# THE THOMAS BRASSEY SOCIETY

## MINUTES OF THE THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

## HELD AT THE QUEEN HOTEL, CHESTER ON THE 13 JULY, 2024

Total number of Member Attendees 35, Non members 9, Start time 10.30 am.

**1 Apologies for Absence**

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

Frank Whitfield, Clive Pointon, David Allan, Phil Pearn, David Hughes, Stewart Shuttleworth, Adrian Fisher, Rowena Feilden, Jeremy Davies, Jeremy Larken, Phil Garrett, Ian Walker, Jean Fortune, Jim Fowler, Reg Snow, Cesare & Margaret D'Enrico

**2 Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 15 April 2023**

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

Proposed by: David Hooley Seconded by Peter Cocker

**3 Annual Report 2023/24 (Chairman – Stephen Langtree MBE)**

i) The Chairman, (Stephen Langtree) welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Peter and Gillian Bolt for preparing and distributing the Annual Report.

ii) He then went on to reflect on the talk given by Mac Steels at the 2023 AGM, entitled "*When I first met Thomas Brassey".* Mac had been one of the engineers working for John Laing Construction on the Shap section of the M6. His boss had told him about Thomas Brassey and Mac had become an enthusiast. Sadly Mac passed away earlier this year and members attended his funeral.

iii) Stephen also told members about the loss of the Society Treasurer, Dave Bebb who was very much missed by everyone. The committee meetings were a pleasure with Dave around the table and his funeral was very well attended and included many Society members.

iv) The Chairman then went on to tell the meeting about the wonderful time that the Society members enjoyed on their trip to Cruet, France which was master minded by Vice Chair, Richard Coackley. The object was to support the local French societies campaigning to save the Pont des Anglais, one of two bridges built by Thomas Brassey between 1853-1855 for the Victor Emmanuel railway which is a designated historic monument but which the local Department is trying to de-designate in order to demolish it. Richard has been active in writing to UNESCO representatives, the Prefecture and others who might support the campaign and hopefully this will bear fruit.

v) It has been a very busy year for the Society. During Making Tracks 3, the Society had the stand in Chester Cathedral again which many members helped to 'man' for the duration. We talked to hundreds of people and it was a very worthwhile exercise. There will be a

Making Tracks 4 this year during August but the Society has not been invited to take part this year due to lack of space apparently.

vi) The Society also helped to celebrate the 175th Anniversary of Chester Station. Again, the event was very well attended and working in partnership with others it was extremely successful.

vii) There will be more events to look forward to next year with Rail200, celebrating 200 years since 1825 when the first train ran and this is going to be a national celebration of railways and railway heritage around the country so we hope that the statue will be a real focus for rail visitors.

viii) Regarding the statue, having to negotiate the details of bin relocations, the style of the plinth with the CWAC Conservation Officer and other related issues are taking far more time than we anticipated. It now looks likely that the statue will be in place, however, by early 2025.

ix) Spreading the word about Thomas Brassey has been a major charitable objective for the Society, initially through many talks given by Peter Bolt. However, this year other members of the committee have also taken on talk engagements to spread the load.

x) In discussion with Llangollen Railway, it was hoped to get panels about Thomas Brassey on the stations at Llangollen and Corwen. Although the spaces allocated seem to have been filled, we still hope to see this come to fruition.

xi) CWAC are planning to devote a room on the 2nd floor of the Town Hall to "Great Cestrians" and it is hoped that there is going to be a display there including information about Thomas Brassey.

xii) The Chairman then thanked the Committee members for their hard work and Gillian Bolt for producing Society newsletters and Reports.

xiii) He then told the meeting that they still needed one or two more members on the Committee. One particular role is to do with publicity – someone familiar with writing Press Releases and talking to media outlets would be welcomed.

xiv) Another role that would be welcomed would be someone to compile a database of all the Thomas Brassey information sources: books, portraits etc – essentially a research role.

