

The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

Welcome to our February 2022 Newsletter

NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



It's February already, but I would like to take this belated opportunity to wish our members all the very best for the year ahead.

New members continue to join us as the word spreads around the country. Among these, we are particularly pleased to welcome the Honourable Thomas Brassey. Tom is a great, great, great grandchild and brings the total number of family members in our Society to 11. We are also delighted to welcome another new member, Trish Jones, from East Sussex.

Existing members already know that it is our long-standing ambition to erect a statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester railway station. Indeed, those of you who were at our inaugural meeting in November 2019 will have heard the amazing (and unexpected) offer of "half the cost" from a local charitable trust. What you may not know, is that we were advised to refrain from further specific fundraising until we had achieved Charitable status and permission to collect Gift Aid on donations.

Well, as all but our newest members will be aware, both of these pre-requisites have now been achieved. We could wait even longer, until we get outline planning permission and choose a shortlist of potential sculptors. However, your Committee is keen to step up the pace by making a start on fundraising in parallel with these other priorities.

To this end, our *Case Statement* & *Funding Prospectus* will be issued to all members in the next few weeks. Therefore, if you have been waiting for an opportunity to contribute, or if you are currently planning for the next financial year, please get in touch. We will be delighted to hear from you and to receive your donations.

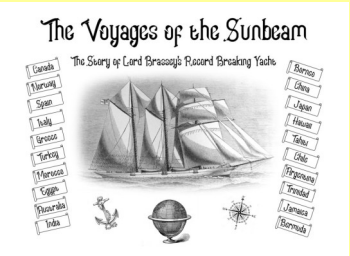
Finally, I hope many of you will attend our AGM (details of which can be found below) and please send us your suggestions for future events in other parts of the country.

With best wishes,
STEPHEN LANGTREE MBE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society would like to notify you that the Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, 23 April 2022 and will be held at the Queen Hotel in Chester.

Full details of the arrangements will be sent through as soon as possible. Lunch will be available.



We have also arranged for a special, after lunch, illustrated talk by new member, Trish Jones, from East Sussex, who will be telling us about the research she has been doing on the voyages of 'Sunbeam', a 157 ft schooner, owned by Lord Brassey (Thomas Brassey's eldest son) and his wife Annie which I am sure will be fascinating.

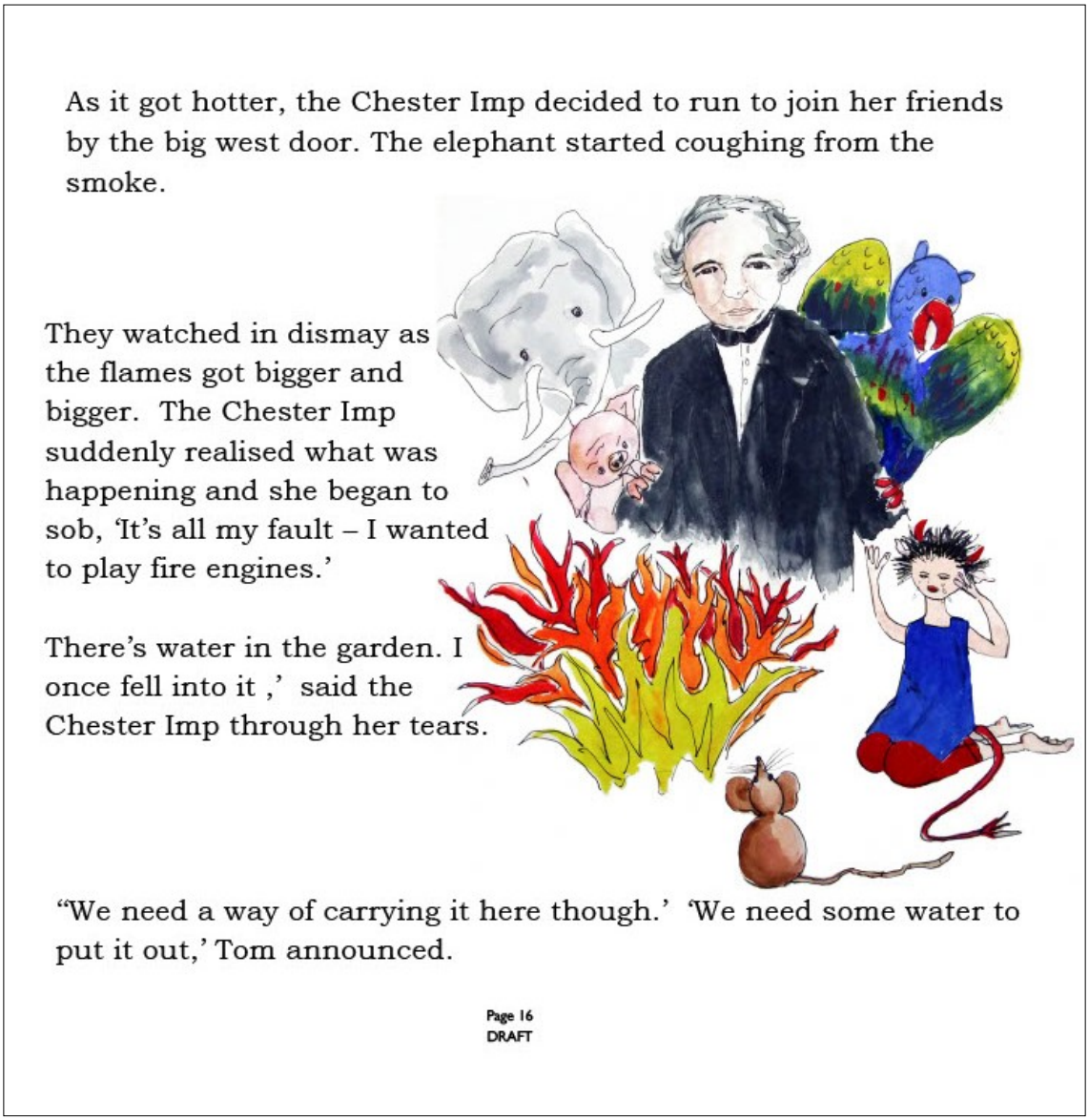
For the moment, please highlight the date in your diary and we will circulate further details in the near future.

