

Welcome to our December 2022 Newsletter



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



November 2022 will hopefully be regarded as another important milestone for The Thomas Brassey Society. It is three years since we were formally constituted at our Inaugural Meeting and, more significantly, we achieved the long-awaited invitation to sculptors to express interest in the proposed statue of Thomas outside Chester station.

The 'Sculptors' Brief' has existed in a preliminary form for quite some time, but it is only with the generous guidance from the Public Statues and Sculpture Association (PSSA) that we have completed the task. (I say "we", but the credit must go to our Treasurer, Dave Bebb, who has worked hard on this for the last few months.)

It is gratifying to see that some well-known and highly skilled sculptors are already responding to our invitation. No doubt our design panel, which includes a representative of the Brassey family, will have its' work cut out to produce a shortlist next Spring.

Meanwhile, our efforts to secure more funding continue. Richard Coackley, Peter Bolt and David Hooley are leading the charge on this. They have been busy sending application forms and supporting material to a wide range of potential sponsors. It's not an easy job, as anyone who has done this will know, but we are trying to be as persuasive as we can!

Before signing off, I would like to mention two more things:

1 - Members' activities – your committee is very keen to organise more events and day trips in the coming year. Ian Walker has joined the committee to lead on this so we do hope you will support his ideas as they emerge. Can I also thank John Whittingham for his presentation to members on 10th November which included an interesting visit to Chester station which, as you all know, was built by Brassey in 1848.

2 - Spreading the word - Our WebMaster, Phil Pearn, recently reported that he could find no mention of Thomas Brassey in the National Railway Museum in York. It is almost certainly also true that many of the heritage railways which run on lines built by TB make no mention of him in their guidebooks. We obviously have a task to fulfil and any of you who can help in any small way are encouraged to do so.

And so to round off, may I wish you all the very best for the festive season and a healthy and successful year ahead. Thank you for your support, and please don't forget to renew your membership in January.

Kind regards
Stephen Langtree MBE

Welcome to new members

A special welcome to the following new members. Hopefully you will be able to join us on future social events — see page 5

George Wilson	Chester
Jeremy Bruce	Church Stretton
Paul Lowry	Chester

NEWSLETTER

Thomas Brassey & the Pont Victoria, Canada
by Brian Crossley MBE, FICE

"The great British contracting firm of Peto, Brassey, Jackson and Betts persuaded itself that there would be profit from a vast railway through Canada from Portland, Maine, to the American Middle West. No one seems to have warned them about rivers, politicians, labour costs, or of the Canadian winters on track, locomotives and rolling stock."

From 1985, my wife and I have visited our eldest daughter and her family many times in Toronto and Montreal. On a visit in 2006 I became aware of a collection of early photos by William Notman in the McCord Museum, taken during construction of the Victoria Bridge. Prior to a visit in September 2022 for our daughter's wedding, I contacted the Museum for any references to Brassey in their archives. Archivist Heather McNabb reported that there was information on the vessel '*Sunbeam*' and "*We also have some engravings, and James Hodge's book on the bridge's construction, published in 1860."*

Arrangements were made to examine the engravings (which are actually original drawings) and Hodge's Book during the morning of 22nd September, which provoked the comment *"It will take two technicians to get it up to the Archives and Documentation Centre, and we'll have to figure out how best to manipulate it on your visit."*

There are 97 ink on tracing paper drawings (most from Canada Works, Birkenhead) including some of other UK projects, contained in a heavy portfolio approx. 4ft x 2ft 6ins. There is an 8ft long (folded) detailed drawing for each of the 24 spans, but they are too delicate to unfold without causing damage, however there are many drawings of parts of the spans and equipment used during construction which afford an adequate appreciation of construction details used e.g. roller bearings and riveted construction. 37 drawings were photographed. The source of these drawings is unknown, but they were purchased from Maggs Bros Ltd, London who are long established antiquarian booksellers. This possibly explains why some UK projects also found their way into this collection.

Because the Victoria Bridge project immediately followed tubular bridges at Conway, Menai and the Boyne viaduct, these original drawings are of international importance being a detailed record of major riveted structures and construction equipment.

The large book by James Hodges is a very detailed month by month report of construction of the piers and structure plus dramatic observations of the build-up and melting of the ice each winter. There are 33 exquisitely detailed prints showing various stages during construction plus equipment used in the cofferdams and site fabrication. Only 8 were photographed,

An interesting Appendix in the book is a long letter from the Engineer Robert Stephenson, justifying to the Directors of the Client, his design of the approaches, the foundations, the upper masonry and particularly the use of a tubular structure compared to American practice at the time of using latticed steel structures. Full details of load testing and deflections of each span are recorded.

The Institution of Civil Engineers have a copy of the Hodges book which is too large to put in the post, but I was able to examine this in October 2022 and photograph all prints. ICE Archivist Carol Morgan has provide details of a digital copy held in Quebec https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.45104/1

This digital copy of the book contains some photos taken during construction which are not good, but the text is very readable.

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This project nearly bankrupted Peto, Brassey, Jackson and Betts and the backers of the railway. When the Prince of Wales opened the bridge in December 1859, he commented

'They left behind an imperishable monument of British skill, pluck, science and perseverance".

In the middle of all this activity in Birkenhead and Canada, Brassey, Peto and Betts were requested by the UK Government just before Christmas 1854, to urgently build a railway to help relieve soldiers at the front in the Crimean War – which was achieved.

Many thanks to Heather McNabb, Archivist McCord Museum, Montreal and Carol Morgan, Archivist to the Institution of Civil Engineers, London for their valuable guidance and assistance.



