

The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our October 2021 Newsletter

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



Our Patron, Pete Waterman with TTBS Chairman, Steve Langtree

First and foremost, a very warm welcome to all our new members. The month of September has provided welcome respite for your committee members, all of whom have worked hard throughout the summer.

The main effort, but by no means the only one, was to 'man' our stand every day for seven weeks while Pete Waterman's model railway '*Making Tracks*' was exhibited at Chester Cathedral. It was quite a commitment for us all, but it was greatly assisted and made all the more enjoyable by local members of our society who came along to help each and every day. I would like to say a very big "thank you" to everyone who helped to make this so successful.

More will be said by other contributors, but there is no doubt that this was a wonderful opportunity for our fledgling society. Having a presence close to the model railway did so much to raise the profile of Thomas Brassey. It introduced us to many interesting visitors and enabled us to recruit over 40 new members, such that we now have over 100.

Our patron, Pete Waterman, and his 'railway nuts' produced a stunning model of parts of the West Coast Main Line constructed by Brassey. Pete and his team were pleased with the response from the public - and so were we! Then of course, as many of you know, we held a very successful and enjoyable Members' Lunch on Saturday 28th August. Over 50 TBS members and guests were present including several Brassey family members whose support is very much appreciated. I would like to express our thanks to Richard Coackley and Peter Bolt for ensuring that all the arrangements went smoothly and that we all had a good time!

Amongst several short presentations that day, Peter Cocker announced the successful outcome of our application to the Charity Commission. I'm delighted to record that **The Thomas Brassey Society** is now a registered charity. The next move, which is already underway, is to register with HMRC so that we can collect Gift Aid on future subscriptions and donations.

Finally, let me reassure you that we are still making progress with plans for a statue outside Chester railway station - built by Brassey in 1847/48. Site meetings have been held with relevant officers from Cheshire West and Chester Council and, with their encouragement, we expect to submit an outline planning application before Christmas.

This is just a summary of a busy period for the Society. Please read on for more details, explore our website and get in touch with us if you have any suggestions or queries.

Best wishes,
Steve Langtree MBE

Success - the Society is now a registered charity
Peter Cocker



Those Members who managed to get to our informal August lunch at Chester Cathedral during the Making Tracks exhibition will know that we were able, at long last, to announce that we had just succeeded in gaining charitable status for the Society.

This achievement was a more protracted process than we had anticipated. Foremost was the necessity to have a new Constitution based on the Charity Commission's 'association' model for a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This meant replacing our original simple 3-page constitution by a much more comprehensive 25-page version.

NEWSLETTER

The next hurdle was the Charity Commission's objection to the word 'Society' in our title without having the permission of Companies House – this despite there being over 18,000 charities with the word 'Society' in their title. Apparently this issue is a relic of the naming of societies in the nineteenth century. This hurdle was fairly easily overcome by prompt help and approval from Companies House, but who would have guessed that the word Society was a so-called 'sensitive name' or that Companies House would actually have a 'Sensitive Names Team'?

The final hurdle was the Charity Commission's objection to two of our three charity 'objects' (i.e. objectives). All Charitable Incorporated Organisations must have objects that are consistent with one of the Charity Commission's statutory list of thirteen objects, and the only one of ours that complied with the statutory list was the one to promote education of the general public. At this point the Charity Commission became positively helpful and suggested a new overarching object that satisfied their requirements and, in the interests of making progress, we accepted this with thanks. The new single object is :-

"To advance the education of the public in the historic significance of the life and works of Thomas Brassey in particular but not exclusively by providing and assisting in the provision of educational materials, activities and events open to the general public on the topic of Thomas Brassey and the field of railway engineering more generally."

You will notice that the new object makes no reference to the erection of a statue of Thomas Brassey, which has always been one of our main aims. This is not as alarming as it first appears, however. The erection of a statue – or indeed any physical structure - is not in itself consistent with any of the thirteen statutory objects, so it cannot be one of our formal charity objects, but it can be one of the means by which the education object can be achieved. Our efforts to erect a statue outside Chester Railway Station therefore continue unabated!

The main long-term advantage of achieving charitable status is that it opens up the possibilities of gaining grants towards the erection of a statue from organisations that would only consider giving to registered charities.

In the short term, of course, the principal advantage is our ability to claim gift aid on member subscriptions and donations from individuals who pay either income tax or capital gains tax or both. This will be worth 25p to the Society for every £1 received. Our new membership application / renewal form and donation forms will include a pro-forma gift aid certificate for signature so that we can take advantage of this provision.

Existing members who joined the Society before October 2021 will need to renew their membership by 1st January 2022 using the new 'gift aid' form so that we can start claiming the gift aid from HM Revenue and Customs. Members will receive a reminder about this nearer the time.

Was Brassey a Christian?

We were asked some interesting questions at Making Tracks, including,

"*Was Thomas Brassey a Christian?"*

Well, what I can tell you is that while Brassey was in France, working with his partner William Mackenzie near Rouen, they did find time, along with their respective families, to attend Church most Sundays. This information was well documented in the Diary of William Mackenzie.

From a practical point of view we know that Brassey was good to his men providing them with warm clothes, better rations and new working boots. He believed his men should be better educated and provided a Library at the Canada works in Birkenhead. When in France he covered the cost of hospital treatment for the many accidents that would take place. Brassey was considered a man without faults!

