NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our August 2024 Newsletter

The THOMAS BRASSEY Society



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Brilliant, fascinating, enthralling, inspirational – these were just some of the words used by members of our spell bound audience who listened to Andy Edwards speaking at our AGM on 13th July.

Andy described his career as a sculptor, mentioned his past commissions and expressed his genuine delight at being appointed to produce the statue of Thomas Brassey. He captivated the audience with his attention to detail and with his explanation of the stages necessary to create a bronze statue.

Those of you who were present will now appreciate why the statue is dominating our thoughts and taking a while to deliver. Nevertheless, we are pursuing a number of other small projects and are always looking for opportunities such as described below.



Andy in full flow!

On a recent visit to the National Railway Museum in York I tried to find someone, **anyone**, who had heard of Thomas Brassey. I drew a blank with two junior members of the museum staff and spoke at length to a more senior member who was, at least, helpful and keen to hear more. So, even when the statue project is complete there is clearly a lot more for the Society to do to raise awareness of Thomas Brassey.

In the meantime, please consider joining us on our day trips to the East Lancashire Railway next month and to the Llangollen Railway in October. Both of these heritage railways have connections with Thomas Brassey; please see details in this newsletter and earlier newsletters for histories of those railways, written by our late Treasurer, Dave Bebb.

Hope to meet you again soon!
With best wishes and thanks as always for your support,

With best wishes

Stephen Langtree MBE

Thomas Brassey Society Grand Days Out

Our First Day Out on the East Lancs Railway — 11 September 2024

Meet at Rawtenstall Station (in the coffee shop) for the 11.25 train to Bury, arriving 12 noon. The next return train is 13.00 but the plan would be to visit the Bury Transport Museum, have some lunch and catch the return train at 15.00, arriving Rawstenstall 15.35. The current costs for an on line advance concessionary return ticket is £18.50. Car parking is better at Rawtenstall and there are no trains to Heywood at that time.

Please let Ian Walker know by 30 August if you are interested in joining the trip
(ian.walker131@gmail.com) (*Caravan & Motorhome Club members get a special ticket offer!)*

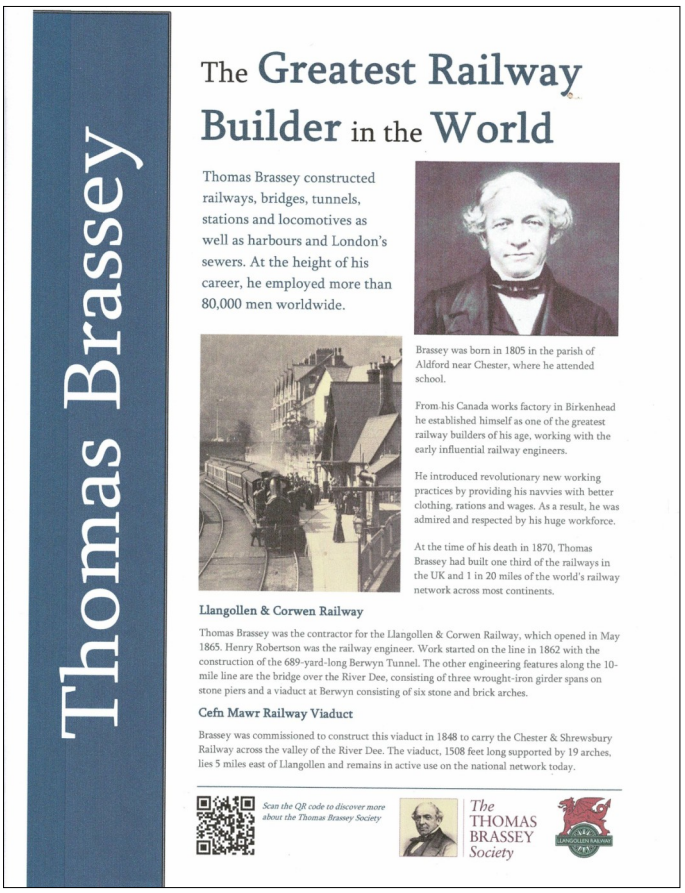
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POSTER BOARDS ON THE LLANGOLLEN RAILWAY

As reported in the Minutes of the AGM, following an approach by the Llangollen and Corwen Railway society we have agreed to share the cost of four A1 size posters to be erected at Llangollen Station and also at Corwen.

