees 26, Non Members 4, Start time 10.30 am

The Secretary advised the meeting that the Honourable Thomas Brassey of Preston Capes, who had joined in December, had died earlier this month. A sympathy card from the Society has been sent to his wife and family.

1 Apologies for Absence

The Secretary reported that the following members had sent their apologies:

Pete Waterman OBE (Patron), Diana Short, David Challen, Rowena & Andrew Fielden, Phil Pearn, Ian Walker, Anthony Brassey, John Connah, Roger Jones, Gerald Leach, David Jones, Phil Garratt, Reg Snow, Joan Decker, Frank Whitfield, David Allan, Alan Brassey, Caroline & Andrew Capel, Phil & Pauline Macey, Doug Haynes, Simon Sherard, Anni Wolley Dodd, David Carr, Rev. Tim Macquiban, John Warburton

2 Annual Report 2021 (Chairman – Stephen Langtree MBE)

The Chairman, Stephen Langtree MBE, opened the meeting.

This Annual Report for 2021 covers a 14-month period from November 2020 to the end of December 2021. It is only our second year as a fully constituted voluntary organisation and it has been a period of unprecedented activity despite the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic. Membership has almost doubled, to 110, and we are now a registered charity. In that capacity, the rest of this Annual Report follows the format recommended by the Charity Commission. Sections C and D provide a complete list of our activities and achievements, some of which are highlighted below.

First, our new information panel outside Chester railway station was installed in November 2020 and formally unveiled on 8th December 2020 – precisely 150 years after Brassey's death on 8th December 1870. An illustration of the panel was included in our last Annual Report and, once again, our thanks go to everyone involved in its design, installation and 'socially distanced' unveiling! We are very proud of this lectern-style panel and pleased to record that it has attracted a great deal of interest over the past 12 months.

By complete contrast, in spring 2021 the Society was contacted and asked for help by a community group at Cruet in SE France. They are trying to save an iron truss railway bridge, built by Brassey in 1859. It is important for its historical significance and valuable to the local people as part of a footpath and cycleway. We were happy to lend our support and practise our French translation *n'est pas?*

The Society's next big event was to support our Patron, Pete Waterman, during '*Making Tracks*', the mammoth model railway exhibition at Chester Cathedral. Our stall, alongside the model railway, gave us a wonderful opportunity to promote Thomas Brassey to the thousands of visitors. It was also an effective recruitment exercise, with over 40 new members signing up during that 7-week period. On 28th August, as the model railway exhibition entered its final week, we held a Members' Luncheon in the splendid surroundings of the cathedral refectory. The gathering was attended by 50 members and guests, including a growing contingent of Brassey family descendants.

Throughout all of the above we have continued to pursue plans for a statue of Thomas Brassey at Chester station. We have taken professional advice regarding funding opportunities and have developed a good relationship with the Public Statues and Sculpture Association (PSSA). We have collated information on many similar statues and have produced our own 'Case Statement & Funding Prospectus'. Site meetings with various stakeholders have taken place at the station and we are in discussions with the Planning Authority.

One of our members, Clare Dudman also produced a one hour video on the life of Thomas Brassey, first shown at the Chester Heritage Festival and is still available on You Tube.

The exhibition stand has been taken to a number of outside venues, including Northwich, Crewe, Blackburn and Port Sunlight. Publicity and promotion of our objectives has also benefited considerably from the excellent Newsletters and talks by Peter and Gillian Bolt, with a special mention to our webmaster Phil Pearn. All in all, a great team effort by everyone and which is very much appreciated by the Chairman.

2a Comments from the Floor

i) Brian Crossley asked about the situation with the Brassey Oak and the four stones that had fallen down. These had been relocated on the Marl Pit site at Bulkeley. They have since been taken down along with the interpretation panel but will be reinstated shortly.

ii) John Whittingham talked about a number of statues he had seen on his travels including Edward Elgar and George Elliot. A number of those mentioned appear in our Case Statement document.

With no further comments from the floor the Chairman's report was unanimously adopted.

