Welcome to our November 2023 Newsletter



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



Artificial Intelligence (AI) software linked to large scale 3-D printers might soon revolutionise the world of art and sculpture. In the meantime, however, we are using all the 'natural intelligence' (NI) at our disposal to fulfil the long held ambition of a cast bronze statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester railway station.

To this end, I am delighted to announce that we have engaged Andrew Edwards to create a work of art befitting the life and achievements of our local hero.

The selection of the sculptor was not an easy process, but having shared ideas with Andy we are confident that his skill, intuition and considerable experience will deliver a statue we can all be very proud of.

On another subject, the Society was pleased to be asked by Cheshire West and Chester Council to assist with a project at Chester Town Hall. The plan is to convert an under used room in the town hall into a visitor facility celebrating some of Chester's famous citizens. One such is Thomas Brassey, so we will be collaborating with the Council to produce illustrated information panels which particularly highlight Chester station and all the railway lines he built in the surrounding area.

Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will find a report on our recent outing to the Llangollen Railway as well as an exciting proposal for a visit to France next May.

Finally, let us not forget that all organisations and societies such as ours rely heavily on the efforts of a small number of dedicated people. At present, two or three of our committee members are dealing with their own health issues so I would like to take this opportunity, on your behalf, to wish them the very best of luck and a full return to good health. We need each and every one of you!

With best wishes

Stephen Langtree MBE

As this is the last newsletter before Christmas, we would like to wish all our members a happy and healthy Festive season and look forward to meeting up in the New Year.

NEWSLETTER

PROPOSED VISIT TO CRUET, FRANCE
14 — 16 MAY, 2024

TTBS Vice Chairman, Richard Coackley and his wife Ella recently visited Cruet to scope out our proposed Society visit in 2024.

Following a very warm welcome to Cruet and Montmelian by our hosts in the Savoie region to discuss ideas for our **TTBS Spring Voyage** in 2024 we are delighted to announce our early plans. **Please let us know as soon as possible if you are interested in joining us**. There is no commitment at this stage, this article is to give you some detail and to save the date in your diaries, and for us to gain an understanding of potential numbers for planning purposes.



Our organized visit will be the full days of 14th, 15th and 16th May 2024, spending four nights at Hotel Cle des Champs, a three star Logis Hotel in Montmelian (see picture on the right).

Our initial itinerary, which will be finalized over the next few weeks, includes:

- Inspection, guided visit and technical talk on Thomas Brassey's "Pont des Anglais", the first wrought iron bridge in France
- Visit the Cave des Vins Fins de Cruet, and Maison Philippe Grisard and sample local Savoie wines
- Visit and guided tour of the picturesque historical town of Chambery including "La Rotonde" a huge circular building for the rotation of locomotives on a working turntable, incorporating an historical locomotive museum
- Visit and guided tour of Aix les Bains, on the shores of the beautiful Lac du Bourget, much enjoyed by Queen Victoria, showcasing Brassey's first phase of his Victor Emmanuel railway
- Visit and guided tour of Chamonix, the classic Alpine resort at the foot of Mont Blanc. Ride on the Aiguille du Midi cable car and then a rack train to the "Mer de Glace".
- An alternative option would be, instead of Aiguille du Midi, or if preferred, enjoy a day in the enchanting city of Annecy to see its eponymous lake, chateau and canals.
- Tour the world renowned Packard Bell Foundry in Annecy where the Sevrier "Bell Stradivarius" was cast, with bell casting demonstrations and vocal and carillon concerts.
- Join a cheese tasting workshop led by a sommelier and Master Cheesemaker of France at Abbaye de Tamie.


La Rotonde



Richard and Ella (rt) with representatives from the Cruet & Montmelian Community at Lac du Bourget, Aix.

The communities of Cruet and Montmelian are delighted that the Thomas Brassey Society will be joining them to support their cause in retaining this very first wrought iron bridge in France, the Victor Emmanuel bridge, known as the "Pont des Anglais" built by Thomas Brassey in 1856, and very much look forward to welcoming us all.

For potential travel arrangements and costs, please see the next page.

NEWSLETTER

POSSIBLE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Regarding travel to Cruet, Voyageurs would make their own arrangements to arrive by the evening of the 13th May, in time for a welcome event. A return or onward journey after the organized event, would be on the morning of the 17th May, although some of you may wish to extend your stay, either before or after the 17th if you wish. (*Your Secretary and his wife will be taking their motorhome.)*

Travel from UK is available flying from Luton to Lyon by EasyJet, with opportunities from other UK airports by other carriers. You can also fly into Geneva. Train transport can also be organised by Eurostar to Paris and then TGV to Chambery. You may wish to use personal transport of course.
.
Local transport arrangements from airports and stations to Montmelian will be organised when we know specific travel details for each Voyageur.

For the purposes of personal early budgeting, hotel and half board for four nights is estimated to be in the region of £500 per person and depending on numbers, coach transport and entry costs for the three days, depending on the final itinerary, would be in the region of £150 per person.

