

The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our May 2022 Newsletter

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



First and foremost, thank you to everyone who attended our Annual General Meeting in the Queen Hotel, Chester, on Saturday 23rd April. Thanks also to Dave Bebb for making all the arrangements with the hotel, to Trish Jones for her fascinating talk about Lord Brassey's yacht *Sunbeam,* and to Stewart Shuttleworth and John Whittingham for leading guided walks after lunch.

As this was our first such occasion since becoming a registered charity last year, the whole committee was obliged to step down. Thankfully, all eight of us were eligible and willing to be re-elected, and thus it was! The Minutes will be posted on our website and a summary is given in Peter's report below. A subsequent committee meeting, held on 5th May, saw each of us agreeing to be re-appointed to the roles we held previously. However, there remain up to four vacancies on the committee and we would be delighted to hear from anyone who might wish to be co-opted to help with the statue project, fund-raising in general, or in some other capacity.

With the AGM behind us, we will now focus on our priorities for 2022. The first of these is to make significant headway with the commissioning of a statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester railway station. Peter Cocker will elaborate in his report below, but now is the time to circulate our 'Case Statement and Funding Prospectus' for your consideration. It is my fervent hope that we will have chosen a sculptor by the end of this year and have sufficient funds to commission the work.

In the meantime, we hope you will help on our stall at *Making Tracks 2* in Chester Cathedral this summer. Again, further details are given below.

In rounding off these Notes, I would like to thank you for your continuing support for the society, and hope that the next 12 months will give us opportunities for social events and visits to some of Thomas Brassey's magnificent works.

With best wishes,
STEPHEN LANGTREE MBE

Our first TTBS Society AGM

Before the Apologies were read out our Secretary Peter Bolt advised the meeting of the death in early April of the Hon. Thomas Brassey of Preston Capes. Our condolences go to all the family.



Our Chairman Stephen Langtree then opened the meeting and went through the achievements of the last 14 months. First was the erection of an interpretation panel at Chester Station. We also provided help to a Heritage group in SE France who are trying to save the Cruet Bridge, built by Brassey in 1859. This important bridge has historical significance and following our intervention, the authorities are reviewing their decision to demolish it. We also gave support to our Patron, Pete Waterman, during 'Making Tracks' last year and hope to do the same this year.

Probably, the highlight of the year was achieving Charity Status which is a 'must requirement' when going after significant sums of money. We have made a big step forward in engaging with the Council Planning department and also developed a good relationship with the Public Statues and Sculpture Association (PSSA). All in all, a good year - taking a step by step approach to achieve one of our key objectives of erecting a statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester Station. For the full AGM report, follow the link to our website:
http://www.thomasbrasseysociety.org/AGM%202022.pdf
For pictures see: http://www.thomasbrasseysociety.org/AGM%202022%20photos.pdf

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At our first committee meeting, after the AGM, the following Trustees/Committee members were elected:

Stephen Langtree MBE	Chairman
Richard Coackley CBE	Vice Chairman
David Bebb	Treasurer
Peter Bolt	Secretary
David Hooley	Membership Sec
Peter Cocker	Minutes Secretary
Jean Fortune	Researcher
John Whittingham	



The Adventures of Sunbeam



Our guest speaker and society member Trish Jones gave a fascinating talk about Lord Brassey and his adventures as he sailed around the world in 1876-7 with his wife Annie, 4 children and a crew of 37. Much has been said about Thomas Brassey the Railway Builder but it was quite an eye opener to learn about his eldest son, also Thomas, who went on to become Earl Brassey. Thomas jnr credits the start of his love of the sea to seeing as a boy, Nelson's '*Victory*' and other old ships of the period moored at the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour whilst he was staying at Gosport with his father, who was at the time constructing the South Western Railway, so mid to late 1840's.



The '*Sunbeam*' was built by Bowdler & Chaffer of Seacombe. A beautiful vessel 159 ft long, of some 576 tons and carrying 9200 sq yard of sail. After leaving Chatham for Rio de Janeiro via Madeira, she sailed for Chile, Tahiti, Hawaii, Japan, Malaysia and Suez, then Malta, Gibraltar and Portugal. When returning to Hastings some 11 months later '*Sunbeam*' had covered 35,375 miles.



There are several books about the '*Sunbeam's*' voyages by Thomas jnr's wife, Annie, besides the famous '*Voyage in the Sunbeam'*, as well as '*Sunbeam RYS'* and other smaller books about the yacht and sailing by Thomas jnr. Thomas jnr was responsible for increasing the size and recruitment for the RNVR, in which he held a commission. He also started the much respected Brassey's Naval Annual, the editorship of which was continued by his son (yet another Thomas). As an MP, Thomas jnr did a great deal of work on all aspects of the rights of the working man, influenced by his father's favourable treatment of his workforce. He also served on the commission on unseaworthy ships with Samuel Plimsoll.

'*The Last Voyage'* describes a voyage to India and Australia in 1887. When the Brassey's reached Australia they spent a lot of time travelling around the interior, often by train and on lines that were still being constructed. On several occasions they met men they knew working on the new lines, who had previously worked for Thomas Snr.

I fully recommend reading the book written by Annie Brassey called '*A Voyage in the Sunbeam*' published by Trotamundas press.

