THE THOMAS BRASSEY SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

HELD AT THE QUEEN HOTEL, CHESTER ON THE 15th APRIL, 2023

Total number of Member Attendees 25, Non members 2, Start time 10.30 am.

1 Apologies for Absence

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

Pete Waterman OBE (Patron), Jeremy Larkin, Phil Harris, John Henke, David Allan, David Scott, Richard Vaughan Davies, Rowena Feilden, Caroline Capel, Andrew Capel, Steve Percy, Reg Snow, Richard Colehurst, Ken Newell, David Challon, Anthony Brassey, Gerald Leach, Richard Birchett, Roger Jones, Phil Scott, David Kluth, Ian Walker, David Highet, John Martin, David Evans, Keith Stoops, Tony Bennett, Jon & Bill Yates, Doug Haynes, Jeremy Davies, David & Norma Casement, Mike Lamport, Gill Brickland, Andy Helsby

The Chairman (Stephen Langtree) also recorded the Society's sadness at the loss of two members, Tom Stacey and Mike Chubb. Tom was a great, great grandson of Thomas Brassey and had written a very interesting book about the man and his railway building career. The Secretary advised that this book was still available – now at no cost from Amazon, apart from a postage and packaging fee. Mike Chubb had been very active some years ago and was very knowledgeable. Stephen recalled meeting both gentlemen at a dinner in London to commemorate Thomas some years ago.

2 Minutes of last year's Annual General Meeting

These were accepted as a true and accurate record of proceedings by those attending.

Proposed by: Adrian Fisher Seconded by Christine Robinson

3 Annual Report 2022/23 (Chairman – Stephen Langtree MBE)

The Chairman went through the highlights over the last 12 months. He felt that the Society's charitable objectives had been more than accomplished in that Peter Bolt had given over 20 talks to various groups during the past 12 months; Making Tracks 2 had attracted over 40,000 visitors and a good proportion of those visitors had visited the Society's stand in the cathedral as well. He thanked all those who had "manned" the stand through July and August 2022. There was also the children's book written by Canon Jane Brooke about Thomas putting out a fire in the Cathedral using a train to carry water. The Society supported the printing of the book financially, with the view that it would bring Thomas's name to a new audience.

The Society stand has been taken to a number of Heritage events throughout the North West, spreading the word beyond Chester as the Society's aim is to ensure Thomas Brassey is known "far and wide" so there is much more we can do. The Society has a Facebook page and a volunteer to help with that. However, the Society does need someone with marketing experience to take on the role of engaging with the press as it is felt that the Society does not make enough of an impact in this area.

Regarding the statue, it has been a very busy year, following up on consultations with Transport for Wales, Network Rail and Cheshire West and Chester Council. We have also continued with our statue fund raising following the substantial pledge we received at our inaugural meeting and there is now a final push to reach the target. Thanks to all those members who have contributed so far.

The Chairman thanked the Committee for all their hard work during the year as it had been a terrific team effort and said the Society was lucky to have such a dedicated group of people.

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

4 Statement of Accounts 2022/23 (Treasurer – David Bebb)

David went through the Statement of Accounts included in the Annual Report, saying that it had been a very good year. The membership subscriptions amounted to £1940 and other donations had raised the total of cash funds to £31,490. Of the donations some £13,500 has been given by the Brassey family and Rowena Feilden was thanked for her significant efforts in this regard.

The outgoings amounted to £2,574 and when an amount of £9,429 from last year end's cash funds was added in, this led to a total cash fund of £38,345.

An amount of £6,000 has been allocated for future costs and maintenance of the statue.

The pledges we have received for the statue amount to £55,000 therefore the total statue fund stands at £87,000.

The bids received from the sculptors estimated costs to be between £60,000 - £130,000 so the Society is still short of the target figure needed to commission and install the statue.

Now that the Society is a charity, we can claim Gift Aid and David will be working on this in the coming weeks. David's estimate for the amount to be claimed so far is £3,500.

4a Comments from the floor

i) Rex Andrews stated that claiming Gift Aid was very straight forward as he had done this for another charity.

ii) Rex suggested that the statue fund money should have been shown under the "Restricted Funds" column on the Receipts and Payments Accounts rather than being included in the Unrestricted Funds. This was noted for future consideration.

With no further questions, the Accounts were adopted.

Proposed by: Adrian Fisher Seconded by: David Hooley

iii) Later in the meeting Peter Robson queried whether the wording on the Gift Aid donation document was correct and was assured that it met the Charity Commission guidelines.