We hope that gives members sufficient information to enable you to think about joining us for this exciting visit. **Please let Peter Bolt know as soon as possible (email on the last page)**



Paccard Bell Foundry



The centre of Annecy

Lord Brassey's boat Sunbeam

Some of you will be interested in this short 10 page illustrated interview of Lord and Lady Brassey discussing the fit out of "Sunbeam" and Normanhurst Court. Both the boat and the house are nothing less than stunning.

This is "The other half" ! (Or maybe just the top 2%)



Reading on page 526 it looks as though the Brassey Presentation Shield may have at one time resided in the Pompeian Room at Normanhurst Court, as there is a picture of the room.

Peter

https://www.victorianvoices.net/ARTICLES/STRAND/1894B/S1894B-Brassey.pdf

SOCIETY VISIT TO THE LLANGOLLEN RAILWAY

On 19th October, 8 members of the TBS gathered at Llangollen Railway station for a trip along the heritage line, constructed by Thomas Brassey for opening in 1865.

The line runs from Llangollen, up the Dee valley, to a new terminus at Corwen, which only opened to traffic in June 2023. The route length is approx 10 miles. Although the weather forecast was a bit 'iffy', the journey out to Corwen was in glorious blue skies and sunshine!

The new station at Corwen has involved a great deal of civil engineering, part of the embankment needed to be rebuilt, (it had been cut through by the access road to the sewage works!), some substantial surface water drainage works were needed under the embankment, and the new station has had to be built as an island platform with a substantial roof against the wild Welsh winds!


Our merry band at Corwen

Whilst at Corwen, some members wandered up to investigate the 'fleshpots' of Corwen, (I didn't, so can't comment on the 'fleshiness' or otherwise of the town!) whilst others mooched and nosed around the station area.

We caught the returning train back as far as Berwyn, where we alighted to enjoy lunch at the Chain Bridge Hotel, (*reached by a chain link suspension bridge across the River Dee. The bridge itself is an engineering feat, reputedly the oldest chain link suspension bridge in the world, opened by local entrepreneur, Exuperius Pickering, in 1817, to transport his goods up the valley, whilst avoiding the tolls at Llangollen*!)



After lunch, we caught the train for the short trip back to Llangollen, where we all went our separate ways, (it was also raining by then!)

Motive power was a driving coach from a Class 127 dmu, married up with a driving coach from a Class 108 dmu, both dating from 1959/60, wonderfully restored and maintained by Llangollen Railcars.



A quick plea for our heritage lines

The Llangollen Railway is now operated by the Llangollen Railway Trust, as the PLC went into liquidation, so anything that wasn't owned by others was sold off. Fortunately, the track bed is either leased from the local council, or owned by the Trust, or that could have been at risk. The motive power is 1st generation DMU, 'railcars', as there is only one steam locomotive left.

It's ironic that 'railcars' helped to preserve some branch lines, now they're being used to preserve the heritage lines!

So, please, for all our heritage lines, go and be a 'bum on a seat', pay for a trip on a 'manky' day in winter, in a 'railcar', buy some postcards, support those running the lines, so the line can survive!

NEWSLETTER

WIRRAL WATERS — WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Some of you may think that Brassey and recognition of his achievements on the Wirral has been forgotten?

You will be pleased to hear that this is not so, as the Peel and Wirral Waters scheme is very much alive and kicking.

I was invited to a meeting along with other heritage representatives, at the Wirral Waters offices on Tower Road, Birkenhead only this week to discuss heritage opportunities at their site on the 'Left Bank' of the Mersey.

A number of tourist attraction sites have been identified in the area and they were impressed with what the Making Tracks 1 , 2 and 3 produced in Chester. (*We have been told that 63,000 visitors came to see 'Making Tracks 3' this year - despite only being in the Cathedral for 5 weeks).*

Ian Parkinson, Wirral Waters Director, who came to the Brassey Blue Plaque unveiling in Beaufort Road three years ago is convinced that the old red brick buildings adjacent to the Blue Plaque (and the Canada Works site) would be ideal for a future Heritage Hub and that is why they are still standing. There would also be a stopping point for a light transport network. The planned for Brassey mural on the wall was temporarily de-railed by Covid but is back on the agenda and they are hoping to start initial designs with West Wirral college in January.


Housing with views across the dock

The whole area has now been landscaped ready for a 'run around' transport link — either a bus or a future street car (VLR – Very light Rail). It would also incorporate a cafe, food and drinks outlet and facilities. They would like the development of this part of the project to concentrate on '**Birkenhead and its Making Past'**, i.e. Camel Lairds, Brassey, the pottery enterprises and a number of other heritage products associated with Birkenhead. The transport link would embrace Birkenhead Park which is well down the route to obtaining World Heritage status which would boost tourism enormously.

The sale of the colourful housing is obviously needed to fund further landscaping and heritage offers and it seems that many of them are already sold with "waterfront views" proving popular with buyers.



Hopefully we will hear more in the New Year but it would suit us to get more involved after the installation of the statue.



With best wishes

Peter

Peter Bolt
Secretary
The Thomas Brassey Society
petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com
www.thomas brasseysociety.org