NEWSLETTER

Awesome Anselm and the Railway Man

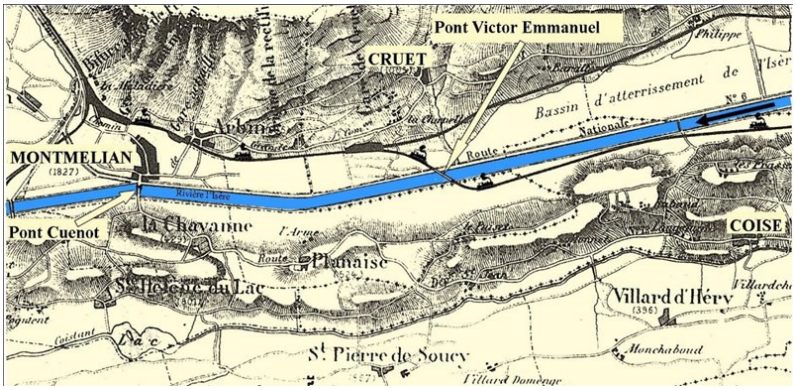
As part of meeting our charitable status we have placed much emphasis on educating people about Thomas Brassey and his achievements. While we can give talks and lectures to adults we are conscious that we also need to reach out to children. Therefore we have decided to sponsor the publication of the latest book written by Canon Jane Brooke of Chester Cathedral and illustrated by Patricia Faraday. This will be the fourth book in a series written specifically for young children. It tells of the adventure of 'Awesome Anselm', the little carved brown mouse who lives on the altar rail. In the story a fire breaks out in the cathedral and he and his friends (shown here in an early draft illustration) ask Thomas 'Tom' Brassey, who lives in the Erasmus Chapel, to help put out the fire. Magically Thomas's ingenuity with bridges, railways and trains saves the day.
Gripping stuff yes, and a really nice way to introduce Thomas Brassey to children. (*sample page shown below ..)*

The publication will be just under £1000 and we, as a Society, would like to offer a contribution to this cost. While we do have some funds available we would also like to ask members to become part of this project and make a donation. The books will be launched in the Cathedral Bookshop at the beginning of "*Making Tracks 2*" during the summer. If you would like to contribute please send a cheque made out to "The Thomas Brassey Society" with a covering note mentioning "Book Donation" to our Treasurer, David Bebb, (2 Kings Crescent East, Boughton, Chester, CH3 5TH) or direct to The Thomas Brassey Society bank account Sort Code: 01-07-02 Account No: 56481608 (*Please add your own surname + "book" as reference*).