Floating Cofferdam for construction of piers



Staging for central span (ice up to 8 ft thick)

WANTED
An enthusiastic social media member
to manage the Society's
Facebook account. We would like to develop
an 'interactive' site which enables members to contribute.
If you are interested please get in touch with
Peter Bolt, Secretary, TTBS in the first instance.
petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com

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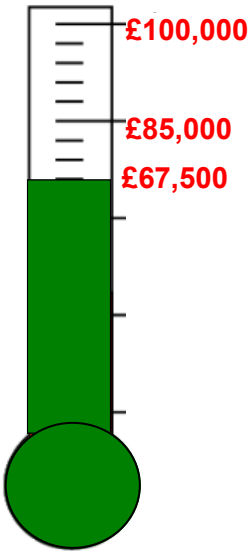
STATUE — WHERE ARE WE UP TO?

Over the last few weeks your committee has been going out for funding to Charitable Trusts and also contacting Sculptors.

FUNDRAISER

OUR GOAL:

£85,000 plus



About eighteen months ago we had a meeting with a Funding Consultant who gave us advice and also supplied a list of suitable Charitable Trusts who may consider funding the Statue project.

The bids have been going in and it's now a waiting game.

Regarding the Sculptors, we have selected a short list of twenty but the Sculptors' Brief will be sent out to the main list by the Public Statues and Sculptors Association (PSSA).

However, we have had some interesting replies already including one from a Sculptor who advised he was the great, great, great Grandson of Thomas Brassey . What a small world!

Our funds, including donations and pledges, continue to grow but we do need your financial help to make this happen. If you can think of any other potential funders too please let us know.

Details of how to make a donation are provided on our website (thomasbrasseysociety.org) together with a donation form which can be downloaded.

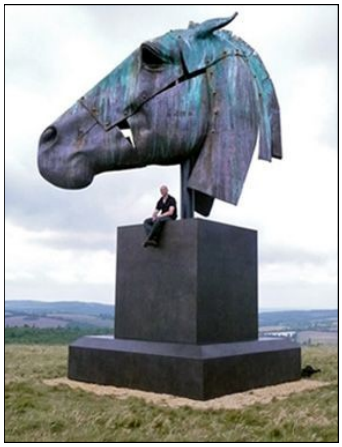
No matter how large or small, donations of any amount are very gratefully received and all will be personally acknowledged.

The Castle Fine Arts Foundry



Following an invitation from Chris Western (Commercial Director) of the Castle Fine Arts Foundry, Peter Bolt and Dave Bebb visited the factory in Llanrhaeadr, Nr Oswestry. We wanted to understand the process of casting a bronze and get an idea of costs from both the Foundry and the Sculptor and how they worked together.

Over the years the Foundry has produced a number of famous pieces of art including the 'fab' four in Liverpool and the iconic 35ft high horse's head '*Artemis*' installed at Goodwood in the South Downs. Contrary to popular belief the castings are not solid but go through a 'lost wax' process producing a bronze casting only 5 mm thick. They are not cast as one but from a number of castings and then undergo welding & chasing, fettling and finally wax sealing and fixing.



When discussing costs, something close to our hearts, we learnt that an average 1.25 life size statue would use 250 kg of bronze and at the moment the price of bronze and gas used in the furnace is going up rapidly. Therefore it is impossible to obtain a fixed price at the present time. Also Sculptors' costs vary considerably depending who you choose for the job.

Wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and healthy New Year
and don't forget that membership is due in January,
by Standing Order please.

Peter Bolt

Secretary - petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com
www.thomasbrasseysociety.org

PROPOSED EXCURSIONS/ACTIVITIES 2023

Ian Walker has put together a list of proposed events for the first part of 2023.

January – Monday 16th, 8 pm at the Town Crier, Chester.

This is a RCTS (Railway Correspondence and Travel Society) meeting at which Peter Bolt, TTBS Secretary, will be giving his talk on Thomas Brassey. The RCTS has kindly opened their meeting to TTBS members, so please contact Ian and the first 20 can secure their place due to room size. ian.walker131@gmail.com;

March - Saturday 25th

Wirral History & Heritage Fair at Hulme Hall, Port Sunlight. The Society will have a stand there and the Fair runs from 10.00 am – 4.00 pm. This is one of the best Heritage fairs in the area. Light bites are available and Port Sunlight Station is just a short walk away. Well worth attending plus an opportunity for members to meet up and later, view the Port Sunlight end of the Storeton Tramway, built by Brassey.

April - (date to be advised) **TTBS AGM**

We hope to hold this at the Queen Hotel and offer a Society lunch as well**.**

May - Possibly w/c 15th May. **Visit to Churnet Valley Railway, Staffs**.



Meet at the CVR, Froghall Station, to join the first train of the day and enjoy a breakfast on board during the round trip. Afterwards there will be time for another round trip, or part trip and visit to the workshops. More details later, as the CVR hasn't worked up its 2023 timetable. Costs expected to be £30-35 per person.

July & August - Making Tracks 3 at Chester Cathedral

Our TTBS stand will be there and we will be looking to arrange a social event at the end of it in early September again. We will be asking for volunteers to help staff the stand nearer the time.

August The 1st of August is a '**red letter day**' as Chester Station is celebrating 175 years since the opening. We hope to arrange a commemorative event with more details to follow although we won't be able to re-enact the original "Grand Opening" Festivities including marching bands, big feast etc.

September 16 & 17.

In September there is a proposed trip to Cruet in South East France, to visit the Thomas Brassey bridge, the 'Pont des Anglais' as guests of the Cruet Nature & Patrimoines group. It coincides with "Journées du Patrimoine", a national (possibly even european) annual event celebrating cultural and historical heritage. It is a time when Cruet Nature and Patrimoines and other associations organise events, open exhibitions, etc. This could be a perfect opportunity for our visit. We could also visit the lovely lakeside town of Annecy which is nearby.



