Welcome to our April 2024 Newsletter



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



I would like to start these Notes with a vote of thanks to our friend and colleague, Dave Bebb. Dave is a founder member of the Society and has been our diligent Treasurer from the outset.

Unfortunately, Dave has had to relinquish this role due to ill health but I'm sure we all send him our very best wishes. Dave has also played a big role in preparing the design statement for the Thomas Brassey statue and saw that through to the selection process for a sculptor. His contribution is invaluable, thoroughly professional and good-humoured.

Dave's role as Treasurer has now been taken on by Keith Stoops. Keith and John Violet were recently co-opted to the TBS Committee and have been made most welcome as new members of our team. However, Dave remains as a consultee to the Committee.

Meanwhile, work on the Thomas Brassey statue has begun in earnest. Our sculptor, Andrew Edwards, is making great progress and as reported later in this newsletter, four of us have visited the workshop in Liverpool where the statue is quite literally taking shape; it's all very exciting!

Peter Cocker is also working extremely hard liaising with Cheshire West and Chester Council and preparing the necessary documents for full planning permission.

My last note this time is to congratulate Richard Coackley for organising our trip to France in May.
We now have a party of 22 members and guests for what promises to be a very special experience.

No doubt it will be an opportunity to brush up my schoolboy French but, more likely, those of us who did Inter Rail as students will remember a few pertinent phrases such as Le vieux chemin de fer.....

A bientot.

with best wishes

Stephen Langtree MBE

TALKS ON THOMAS BRASSEY

Members can still join a number of talks on Thomas Brassey which are taking place throughout this year and into 2025.

9th April 2024 6.45 Saltney History Group, Saltney Methodist Church – Gillian Bolt
11th April 2024 10.45 am Oxton & Prenton U3A – David Casement.
15th April 2024 12 noon, Heswall Probus. – Gillian Bolt
16th April 2024 Ellesmere Port Family History Society — Gillian Bolt
11th May 2025 Micheldever Station Wiltshire – David Jones
Celebrating the 200th anniversary of the forming of the railways.

Contact Peter Bolt for further details on locations and timings.

SUBSCRIPTIONS WERE DUE IN JANUARY! To pay your subs (only £10 ..) please go to our website or pay us by BACS: The Thomas Brassey Society by BACS/ Standing Order - Sort Code : 01-07-02 Account No: 56481608

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NEW TRUSTEES

Following on from Steve's report we have been lucky enough to recruit two new Trustees to share the ever increasing work load. Unfortunately Dave Bebb has found it necessary to step down, due to ill health, but remains a Consultee. Keith Stoops has taken on his role as Treasurer and John Violet is waiting to find out his role. Background details for both are as follows.



Keith Stoops – Company Director/Consultant BSc (Hons) Civil Engineering C.Eng.

Keith is a keen walker, enjoys camping and caravanning as well as Classic car restoration and growing vegetables & fruit enabling him to make his own cider & wine!



John Violet- Chartered Civil and Structural Engineer (retired) having worked on both buildings and bridges. He was Chief Bridges and Structures Engineer for Cheshire County Council.

His interests include cycling, classical music and of course railways.

John and Keith – welcome to our committee and we hope the journey is an enjoyable one !

Thomas Brassey Society AGM

I give notice that the Society AGM will be held on Saturday July 13th at the Queen Hotel, Chester.

We hope to have Andy Edwards as our guest speaker who will talk about his approach to making statues and give us an update on the progress of our own. Further details to follow but please put the date in your diary.

THOMAS BRASSEY STATUE

Some of you may be wondering where are we up to with the bronze Statue of Thomas Brassey. I apologise for not keeping you informed but I have been away for a number of weeks in Spain for a bit of sun. However during that time our Sculptor, Andy Edwards, has been busy producing the new Maquette and the full size Statue in clay at his Liverpool studio.

After much discussion, we have decided on the plinth which will incorporate a railway feel within the size limitations and materials to suit Cheshire West & Chester's planning requirements. Following a visit by four Committee members to Andy's workshop in Liverpool they saw great progress had been made.

The statue will be 1.2 x life size (approximately 1.7m tall) standing on a bronze plinth cap on top of a stone plinth. It will face north-west down Station Road (parallel to the station frontage), but the feet will be at a slight angle to this. The plinth will be 1.5 m x 1.5 m square, and 400-500 mm high (could be higher if desired). It will sit on an in-situ concrete base 2 m x 2 m square x 200-400 mm thick (to be determined and subject to the depth of any underground services that may be in the vicinity.)