5 Election of Trustees 2023

The Chairman explained that under the Constitution, three Trustees needed to stand down. These were: Richard Coackley, David Bebb, Peter Bolt. They all wish to offer themselves for re-election.

The remaining Trustees are all willing to continue in their roles on the Committee.

There is also an additional committee member, Ian Walker, who has been co-opted and tasked with the job of organising events and outings.

The members now need to re-elect the three Trustees who have stood down and also confirm that they are in agreement for Ian Walker to become a full Trustee.

Members unanimously agreed to the re-election of the three Trustees and Ian Walker's appointment to the committee.

Proposed by: Peter Robson Seconded by: Jim Fowler

The Chairman asked if there were any members who would like to join the Committee or join as a co-opted member? Unfortunately there were no volunteers.

5a Comments from the floor

i) Adrian Fisher thanked the Trustees for their hard work during the year and thought the Society was extremely well run. The Chair thanked him for his comments.

6 Any Other Business

i) P Robson asked whether costs of preparing the ground work for the statue had been included in the costs estimate? The Chair replied that the Secretary, Peter Bolt, would be talking about the Statue project next.

ii) The Chairman mentioned the proposed trip to Cruet, France to see the Brassey bridge. It had been hoped to go this September but has been postponed to Spring 2024.

Richard Coackley then gave further details adding that they hoped to include other visits during the trip including a vineyard, a cheese making facility and the Packard Bell Foundry. Richard told the meeting that the Brassey Bridge inspired the Eiffel tower and the trip would include a visit to the bridge. People could make their own way there by their preferred means and meet up with the group on arrival.

iii) Alan Percy asked if there had been any further developments with Peel Holdings and developing the old Canada Works site? Peter Bolt said that there had been none so far but it was hoped to hear more at another AGM of the Conservation Areas Wirral Society later in the year when one of the Peel Holdings Directors will hopefully be attending.

iv) John Whittingham reminded the meeting that it was the 175th Anniversary of Chester Station on 1 August, 2023. The Chair told the meeting that he had attended a meeting with Transport for Wales but there would be significant construction works going on inside the station at that time. Any displays would therefore have to be outside. However, it is proposed to hold an evening of talks which will possibly include some research which has been done by Cheshire Records Office about railway building in the County.

v) The Chairman commented that the Society membership had peaked at 120 but was now down into the 90's and it would be good to encourage new members where possible.

vi) The Chairman said that when the statue is installed it will attract significant attention. However, there may be opportunities to follow with other initiatives, for example at Heritage railway lines built by Brassey where there is presently little or no recognition of his achievements. It was also surprising that York Railway Museum had no mention of him and Peter Bolt had written to the Curator about this omission some years ago.

In response to this Jim Fowler has associations with the North Yorkshire Moors railway and Peter Robson with the Llangollen. Both undertook to follow up this initiative with each of the railways.

7 Statue update

Peter Bolt reminded members of the inaugural meeting when Clive Pointon of Aaron & Partners had offered half the funding for a statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester Station. This led to the Society needing to achieve charitable status which they did.

The Committee had tried crowd funding and only raised £400 in six months and despite great efforts in applying to various funding sources, so far none had offered any support. However, members' donations had started to arrive and following a talk to a group in Tarporley, a significant donation of £1000 had been sent in. Over the past few months a number of other individuals had given very generous donations, ranging between £1,000 and £5,000, towards the project. Rowena Feilden had contacted many members of the Brassey family by sending them a postcard about the Society's aim and this had resulted in significant donations from several members of the Brassey family and associated trusts along with a further pledge of £5000 from Heap & Partners.

A Design Panel has been set up with The Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of the Society plus Clive Pointon, Bob Rudd (Councillor) and Rowena Feilden, representing the Brassey family.

A Sculptors' Design Brief had been written, reviewed by the PSSA (Public Statues & Sculptors Association) and then bids were invited. Nine (9) submissions were received and reviewed by the Design Panel. A short list of 2 was chosen to go forward to the second stage. A further meeting with the two short-listed sculptors is scheduled for May/June with ideas to be discussed with each, resulting in the submission of a detailed proposal and maquette. Following this the winning design will be announced and contract awarded.

Peter confirmed that it would be a bronze statue.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 11.45 am and was followed by a presentation called "*The Day I Met Thomas Brassey*" by Mac Steels relating to his engineering experience when building the M6 motorway over Shap, following the lines of the Brassey railway.