NEWSLETTER

CRUET BRIDGE — part 2



Brassey's Le Pont Victor-Emmanuel, known as "Le Pont des Anglais", Cruet, South East France

In our last newsletter we introduced our support to the community of Cruet in the Département de la Savoie in South East France in their efforts to save Le Pont Victor Emmanuel from demolition. The bridge known also as "Le Pont des Anglais" or "The English Bridge" is part of the Victor-Emmanuel railway constructed by Thomas Brassey and commissioned in 1856.

The railway was constructed between Aix-les-Bain and Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne via Chambéry and the bridge is considered to be the oldest metal truss frame railway bridge in France. It has been inscribed and declared an historical monument since 1941. The same materials and techniques used by Brassey to construct the bridge will be used 35 years later by Gustave Eiffel for the construction of his Eiffel Tower.



The bridge crosses the River l'Isère near Cruet at an obtuse angle and is 168 m long, 4 kilometres upstream of Montmélian. Its construction took place from 1853 to 1856. Brassey's chief engineer for the railway and bridge was George Newman.

The foundation design was also novel using what was then known as the "Pneumatic Triger Process", now known as caisson construction. The Triger process consists of driving 2m diameter pipes into the riverbed with pressurized watertight boxes that prevent water from entering while the worker trapped inside digs. When stable ground is reached the pipes are filled with cyclopean concrete creating a solid base for the piers and abutments. The worker being removed before concreting.

The English bridge is a notable and rare piece of industrial heritage of the Department de la Savoie and is miraculously fully preserved.

Interest in its conservation goes far beyond Savoy and France. Not only is it of technical and heritage interest but its aerial "basket handle" restraint arches show an undeniable concern for aesthetics.

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NEWSLETTER

/Cruet Bridge story continued

Soon after being commissioned the railway contributed to the victory of the Piedmont and Sardinia kingdoms over the Austrian Empire at the Battle of Solferino by transporting the troops of Napoleon III, thereby securing the unification of Italy, a significant part of Europe's history.

In the 19th century bridges were designed and built to last for the long term benefit of the local community as well as a national transport and communication network. It would be a terrible and very sad loss to the community of Cruet, the region and the nation if it were not to be retained. We support the efforts of the local community and recommend that it be incorporated as part of an environmental, educational or health promoting benefit, and maximise its use as an asset, at the same time as restoring it for the benefit of generations to come to enjoy its unique status.

For more information on the bridge, in French, and the Cruet community efforts and our support go to http://cruet.np.free.fr .

For a drone's eye view of the area and the bridge go to:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNkWJtaTHdQ

Members intending to visit the region and see the bridge will be made very welcome by members of Cruet Nature et Patrimoines.

Richard Coackley CBE
Vice Chair

SPREADING THE WORD



To promote the Society and Thomas Brassey's achievements, committee members Dave Bebb and David Hooley took our stand and display to the ELMRO exhibition in Blackburn on 15 January 2022. They were made very welcome and gave out flyers and information throughout the day.

The picture shows David Bebb (far right), our happy Society Treasurer with Lord & Lady Coupe as well as the Mayor and Mayoress of Blackburn.

Members of the Committee will also be taking our stand to the Wirral History & Heritage Fair on Saturday, 12 March 2022, from 10 am to 4 pm, which is being held at Hulme Hall in Port Sunlight.

If any members would like to come along and see us there, please do so. There is plenty of parking in Port Sunlight and Hulme Hall is a short distance from Port Sunlight station.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

I have been asked to remind you that your membership renewal was due on the 1 January 2022. Please download the renewal form from our website and send it through to David Hooley so that you can continue to receive our newsletters. Completing the form in full, along with the Gift Aid declaration will help us continue in our charitable objectives of spreading the word about Thomas and his great achievements. Please click here for the Renewal Form:

/http:www.thomasbrasseysociety.ormembership.pdf

Thomas Brassey & his links to Heritage Railways No 8

NEWSLETTER

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.



And finally

I have recently acquired "*Birkenhead and its Surroundings*", written in 1903 by Henry Aspinall and there is a considerable amount about Thomas Brassey in the book as they were close friends. One quote for you:

"*My mother was very fond of Thomas Brassey and saw a great deal of him. One day, Mrs Harrison called and asked her if she thought young Mr Brassey would make a suitable husband for her daughter, Maria. My mother replied: "If your daughter, Maria, is fortunate enough to gain the affections of Mr Brassey, I have no hesitation in saying that she is a lucky girl; and you and her father ought to be very pleased if such a happy event takes place." My mother's words came true as Thomas Brassey proved a model husband."*

Wishing you all good health

Peter Bolt

Secretary

www.thomasbrasseysociety.org