Continued over /

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STATUE PROGRESS CONTINUED

The top of the concrete base will be just below the level of the York stone flags surrounding the plinth. The plinth will consist of a stainless steel frame, clad in stone, colour yet to be decided. The plinth will be rag bolted to the concrete base in a manner that will enable it to be removed and then relocated to an alternative site at a future date (if required during the future station renovation).

The plinth will be capped by the bronze base of the statue at 1.5 m x 1.5 m square x 50 mm, on which the at-scale sleepers, rail, chair (track support) and aggregate will sit – all cast in bronze. (*Andy has a real-life chair, which will be used to make the bronze casting and has recently acquired a length of rail for the project*.)

The bronze cap will have a 45 deg chamfered edge so that the dimensions of the top surface will be 1.4 m x 1.4 m square.

The chamfered bronze edge will therefore be about 70 mm wide on which the statue inscription (yet to be determined) will be based. The statue and bronze plinth cap will be bolted to the plinth frame with invisible bolts.

It was agreed that it would be best if the complete plinth was erected in the Castle Fine Arts Foundry workshop so that it can be transported to site in its finished state. This would probably rule out a conventional brick cladding which would need to be applied by a separate contractor after the installation of the plinth base, all at extra cost (unless we could have thin sections of reclaimed brick attached to the frame in the workshop). Chris (Foundry Manager) was very keen for us to visit the Bolton site of the cladding supplier so that we could see what was available. There was also some enthusiasm for an exposed steel frame to give the plinth a sort of 'industrial' character.

As a matter of priority, Andy (via Chris's wife) will produce a photo-montage of the statue standing in front of the station, so that this can be used in the planning application.

Although most of the fabrication work for the statue and plinth will be undertaken at the Liverpool workshop in Cotton Street, the actual casting of the bronze statue will be undertaken at the Castle Fine Arts foundry near Oswestry.





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ASOCIACION CULTURAL DE FERROCARRIL DE FARJA
(RAILWAY SOCIETY BENICASSIM)

Gill and I are drawn to railways of any kind so when on holiday recently in Southern Spain we were delighted to find that Benicassim had its very own narrow gauge railway.

I introduced myself to their Chairman, Mr Eugenio Burriel, in relation to our support for Thomas Brassey and was immediately made welcome. Gill and I had free rides on the trains, a VIP tour of the workshops and were presented with a rather grand plaque before we left.

We were very impressed with the amount of engineering work being carried out on site, with trains being built from scratch and a very interesting track, running through the site of old orange groves.

The superb control cabin had monitors giving feedback as well as a host of safety features and although only open on a Sunday morning, the local families were making the most of the opportunity to ride around the lengthy track.

HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION

In the summer of 1982 a railway fan club -— all members of the Asociación de Amigos del Ferrocarril de Castellón— was born under the name "Grupo Vapor Castellón". Located by the local sports centre of Benicàssim, near the old railway station, it was then the second existing railway circuit in Spain, just after "L'Oreneta" in Barcelona.

From the initial outline, a simple oval with just some railway switches, the railway turned in 1998 into a larger complex of 250 m under the name **"Asociación Cultural Ferrocarril de Farja"** and was provided with a water tank, a pit, a turntable and everything necessary for a railway operation.

Nevertheless, the most remarkable fact was the enthusiastic welcome by children and grown-ups, visitors and the residents. This didn't go unnoticed to the city Council of Benicàssim that is now investing in new facilities which will make it the most comprehensive theme park dedicated to the Railway in Spain.

For the technically minded. *With 11,600 m2 extension, the complex has a main track of 935 metres plus 825 metres of railway at the station, diversions, and sidings. The type of rail is Vingole "Cromat White Medium" with three rails suitable for 5 inches and 7 ¼ inches axles with curves of more than 8 metres of radius. The circuit holds a metallic bridge of 12 metres long and two parallel tunnels of 28 metres crossing throughout a mound of 5 metres high.*

The entire railway complex is located in an urban setting at 500 metres from the city centre and at 200 metres from the beach, very close to the famous Benicàssim Villas.



Main control room

Entering one of two tunnels



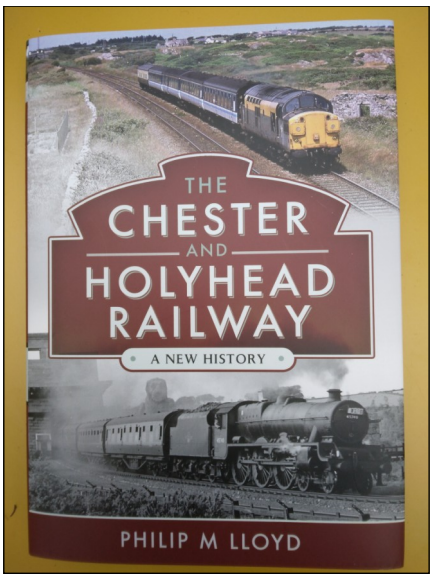


The extensive workshops

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THE CHESTER TO HOLYHEAD RAILWAY

Members attended a talk by Dr Philip Lloyd, by invitation from The Chester Society for Landscape History who were meeting on 24th February 2024, as they thought the subject would be of interest to members of The Thomas Brassey Society. Five members of TTBS attended and with cake, coffee or tea available it was a good start to the evening.



