Welcome to our September 2023 Newsletter



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



By the time you read this, *Making Tracks 3* will be over and Pete Waterman's model railway exhibition will be a happy memory for the thousands of visitors to Chester Cathedral. As in previous years, our stall, alongside the massive model railway, has given us a wonderful opportunity to engage with the public and spread the word about Thomas Brassey.

Before going any further I would like to thank all my Committee colleagues and other members of the Society for ensuring that we had a presence each and every day for nearly six weeks. It was a great team effort by all concerned, especially by those such as John Roberts, who travelled a long way to help us out. Many thanks also to Jean Fortune for preparing the rota so efficiently.

Part of our display comprised the three maquettes for our proposed statue outside Chester railway station. Two of the three were made by Andrew Edwards; the third, and largest one, was by Ben Twiston Davies. Visitors to our stall showed great interest and enthusiasm for our project. Their stated preferences will be taken into account when the statue design panel makes a decision imminently.

Another part of our display was the impressive model, skilfully made by committee member Ian Walker, of Brassey's Victor Emmanuel Bridge at Cruet in SE France. Yet another part was the beautiful scale model of Chester station which, we imagine, took longer to make than it took Brassey's men to build the station in 1848!

That links nicely with my next note about the 175th anniversary of Chester station. On Tuesday 1st August we participated in an event sponsored by Transport for Wales which included a short ceremony outside the station itself. In the evening the Society organised a series of talks in the Queen Hotel which was well attended by members and guests. A summary of the day's events can be found here in the Newsletter, on page 4.

And finally, looking ahead to the autumn, we are hoping to organise another heritage railway trip in October and an event, including a lunch, in November. Meanwhile, thank you for your support and please read on……

With best wishes

Stephen Langtree MBE

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to Jon Leigh, Andrew McDonald, Tony Cottrell, Josiah Spence, Paul Edmunds, Simon Kettle, Gerhard Miller, Eric Shaw, Jacqueline Gorman, Arthur Barton, Colin Polymore, Peter Rolfe, Gordon Collison, Colin Armstrong-Liles, Alex Villiers, Mona Wagner.

We look forward to meeting you on one of our TB Excursions and Events in the near future.

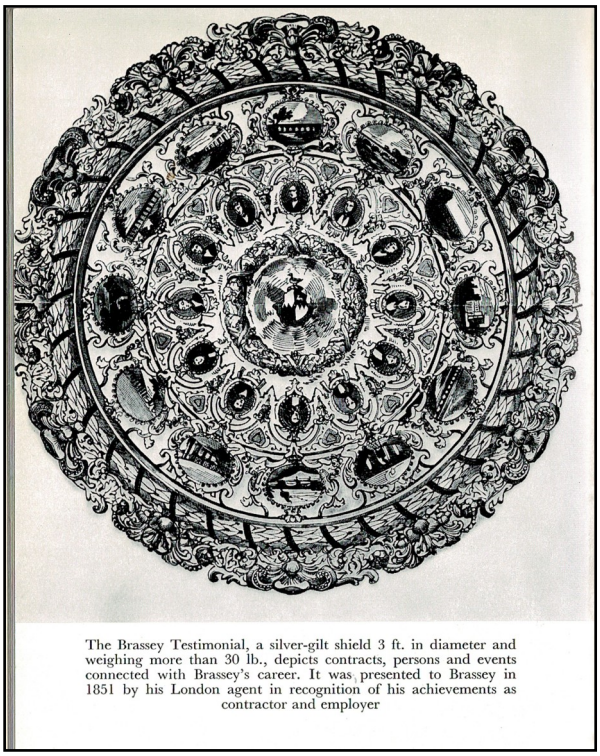
NEWSLETTER

THE BRASSEY TESTIMONIAL SHIELD

(Continued from the July 2023 Newsletter)

Theft of the Shield from the Institution of Civil Engineers

(Courtesy of Carol Morgan, Institution of Civil Engineers)



The Brassey Testimonial, a silver-gilt shield 3 ft. in diameter and weighing more than 30 lb., depicts contracts, persons and events connected with Brassey's career. It was presented to Brassey in 1851 by his London agent in recognition of his achievements as contractor and employer

In 1951 the Council accepted an offer from Lord Brassey to place on loan in the Institution building during his lifetime a presentation shield given to Thomas Brassey on the completion of the construction of the Great Northern Railway. An oak octagonal showcase was specially made for the shield and it was exhibited in the Library.

The cleaning staff arrived one morning to find the Library floor littered with plate glass. The top of the showcase had been smashed and the shield stolen. Although the shield was insured it was embarrassing to have to inform Lord Brassey that the Institution had been relieved of its charge. The shield was very beautiful and it was embellished with gold enamelling but it was doubtful whether the thieves could have realised more than a pound or two for their swag, as it was of little intrinsic value.

