Thomas Brassey and his link to Heritage Railways No 10
By David Bebb

The North Staffordshire Railway (1845-1923) and the Churnet Valley (Heritage) Railway (1992-present)

In 1846, the North Staffordshire Railway (NSR) awarded two major contracts. The first of these was for the construction of the line from Macclesfield to Colwich, via Stoke (the Pottery Line). The second was for the construction of the lines between North Rode and Burton and between Stoke and Uttoxeter (the Churnet Valley Line).

The contract for the Macclesfield to Colwich railway, a length of 48 miles, was awarded to Thomas Brassey. Construction work was started under the supervision of the Engineer, George Bidder. It is reported that by February 1847 there were 1,300 men and 60 horses working between Macclesfield and Colwich. Some 61,000 m^3 of earth were removed and 770 metres of tunnel heading driven.

Brassey also built the Ashbourne branch for the North Staffordshire Railway that had a junction with the Churnet Valley Line at Rocester. At the opening of the Ashbourne branch, the NSR Chairman, John Lewis Ricardo described Brassey as ***"equal to anything, however great or small, in the construction of railways. He is competent to make the Great Northern, or to lease the Ashbourne branch."*** He added that he had known and worked with Brassey for six years, during which time they had been involved in railway works costing nearly £2m.

The contract for the Churnet Valley Line was awarded to contractor J&S Tredwell and opened in 1849. Following the publication of the Beeching Report in 1963 most of the line was scheduled for closure. Passenger services lasted until 1965 although freight traffic continued until 1988. In 1992 the Churnet Valley Railway Company was formed and in 1995 purchased the line from British Railways. The Company now operates heritage trains between Froghall and Leekbrook with branch to Ipstones, a total distance of approximately 11 miles.

It is clear that Thomas Brassey was well thought of within the North Staffordshire Railway Company and played a significant role in the development of the railways around the Potteries. The line between Macclesfield and Colwich, via Stoke and Stone is still in use.



Stone Railway Station looking south with the line to Colwich to the left and Norton Bridge to the right.



The Churnet Valley Line today, pictured at Kingsley and Froghall Station.