The speaker started with a brief introduction to his background. His expertise was in the history and social/political aspects of the railway line. He is, by his own admission, not an engineer, or railway buff. When he retired, he decided to do a PhD on this rail link, at York University Centre for Rail Studies. He has also written a book from his thesis, published by Pen and Sword, entitled '*The Chester to Holyhead Railway – a new history'*.

A brief summary is as follows:

In the early 1840's, Chester was losing out to Liverpool, for mail and trade with Ireland; it was also losing out to centres with better railway connections. Chester had lost out to Shrewsbury with Telford's road, now the A5, being used for the movement of Irish mail. The government of the day, between 1841-1845, led by Sir Robert Peel, wanted to improve communication between London and Dublin to help secure British rule in Ireland. Sir Robert Peel also wanted a link that would benefit his constituency, Tamworth, as well as his other vested interests in the Trent Valley.

There were a couple of rival routes, the GWR promoted Porth Dinllaen, via Wolverhampton as well as the increase in the Liverpool route. Holyhead needed this rail link as it was losing out to increased Liverpool – Dublin traffic.

Philip Lloyd's view was that the railway link, wherever it went, was a political railway to secure British rule in Ireland and that politics, not economic or social impact, decided the issue. Therefore, the route was, in his view, the first 'Imperial Railway' which he defined as being for political and empire purposes and used the latest technology — railways, the electric telegraph and steamships.

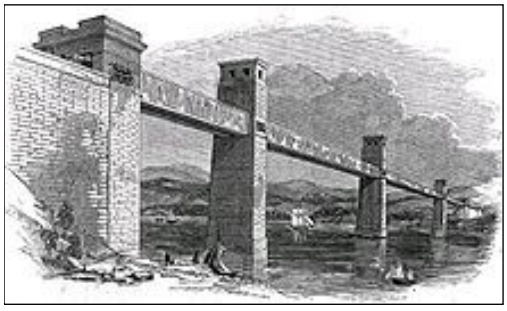
The Peel government, whilst not financing the construction directly, undertook to fund a guaranteed return on investments into the railway's construction of 5%. This was later done in India for railway works on the sub-continent.

The Peel government also supported the route as Peel could use it for his own interests. The rival GWR route, which would have been broad gauge, was finally defeated by the 1845 Gauge Commission coming down in favour of standard gauge.

Philip Lloyd went on to speak about the route as it affected Chester and worked along the line on the original stations, with some interesting facts, and anecdotes he had discovered. I'll put some of these together for a later newsletter.

All in all, an interesting talk and a different view of the Chester to Holyhead railway!

Ian Walker



The original box tube section Britannia Bridge, circa 1852

NEWSLETTER

WIRRAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE FAIR 2024

23 March 2024
Hulme Hall, Port Sunlight, Wirral
10 am — 4 pm.



Following on from a superb show last year, 2024 proved equally as good with a large turnout of visitors. We took our TTBS stand there and spoke to a number of interested people, picking up one or two memberships.

The picture shows TTBS Trustee, Ian Walker, engaging with one of the many visitors during the day. The stand also received a visit from the Mayor, Jerry Williams, who promised his support with any Wirral projects in his capacity as Heritage Champion.

Thanks also to John Violet, our new Trustee, for helping out in the afternoon.

MAKING TRACKS 2024

Pete Waterman and his team will be bringing their superb model railway back to Chester Cathedral during August 2024. The TTBS is currently in discussions with the Cathedral regarding your society having a stand there and we will keep you informed of any developments.

Making Tracks 2024 will run from 10 am to 5 pm, Mondays to Saturdays, Tickets are priced at £3 per person. Following a talk with Cathedral Marketing Manager Kevin Baxter, I enquired about the possibility of us taking our stand. He didn't want to commit at the moment due to space so we will keep you informed if we need your help.



NEW MEMBER

A big welcome to Miss Diana Williams, Parkgate Road, Chester. Diana joined at the History and Heritage Fair and you will no doubt meet her at future meetings.

In the next newsletter I should be able to give you a full report on the forthcoming trip to Cruet and the '*Pont des Anglais'* visit.

In the meantime, we wish you a good Easter holiday.

Peter

Peter Bolt
Secretary
The Thomas Brassey Society
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