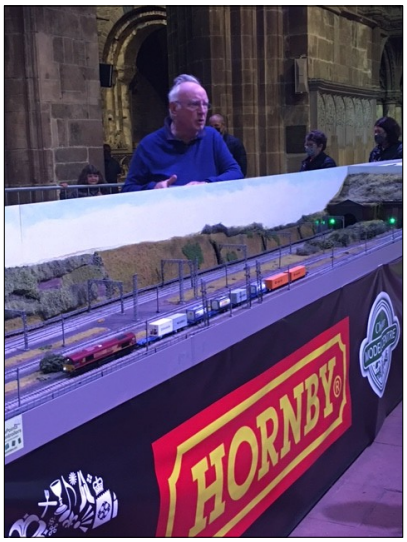
When his eldest son Tom was asked once, "Surely he must have had some faults?"
"Well yes," replied Tom, " I sometimes thought he was too kind to people!"

NEWSLETTER

MORE ON 'MAKING TRACKS'

When we were invited to bring a stand to the Cathedral we realised that this would be a golden opportunity for the society to engage with the public and talk to people about Thomas Brassey.

We know that he is not well known and it is only by education that the general public will learn that the Stephenson's and Brunel are not the only railway greats. This was not a task that the committee could do without help and following an appeal in the Newsletter as well as a local 'ring round' we were delighted to recruit an army of volunteers. This enabled us to have a presence at Making Tracks each day during the Exhibition which totalled up to over 600 man hours – a brilliant effort.





We would also like to thank Nick Thompson for kindly updating the TTBS logo free of charge for insertion in the booklet to give away during the Exhibition.



TTBS at Crewe Heritage Centre

On Saturday the 2nd October we took our stand to the Crewe Toy and Train Collector's Fair at the the Crewe Heritage Centre. The fair was organised by the Crewe Model Engineering Society.

We were made very welcome and had a most enjoyable day amongst the toy and train fair tables. The event was well attended and a steady flow of like minded rail enthusiasts found the time to stop by and chat and in most cases to learn about Thomas Brassey. Talk about Brassey often led into discussion about Crewe as a railway town as several had served apprenticeships at the "Works" or been signalmen. We were able to attract one new member on the day, Alan Bennett, welcome Alan and also spread the "word" through the distribution of our flyers.

A SPECIAL WELCOME TO ALL NEW MEMBERS

We have been very fortunate to have many new members join us during the Summer, thanks to the Making Tracks exhibition. They come from various places around the country and we hope that as restrictions continue to ease (hopefully) we are able to meet many of them again at one of our members' events.

All in all a good day was had and we are already looking forward to doing similar events in the future with a potential return to Crewe in March next year.

Cheshire Local History Association

CHLA are holding their annual History Day at the Grange Theatre, Bradburn's Lane, Hartford near Northwich, CW8 3LU on Saturday, 30 October 2021. Doors open at 9.00 am. The Society has been invited to have a stand at this event and your Secretary will be giving a talk during the day. For more information ring Bob Burgess on 07923 016881 or email rwb44@talktalk.net.

NEWSLETTER

BRASSEY HERITAGE LINE RESEARCH
Thomas Brassey's links to Heritage Railways – No 6
By Dave Bebb

The Albert Edward Bridge and the Telford Steam Railway



The Albert Edward Bridge was constructed by Thomas Brassey as part of a contract to connect Coalbrookdale with Buildwas on the Severn Valley Railway and opened in 1864. The 61 metre span cast iron arch comprises four ribs and is almost identical to the Victoria Bridge on the Severn Valley Railway, also built by Brassey under a contract for the Severn Valley Railway.

The line across the River Severn linked Coalbrookdale with the Great Western Railway route northwards via Lightmoor and Horsehay to Wellington (on the line between Shrewsbury and Birmingham) and southwards via Much Wenlock to Craven Arms. The latter was also constructed by Brassey for the Wenlock Railway Company in 1862.

The railway network within the Ironbridge Gorge was developed primarily for goods traffic rather than to carry passengers. Following the end of World War II a decline in passenger numbers resulted in the closure of the line between Much Wenlock and Craven Arms in 1951 and passenger services between Wellington and Much Wenlock were withdrawn in 1962. General freight traffic continued until 1964. However, the line between Madeley Junction (on the Shrewsbury to Birmingham line) and Buildwas via Lightmoor, Coalbrookdale (and the Albert Edward Bridge) was kept open for coal trains supplying the Ironbridge Power Station until closure of the power station in 2015.

The Telford Steam Railway, a heritage railway formed in 1976, now operates a one mile section of track around Horsehay and Dawley. With the closure of the power station at Ironbridge and proposed redevelopment of the site the steam railway has aspirations to extend southwards to Buildwas as part of a wider plan to link up with the Ironbridge industrial heritage sites.

We may once again see trains passing over the Albert Edward Bridge.



And finally - we are looking for an Archivist.

The Society is looking for an Archivist to work in a voluntary capacity to hold information and images digitally which members may have already and think could be of interest to others. If you feel that you have the necessary expertise and could help us with this please get in touch with Peter Bolt.

With best wishes and hope that you are all keeping safe and well.
Peter Bolt
Secretary
(email: petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com)