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Statue Update

A long-held wish of many members of the Thomas Brassey Society has been to erect a statue of the great man outside Chester railway station – an appropriate location in his home city for a man whose company built the railway station and several of the railway lines leading to and from it.

The erection of a statue would be a suitable means of achieving our primary charity objective of educating the public about the life and works of the world's foremost railway builder of the nineteenth century.

Advice from the Public Statues and Sculpture Association (PSSA) has been that the first step must be to gain agreement for an exact location for the statue. This would allow potential sculptors to understand the context for the statue and come up with their own ideas for its form, size and design. Some members have favoured a traditional standing figure whilst others have expressed a preference for something more 'modern', such as a figure seated on a pile of railway sleepers. The objective would be to have us choose the favourite from several alternative forms and designs, proposed by at least two sculptors.



Finding a suitable site has not been easy since the station forecourt is criss-crossed by buried services but, after discussions with the Council's highways team, we settled for a site on the public footway nib just outside the station entrance and close to the site of the information panel that we erected in 2020, involving the relocation of the litter bins and other street furniture.

Our intention had been to get agreement to the site from the Council planners by submitting an outline planning application, but this was knocked back because we were asked to provide more information about the form, size and material of the sculpture than we are able to at this early stage. Instead, the planners have agreed the proposed site 'in principle' through the mechanism of a Pre-Application Advice Service Form – which we have submitted – subject to them being involved in the decision-making process and agreeing the final design.
Eventually we will need to submit a full planning application, with accompanying heritage impact statement, but before that we have a lot of work to do!

The first task is to set up a Statue Design Panel to oversee the process of appointing sculptors, choosing a 'winning' design and having a statue made. It is proposed that the Panel will consist of several trustees of the society, a member of the Brassey family, and a representative of the Tyrer Charitable Trust, advised by someone from the PSSA.

We have kept the local councillors informed of what we are trying to achieve at the railway station and one of them, Councillor Bob Rudd, has agreed to sit on the Statue Design Panel in a personal capacity. The parallel task is to start fund raising in earnest, helped by our ability to attract gift aid where appropriate. The overall target is in the region of £80,000, but the Tyrer Trust has very generously offered to match anything we attract through all our other donations. A Case Statement and Funding Prospectus has been produced and is available on the Thomas Brassey Society website.

Peter Cocker

Making Tracks 2—Chester Cathedral



'Making Tracks 2' under construction

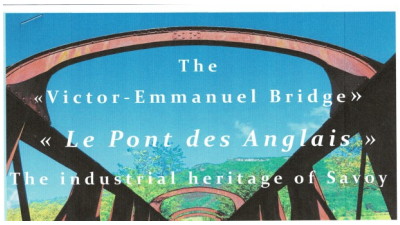
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/Making Tracks 2 continued

Following the success of the 2021 "Making Tracks" installation, 2022 will see an altogether new layout steaming into Chester Cathedral this Summer, created by our patron, Pete Waterman OBE, and his team. "**Making Tracks 2**" is opening to the public 23 July till 11 September. As per last year, we have been invited to have a stand throughout the duration. Right now the model is still under construction but watch this space!

Many of you volunteered to help "man" the stand last summer and we are putting together a list to do the same this year. So we are asking you to express your interest in volunteering on a rota basis again. It really is a great day out, working with a committee member, talking to the public about Brassey and signing up new members. You will also get a chance to have a look round at the other attractions and last year we signed up over 40 new members. To express interest please email Jean Fortune jean.fortune@btinternet.com with your contact home telephone number and she will get in touch, nearer the time, to arrange a convenient date.

The Victor – Emmanuel Bridge (Cruet) SE France.



Further to the articles you may have seen in the last two Newsletters about the Victor – Emmanuel Bridge we are pleased to learn that that a booklet has been written about the bridge and its history / construction by our friends in Cruet and they have undertaken a translation in English. The society was asked to review and correct the contents both technical and the English. This has been done and I show a link to the 14 page booklet which I hope you will find interesting.

http://www.thomasbrasseysociety.org/Cruet%20Bridge%20booklet.pdf

Possible TTBS visit to Cruet, 2023

Your committee has been discussing the possibility of organising a Society visit to Cruet, meeting up with members of the Cruet Nature et Patrimoines society who were our initial contacts and asked us to assist in their campaign to preserve the Brassey "English Bridge".

If you would be interested, in principle, in taking part in such a visit, could you please let me know (by email *petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com*) so that we can gauge interest for such a venture. We would also try and include visits to other places of interest. Cruet's location is on the east side of France on the French/Swiss border, approximately 25 km from Annecy which is a delightful town and worthy of a visit in its own right.

Chester History and Heritage Fair

St Mary's Creative Space, Castle Street

Open from 10.30 am until 4.00 pm on Sunday, 26 June

Find out all about local history groups, civic societies and other heritage-related bodies in the area at this "free to enter 'showcase' event". Representatives of more than 20 organisations will be on hand to provide information and whet your appetite for more! The TTBS Society will be present with our stand so come along and meet us during the day.

Tea, coffee and cakes will also be available so why not combine this with a visit to Chester Castle which will be open to the public on the same day.

Wishing you all good health

Peter Bolt

Secretary

www.thomasbrasseysociety.org