

The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

Welcome to our May 2023 Newsletter

NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



Three significant events have taken place since I wrote my notes for our last Newsletter. I will mention them in chronological order and leave it to you to decide how they rank in their respective importance.

On 25th March we took our TBS stall to the **Wirral History and Heritage Fair** held in Hulme Hall at Port Sunlight.This is a well established annual event with impressive support from local history groups and the general public alike. This year there were nearly 100 stalls and approximately 1400 visitors. Thomas Brassey is generally better known here because his Canada Works was based in Birkenhead. Nevertheless there were still plenty of visitors to our stall who either wanted to know more or who hadn't already heard of him.

On 3rd April a full meeting took place between the six members of our **Statue Design Panel**. This consists of three trustees (Peter Bolt, Dave Bebb and myself) together with our principal sponsor, Clive Pointon, a representative of the Brassey family and a local ward Councillor. The panel reviewed nine expressions of interest from sculptors near and far. The task was not an easy one because a wide range of issues, including the cost estimates, had to be taken into account. Eventually two sculptors were chosen for the shortlist. They were Ben Twiston Davies and Andrew Edwards. Both have been invited to discuss their ideas with the panel in the next few weeks. Exciting times!

On 15th April we held our second **Annual General Meeting** at the Queen Hotel in Chester. The formal business went smoothly and the necessary elections resulted in the Committee of nine continuing as before. An appeal was made for an additional committee member to help with publicity and promotion. No - one came forward on the day (unsurprisingly) but I reiterate the appeal and would be very interested to hear from any member who might like to volunteer. A full account of the AGM has now been posted on the Society's website for your information.

After the formal business we were joined by several guests who came to hear a talk by Mac Steels entitled '*How I first met Thomas Brassey*'. Mac was employed by John Laing and worked on the construction of the M6 motorway around Tebay over 50 years ago. Building a road in this mountainous terrain parallel to Brassey's Lancaster & Carlisle Railway left Mac full of admiration for the ingenuity, skill and fortitude of his Victorian predecessor. See the report on his talk by Richard Coackley.

With kind regards to all,

Kind regards
Stephen Langtree MBE

VISIT TO CRUET, FRANCE POSTPONED UNTIL SPRING

Due to all the work currently going on with the Statue, Heritage Fairs and the 175th Anniversary of Chester Station not least "Making Tracks 3" in Chester Cathedral in August, the Committee has decided to postpone the trip to France — to visit the Brassey bridge (Pont des Anglais) at Cruet — until Spring 2024. Apologies to members for any inconvenience this has caused.

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Details of how you can make a donation are on our website www.thomasbrasseysociety.org under Donations. All donations, large or small, will be gratefully received and all will be personally acknowledged.

"How I first met Thomas Brassey"

Society member, Mac Steels, gave a fascinating illustrated talk to a full post-AGM audience entitled "*How I First Met Thomas Brassey*". This gave a unique insight into the challenges that Thomas Brassey faced in constructing the "up and over" section of the West Coast Mine Line railway, as it is now known, through the Lune Gorge and over Shap to Scotland.

Civil Engineer Mac, working for contractor John Laing and Sons, explained how he 'philosophically' first met Thomas as he was facing similar terrain and geological conditions when constructing the section of the M6 motorway through the same area.

Thomas Brassey had picked the "*best route and consequently the M6 crosses the railway back and forth many times".*



Construction of the railway "*took the physical labour of 10,000 men using horses, picks, shovels and barrows… finishing in a little over two years*". Construction of the M6 took "*three and a bit years, albeit somewhat wider*" to do the same.

Mac included an amazing rear view mirror look at our social history during both periods with his entertaining dry sense of humour, enriched with his unique cultural and political observations. Mac's illustrated talk will be placed in the Society's virtual library available for all to enjoy.