Where is it now? - As far as we know the shield has never been recovered and whether it still exists or not is unknown.

Acknowledgments

Our thanks to Society member Roger Jones for undertaking, from a personal interest, extensive research into the story of the shield.

References

1. The Illustrated London News, April 19, 1851 - The Brassey Testimonial.

2. The Institution of Civil Engineers document entitled "Anecdotage" compiled from the memories and diaries of FV Doody, a member of staff at the Institution of Civil Engineers from 1921 to 1961 - the Theft of the Shield.

Thomas Brassey and the Great Eastern Cable Laying Ship

Playing Cyrus Harding in Jules Verne's book "Mysterious Island" are the real life business partners Thomas Brassey of Birkenhead and the American Cable Entrepreneur, Cyrus West Field. To read more follow the link .....

https://julesverneandtheheroesofbirkenhead.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/21.-Playing-Cyrus-Harding-in-Mysterious-Island-are-Cyrus-Field-and-Birkenheads-Thomas-Brassey..pdf

NEWSLETTER

THOMAS BRASSEY IN RECENT FICTION

Ian Walker writes: there's a series of fictional crime stories entitled '*The Railway Detective'*, set in the Victorian era. They're not a bad read, quite light, but with a reasonable bit of railway stuff thrown in.

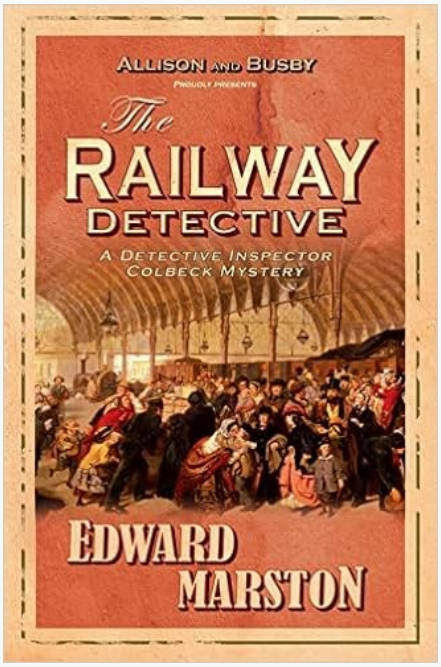
The author is Edward Marston, published by Allison and Busby.

In the book entitled, '*The Railway Viaduct'*, one of Thomas Brassey's trusted agents is thrown to his death from the Sankey Viaduct and, in the course of his investigation, the hero, the Railway Detective, visits Thomas Brassey in France, whilst he is building the Mantes-Caen railway.

The copy I have is paperback, ISBN 0749081147. Available from Amazon.

Extract from the book:

London 1851. With the opening of the Great Exhibition at hand, interest is mounting in the engineering triumphs of the railways, but not everyone feels like celebrating. In an audacious attack, the London to Birmingham mail train is robbed and derailed, causing many casualties. Planned with military precision, this crime proves a challenge to Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck who fights to untangle a web of murder, blackmail and destruction. As Colbeck closes in on the criminal masterminds, events take an unexpected turn when the beautiful Madeleine, daughter of the injured train driver, becomes a pawn in the criminals' game. With time running out, good and evil, new and old, battle against each other. But will the long arm of the law have speed on its side? The Railway Detective is an action-packed dip into murky 1850s London. Full of historical detail, unexpected twists and memorable characters, this is a mystery that will surprise you at every turn. Price £7.53



MAKING TRACKS 3



August saw Trustees & Society members return to Chester Cathedral to what has been called the best "Making Tracks" yet, themed on the West Coast main line but featuring Milton Keynes Station this time. Pete Waterman was there (*seen with your Secretary, Peter Bolt below*) in person along with his team of "Railway Nuts" keeping everything on the move.



The Society stand was very prominent on a corner site, with three tables which allowed us to talk to more people as they read our display boards, marvelled at the model of Chester Station and gave us their opinion on the three statue maquettes.

With generous donations and a number of new members signed up, it was a very worthwhile exercise for us.



175 years

Chester Station

A GRAND DAY OF CELEBRATIONS

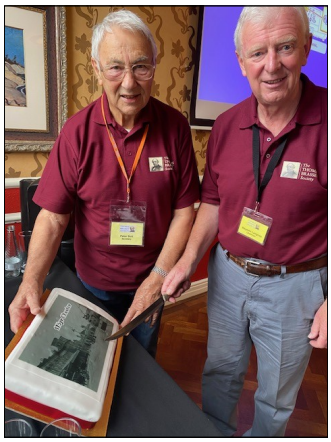
On 1 August, 2023 The Thomas Brassey Society celebrated the 175 anniversary of the opening of Chester Station. This was a 'full on' day with lots of things happening in and around the Station and the Queen Hotel. The day began with The TBS Secretary, Peter Bolt, being interviewed on Radio Merseyside on the Morning Show about Brassey and the celebrations.



