Thomas Brassey and his link to Heritage Railways No 7

The Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway (1847-1923) and the East Lancashire (Heritage) Railway (1970-present)

Thomas Brassey was awarded a contract by the newly formed Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway (L&YR) in 1847 for the maintenance of 93 miles of their network around Manchester, East Lancashire and South Yorkshire. The extent of the contract and the lines included are not known with any certainty but likely to have included a number of lines around Manchester, Bolton, Bury and Rochdale. The former L&YR network has survived largely intact. Some routes around Bury were closed but later reopened as part of the Manchester Metrolink. The East Lancashire Railway preservation group, formed in the 1970s, now operates on two sections, one between Bury and Rawtenstall (part of the East Lancashire Railway Company until 1859) and the other between Bury and Heywood.

The section of the East Lancashire Railway heritage line between Bury and Rawtenstall, by virtue of the fact that it was owned and operated by the East Lancashire Railway Company until 1859, is unlikely to have been included in the Brassey contract of 1847.

However, the section between Bury and Heywood was opened by the L&YR in 1848 as an extension of the line from Castleton via Heywood to Bury. There is the possibility that this section was part of that original Brassey maintenance contract.

The question of a direct link between Thomas Brassey and the present operating lines of the East Lancashire Railway requires further investigation. However, the association between Brassey and the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Company is clear.

The Engineer for the L&YR at the time, John Hawkshaw, in the book "Sir John Hawkshaw (1811-1891) - The Life and Work of an Eminent Victorian Engineer" spoke very highly of him. Of Brassey he said:

"he was proverbially liberal to his agents and those in his employment… he was ever wholly free from ostentation and never lost his original simplicity and modesty of character; and he left behind him a name untarnished by aught unworthy of an honourable man".

The present East Lancashire Railway preserves the engineering achievements of both these great Victorian engineers.



East Lancashire Railway Former L&YR 0-6-0 Saddle Tank No. 51456 stands at Bury (Bolton Street) station, October 2021.



East Lancashire Railway Former L&YR 0-6-0 No. 52322 enters Bury (Bolton Street) station from the south, October 2021.