3 Statement of Accounts 2021 (Treasurer – David Bebb)

David briefly went through the Receipts and Payments Accounts for the period from November 2020 to December 2021 (as published in the Annual Report) followed by the Statement of Assets and Liabilities at the end of the period. The income of £2392.00 was mainly from membership subscriptions and donations. Expenditure for the period was £531.00 covering mainly promotional costs. The balance at the end of the period was £9429.00. It was reported that the 'Just Giving' page had raised £400.00 and for information the latest society account balance as of 21/04/2022 was £10,900.00.

Peter Moody asked about the Liabilities figure of £3,380.00 against the Interpretation Panel. This is because that since November 2020 we are still waiting for an invoice from CW&C. With no further questions the accounts were adopted.

Proposed by Peter Moody
Seconded by Adrian Fisher

4 Election of Trustees 2022

Present Trustees:

David Bebb, Peter Bolt, Richard Coackley CBE, Peter Cocker, Jean Fortune, David Hooley, Stephen Langtree MBE, John Whittingham.

As this is our first AGM the Chairman explained that in accordance with the Constitution all the present Trustees are required to stand down. All Trustees were happy to be re-elected and further nominations were invited from members as, under the constitution, the maximum number of Trustees is 12. However there were no other nominations from the floor.

It was agreed that all the retired Trustees should offer themselves for re-election en Bloc and on that basis the election of the Trustees for the coming year was duly approved.

Proposed by Adrian Fisher
Seconded by Christine Robinson

Next year, three members are required to retire as Trustees but can offer themselves for re-election.

5 AOB and any questions from members.

a) Proposed Statue of Thomas Brassey

Peter Cocker went through the process of obtaining and erecting a statue bearing in mind that since our Charity status objective of Education, a statue is a 'means' rather than an 'end' .

The first thing was to determine a site which, following discussions with the highway Authority, was agreed to be on the footway 'nib' in front of the Station entrance. It is important to avoid buried utility services. After a discussion with Planning it was suggested that a Pre Application Advice be sent in to an assigned Case officer. At this stage the fee

was waived. There was agreement in principle from Planners to the site, all subject to size, design, materials etc.

Following advice from the Public Statues & Sculptors Association (PSSA) we should form a statue committee and go out to a number of sculptors inviting them to submit designs in a competition. We have also had meetings with a Funding Consultant who has put together a list of 25 funders who specialise in Heritage funding. It has now become possible to think seriously about funding now that we have Charity Status and Gift Aid. Our next step will be to engage with potential Sculptors.

b) Awesome Anselm and the Railway Man

Richard Coackley CBE also gave more information about our work and explained our involvement with Canon Jane Brooke from Chester Cathedral. Jane is publishing the fourth in the series of children's books about Awesome Anselm and his friends. In this book she is introducing Thomas Brassey as the hero of the story and we were asked if we could offer any funding to offset the publishing costs. Introducing Thomas Brassey to children at an early age would fulfil one of the educational aims to meet our Charitable Status.

We decided to fund over half the cost, about £650.00 and for this we were able to get a mention in the book for the society and its aims. This book will be on sale at Making Tracks 2 starting in July.

c) The Cruet Bridge *(the English Bridge)*

Richard Coackley CBE discussed our work with the Les Amis de Montmelian Association in France when they asked for our help to prevent the Cruet Bridge from being pulled down. This was possibly one of the first steel truss framed metal bridges built in France by Thomas Brassey.
We put together a document based on in-house knowledge and with information from the ICE in France and forwarded it to the Department of Savoie in France. We pointed out the historic value of the bridge and put forward a suggestion that the bridge should be used for pedestrians and cyclists. We have heard that any demolition is now on hold. We have established a good relationship with our friends in Cruet and we have just checked over the wording of a booklet that they have translated from French to English. This contact is important and demonstrates that our society is being recognised internationally.

Adrian Fisher suggested a visit to Cruet next year.
Christine Robinson thanked the committee for all their hard work.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 11.35 am and was followed by a presentation called "The Voyages of the Sunbeam" by TTBS member Trish Jones from Mountfield, Sussex.

Peter Bolt
Secretary 24th April 2022