Richard Coackley CBE, Vice Chairman

STATUE UPDATE

Following an instruction from our Main TTBS committee, a Statue Design Panel was formed comprising:

Peter Bolt, Secretary TTBS
David Bebb, Treasurer TTBS
Steve Langtree, Chairman TTBS
Clive Pointon, Aaron and Partners Ltd (Main Sponsor)
Bob Rudd, Ward Councillor (CW&C)
Rowena Feildon, (representing the Brassey Family)

In accordance with the Design Brief the selection process was based on "open competition" and initially (Stage 1) the Brief was issued to a list of sculptors including members of the Public Statues and Sculpture Association (PSSA) and the Royal Society of Sculptors (RSS) through Joanna Barnes Co-Chair PSSA.

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We received a number of positive replies and in support of the bid process sent out copies of the Case Statement as well as a set of portrait photographs and The Obituary to Thomas Brassey from the ICE (Institution of Civil Engineers). The website homepage was also up-graded to bring attention to the key Brassey facts. The majority of applicants visited Chester Station and met up with a Trustee of the TBS.

After a lot of phone calls from a number of sculptors we received nine positive applications by the submission date of 31 March 2023. These were quite varied and were presented to the Design Panel at a meeting held in the Board Room of Aaron and Partners on the 3rd April. Rowena travelled by train from Oxford to be at the meeting.

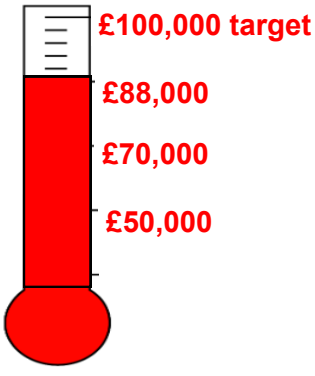
Time constraints meant that only approximately 20 minutes could be given in reviewing each applicant's submission. A list was initially drawn up showing 1 Yes, 3 Maybe's and 5 No's. Cost was also an important factor and these varied considerably. To go through to Stage Two each applicant would be required to produce a detailed proposal and a maquette which we would fund at £3,000 each. Following further consideration of the "Maybe's" the panel agreed to select two sculptors, namely Ben Twiston-Davies and Andrew Edwards.

The Design Panel will be meeting both artists, one on 23rd May 2023 and the second on the 20th June 2023.

As part of the detailed design process we will have an in-depth talk with each of the sculptors on what we will be looking for - including the plinth design and wording as this is an impor-tant aspect of the project

STATUE FUND

Two Months have gone by and still the donations keep rolling in both from talks, donations from the Brassey family and members. In the February Newsletter, I advised you that the to-tal to date was £78,000. To-day, you will see on the Funding graph that this has increased to £88,000, We need to hit at least £100,000 to make sure we have enough for Insurance and Third Party Liability plus a cleaning contractor.



AUGUST: Making Tracks 3 at Chester Cathedral & a big Anniversary for Chester Station

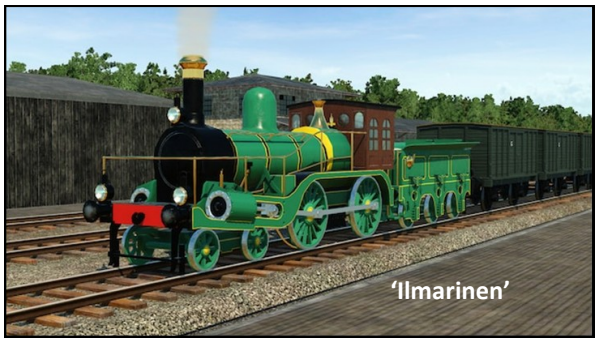
Our TTBS stand will be there and we will be looking to arrange a social event at the end of it in early September again. We will be asking for volunteers to help staff the stand nearer the time.

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

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FINNISH RAILWAYS

Finland is proud of its 161 year old but thoroughly up to date railway system, whose British beginnings in 1860 was the start of the 5727 mile 5 ft gauge rail network.


'Ilmarinen'

The first locomotive was the '*Ilmarinen*', the first of four locomotives built at the 'Canada Works' by Peto, Brassey and Betts.

