Thomas Brassey and his links to Heritage Railways No 8

The Cannock Chase Railways and the Chasewater Heritage Railway

By David Bebb

Thomas Brassey was awarded a contract by the Cannock Mineral Railway Company in 1859 for the completion of the construction of a line 10 miles in length between Cannock and Rugeley in Staffordshire following the death of the original engineer George Heald. A second contract was awarded to Brassey in 1862 by the Cannock Chase Railway Company for the construction of a further 3 miles of railway in the area. Both railways formed part of the wider network of mineral lines that were being built to serve the coalfields in the Cannock Chase and Staffordshire area and were linked with the local mainlines.

The mineral lines became part of the National Coal Board in 1948 but were progressively closed between the 1950s and the 1970s. Much of the track has been lost to development but some sections remain around Cannock as public footpaths.

Due to the efforts of the West Midlands Preservation Group in the 1960s a lease on part of the former 1888 Brownhills to Aldridge trackbed along Chasewater was secured in 1964. Limited steam train operation started in 1973 operated by the newly formed Chasewater Light Railway Society. Development of operations proved difficult and in 1982 the railway was forced to close. It was not until 1985 that operation was resumed. More difficult times followed but the Chasewater Railway now operates approximately 2 miles of track between Brownhills West and Chasetown and circumnavigating Chasewater.

Whilst Thomas Brassey may not have been involved in the construction of the section of line now operated by the Chasewater Railway he certainly made a significant contribution to the development of the mineral lines in the Cannock Chase area. Thanks to the Chasewater Railway the preservation of this industrial heritage for future generations is in good hands. The photograph below by Chris Allen is reproduced courtesy of Wikipedia.