Later in the morning this broadcast was followed by a re-enactment of cutting the ribbon by TTBS Trustee John Whittingham, dressed as Thomas Brassey, accompanied by the Town Crier with others in Victorian dress making a grand spectacle.



Meanwhile, inside the Queen Hotel, Transport for Wales hosted a morning of talks by the Mid and North Cheshire Community Rail Partnership, including a great presentation by Pete Waterman, Patron of the Thomas Brassey Society, which was well received by the large audience.



Following a brief interlude, more presentations followed in the early evening. There was a ceremonial cutting of a cake, kindly provided by Transport for Wales, after which John Whittingham gave a short history of the Chester Station. Then the audience was given a fascinating look into the history of the Queen Hotel by Elizabeth Allen, followed by an insight into the huge resource of railway papers held by Cheshire Archives. The evening finished with our own Vice Chairman, Richard Coackley, talking about the history of Thomas Brassey's life and work and his relationship with other engineers of the time.



All in all, an excellent day!

(The Society would like to thank Transport for Wales for their overall organisation and support of the event)

NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY POLO SHIRTS

For those of you who attended the 'Making Tracks 3' in Chester you may have noticed that the Trustees were wearing smart polo shirts with the Society logo.

A number of people have asked about purchasing them and if so how much would they cost.

The Trustees discussed this at their last meeting and decided to make them available to members with various options regarding cost, delivery etc.

If a member would like to purchase one or more please let me know and I can let you know further details.



The Chairman and Secretary wearing their smart Polo shirts at the Chester Station 175 Celebrations.

PROPOSED VISIT TO CRUET

We talked last year about a visit to Cruet in South East France but due to the pressure of work with Making Tracks 3 and sculptor selection we decided to postpone it.

We have not forgotten this trip and are now looking at early May 2024. We have maintained contact with our friends in Cruet and our Vice Chairman, Richard Coackley, is on his way out there to explore the area and stay at the same hotel which has been recommended to us. We are sure this will be a fabulous trip and a great opportunity to see some of the beautiful scenery and places in the area as well as the Pont des Anglais bridge, built by our hero. Cruet is only 30 km from the world famous town of Annecy and we can thoroughly recommend a boat trip with lunch on the stunning lake.

Please keep space in your diary and we will put together a more detailed itinerary as soon as Richard has reported back on his preliminary visit.

A SOCIETY "GRAND DAY OUT" PROPOSAL

I'm proposing that we have a Thomas Brassey Society day out at the Llangollen Railway, which was a TB build, on Thursday 19th October. I know it's short notice but as there won't be a breakfast train involved, it will be arranged on a '*pay your own ticket*', in advance, or on the day, basis, with just numbers to me to give prior notice to the Llangollen Railway.

The day will basically be:

Meet at Llangollen Station for the 10.30 am train to Corwen, arriving 11.10 am. The next return train from Corwen is 11.50 am, arriving Llangollen at 12.28 pm. Alternatively, there is a later train from Corwen at 14.20pm, or, with a Day Rover ticket, you can get on, or off, depending on train....but, don't forget not to get left behind!
The current costs for a return ticket are £18 advance, £21 on the day.
I'll investigate the possibilities of lunch at a local venue!
If you're interested, please contact me, via email, by 30th September please, then I can prepare the railway for our visit. Many thanks

Ian Walker ian.walker131@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER



.Saturday 16th December 2023 – Sunday 7th January 2024

Daily Opening Times 10:30 – 18:00

Remember a magical childhood Christmas when
you woke to find Santa had left a toy train set?

This festive season revisit those happy memories of yesteryear,
at the Pete Waterman's 'Making Tracks' installation.
Following its recent success at Chester Cathedral, Pete Waterman
and the Railnuts team will be bringing their layout to Cheshire Outdoors at
Blakemere Village near Northwich.

The 64ft long model railway installation includes interactive elements for children
and adults with a few hidden surprises! It's fun, educational and awe-inspiring.

Sponsored by Hornby amongst others* Supported by Pete Waterman OBE
and the Railnuts modelling group.
*Hornby Magazine, Chester Model Centre, Peco, Tom Connell limited edition prints,
Accurascale, UK Departure Boards, MegaPoints Controllers,
Hanson Plywood, Railcam, PJM Models and Model Signs.

And finally .....

I hope you all find the newsletter interesting and we look forward to meeting you on one of our Thomas Brassey themed outings, perhaps in October on the Llangollen Railway? We also hope to organize a lunch in November and I will update you all when we have any details.

Our next newsletter will be in November and if you have any news or titbits which could be included, please let me know.

With very good wishes to all of you
Peter Bolt
Secretary
(email: petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com)
The Thomas Brassey Society
www.thomasbrasseysociety.org