Up until 1870 most loco's ran on wood but as forests were cleared they started to change over to coal burning. '*Ilmarinen*' made its historic first run on Finnish tracks – three kms of them from Helsinki to Pasila on August 8th 1861. By the end of the year a 110 km line had been laid from Helsinki to Hameenlinna. At that time, it took about 5 hours for the journey — now it takes a third of the time.

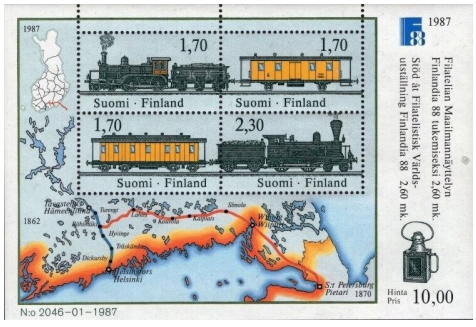


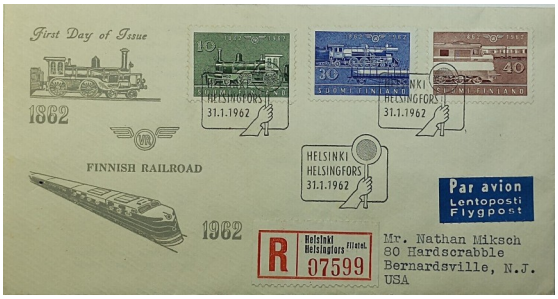
I contacted the Railway Philatelic Group of Finland because I was aware that stamps had been issued at some point, commemorating the railways. The set of stamps which I was interested in was issued in 1962 to mark the centenary of Finnish railways. The lowest value depicted '*Ilmarinen*'.

Below are pictures of a First Day Cover depicting the full set of 3 stamps, as well as the stamp that depicts the first locomotive on its own.

Peter Bolt
Secretary









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Starting July 26 - Finish September 2
Following the success of the 2021 and 2022 Making Tracks installation, 2023 will see an altogether more complex layout steaming into Chester Cathedral this Summer.

What Can Visitors Expect?

Making Tracks 3 will feature a brand-new layout that builds on the successes of the 2021 and 2022 events – modelling Milton Keynes Central station. The layout will be built around the same storage yard as the first two but will feature an entirely new scenic section to capture the West Coast Main Line station in modern-day times. It'll include detailed replicas of real-world buildings and locations like churches, schools and business parks as well as working signals and level crossings. Plus, it'll come complete with lights and sound to bring the scene to life!

Interactive Elements

The exhibition will also feature some interactive elements sure to keep everyone entertained including the chance to operate the trains using digital controls. There may even be some surprise additions! The goal is for visitors – both experienced modellers or not – to leave with a greater appreciation for how complex model railways are designed and constructed and perhaps to pick up the hobby themselves.

Educational Value

It's not just about fun though; Making Tracks 3 has educational value too! It can teach children about engineering principles such as electricity and magnetism through play while allowing parents and grandparents to learn more about this classic hobby and gain tips from modellers who share their passion for oo gauge building. TTBS will have a stand there and hope you can give some time to help with manning the stand. **Jean Fortune is collating names for a rota from Monday till Saturday. You will be on with a Trustee so you just enjoy yourself talking to the visitors about Thomas, the display and about the Statue. Get in touch with Jean on 01244 571155 Email:** jean.fortune@btinternet.com .

NOTE: there is no charge to attend Making Tracks 3, however there may be a summer entry fee for Chester Cathedral (TBC).

Make sure you don't miss out on all the fun at Making Tracks 3 this summer – open Mondays to Saturdays from 26th July to 2nd September.

Welcome to new members: Edward Challoner, Paul and Claire Bentley. Paul has kindly agreed to run a Facebook group for the Society and we look forward to working with him in the future.

With best wishes and looking forward to meeting you at some of the events this year.

Peter

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