Again the Chairman thanked everyone for coming and asked if there were questions.

**Questions:**

a) Roger Croston asked whether the Society could endeavour to get a plaque at the "new" Oak tree site in Bruera, planted in 2005. The area was becoming overgrown and needed a hedge trimming to ensure the new tree was visible as well as the interpretation panel.

The request was noted.

b) Peter Robson, Llangollen Railway, queried the matter of the panels and said that his understanding was that the Llangollen personnel were waiting for a response from the Society. Gillian Bolt replied that they had sent amended panel designs as requested and had asked for feedback several times but not received any. Peter Robson will follow this up with the railway personnel and GLB will forward the panel design through to him.

c) John Whittingham added extra information about the 175th Chester Station celebrations and said how much the public had enjoyed the spectacle. However, he went on to say how disappointed he was in the current condition of the station with extensive weed growth proliferating on the brickwork. He had talked to the Manager about it but felt we needed to apply more pressure.

**4 Treasurer's Report**

(Keith Stoops has only recently taken over the Treasurer's role from Dave Bebb and apologized in advance for any errors and omissions.)

The Accounts had been sent out in advance and so Keith did a brief summary, particularly of the Statue monies, advising that there would be a need for more money to cover the extra monies needed for the plinth & foundation as well as public liability insurance for the foreseeable future. Hopefully the Council would take that over at some point but in their current financial situation, they are unlikely to do so in the near future.

**Question:**

a) Peter Robson raised the point that there was an anomaly between the last year's data shown on these accounts and the figures that appeared on last year's accounts.

Keith apologized and said he would check why this had occurred.

b) In answer to a question about auditors, Peter Cocker replied that the Civic Trust Treasurer, who is also a chartered accountant, would be asked to audit them again before sending off to the Charity Commission.

c) John Roberts asked about the Public Liability insurance for the statue and it was confirmed that this is a concern for the Society as the statue may also have to be moved at some point, making the foundation more complicated. The Station forecourt is scheduled to have a refurbishment at some point which would probably result in a new location being identified for the statue.

Approval of the Accounts was proposed by Moir Cocker, seconded by Peter Robson (subject to the last year's figures being amended.)

**5 Election of Trustees**

Three Trustees were up for re-election: David Hooley, Peter Cocker and Stephen Langtree. All are willing to be re-elected.

They were proposed by Caroline Capel, seconded by David Casement.

Two new Trustees were then proposed: Keith Stoops and John Violet.

They were proposed by Gerald Leach, seconded by David Hooley.

All were unanimously elected by the meeting.

**6 Any Other Business**

i) Peter Bolt advised that Ian Walker, the Society Events Co-ordinator, could not be at the meeting but had sent along details of two proposed Autumn outings. One would be to the Llangollen Railway with lunch at the Chainbridge Hotel and the other would be to the East Lancs Railway with lunch organized. Further details would be in the next newsletter.

The Chairman announced that was the end of the formal AGM business and closed the business part of the meeting.

**7 Thanks from Caroline Capel**

Caroline (representing the Brassey family) thanked the Society members and the Committee in particular for their hard work and dedication to promoting the work of Thomas Brassey. Since 2005, Caroline has attended many events and supported the Society's work in every way possible and her kind words were very well received.

**AGM Talk on the process of the sculpting of the statue**

The Sculptor, Andy Edwards, then gave an excellent presentation about his own history of starting out as a sculptor with a commission to do one for Sir Stanley Matthews in his home town of Stoke on Trent. This led to many others around the world including the four Beatles, in Liverpool and a more recent one of our late Queen which will be placed in Newcastle under Lyme.

The processes he uses includes copies of ancient measuring equipment used by Michaelangelo (for getting dimensions right) up to modern AI and digitization.

The talk and accompanying slides were fascinating and Andy received a very warm round of applause at the end of his presentation.

Gillian Bolt

16 July 2024