Half the posters will be in English as shown and the other will be, quite rightly, in the Welsh language. The bold blue band on the left hand side was taken from the Interpretation panel located outside Chester Station and is something Peter Dickinson, CEO of the Llangollen Railway Society, particularly wished to use.

The current situation is that the posters are being translated into Welsh, then the Railway Society hope to install them at some point in September so that members will be able to see them on our second Grand Day Out.



Thomas Brassey Society Second Grand Day Out

Friday, 18 October 2024 - Llangollen Railway

Meet at Llangollen Station for the 10 am train to Corwen, arriving 10.41. The next return train from Corwen is 11.05, arriving at Llangollen at 11.46. Alternatively there is a later train from Corwen at 13.35 or, with a Day Rover ticket, you can get on, or off, but ensure you don't get left behind at any point!

The current costs for an on-line, advance concessionary return ticket are £26.50 (advance) or £29 on the day. The current plan would be to catch the return train to Llangollen, alight at Berwyn 11.37 and wander over to the Chain Bridge Hotel for coffee and lunch, returning from Berwyn at 13.55, back in Llangollen at 14.16. There is plenty of parking in the town so please let Ian know (ian.walker131@gmail.com) by 30 September if you would like to join the trip.





NEWSLETTER

STATUE FUNDING

As you see from the photograph on the right, the clay statue is well on in manufacture, ready for the bronze casting to start taking place.



The picture below shows how the statue will appear when it is in situ outside Chester station.



However we desperately need more funds to cover unexpected costs such as the rise in raw materials, insurance and plinth extras, particularly below ground.

So — we are putting out an appeal for more funds to cover these unexpected costs.

The aim is to have the statue in place, ready for the **Railway200 Celebrations** next year when a touring exhibition steam train will be coming to Chester Station for two or three days with the aim of bringing enthusiasts to admire the Station and hopefully the statue.

Any contributions that members can make will be much appreciated.

PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

The Society intends to run a Photography Competition - in memory of Dave Bebb (our late Treasurer) who was a very keen photographer and passionate about railway photography.

We are looking round for someone to organise it and I hope to have more information on this in the next newsletter.



Steam in the Snow—Picture by Dave Bebb

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THOMAS BRASSEY'S EARLY YEARS

Some little time ago we acquired a book called "*Birkenhead and Its Surroundings*" by Henry Kelsall Aspinall. Published in 1903, when Mr Aspinall was in his later years, he has a whole chapter on his memories of Thomas during those early years in Birkenhead and the friendship was maintained until Thomas's death in 1870 although, being also friendly with Lord Brassey, the elder son, Mr Aspinall's contact with the family continued into the 1900's. We thought members might be interested to read some of these anecdotes so this is the first instalment (*punctuation and spelling as in the book..)*


Thomas Brassey 1830

"Thomas Brassey, perhaps the greatest railway contractor the world has ever known, was a remarkable man. His early days were spent in Birkenhead, learning the profession of a surveyor with Mr Lawton, the resident agent of Francis Richard Price. During this time he lived in lodgings. My father was very fond of him and frequently asked him to dinner.

One day, Mr Brassey, who was a modest, unassuming young man, asked my father to tell him where he could get a few bottles of sherry like that we drank at dinner as he thought it was exceedingly nice wine. My father said he could not give him the name of the wine merchant who supplied him with that particular sherry; but he would be pleased to send Mr Brassey some if he would accept it. Thomas Brassey never forgot that little incident; and whenever it was in his power to do me a good turn, he invariably did it; and that in the kindest possible manner. He was a man, I may say, almost in a million. My father always said Thomas Brassey would rise to be a great man.

Mr Brassey began his business life as land surveyor, coal and lime merchant, and general contractor. His works were situate on the banks of Wallasey Pool, now the Great Float. .....

The first large contract undertaken by Thomas Brassey as a young man was to supply the bricks for building the present Liverpool Custom-House. Good clay was easily obtainable; so the bricks were made in Birkenhead. Many millions were required; all to be delivered on the ground in Liverpool, inside the famous old dock. It was a hard contract: broken bricks to be rejected. In view of the handling required, it seemed as though these must prove a large percentage. The bricks had to be loaded at the kilns on carts; carted to the Woodside sandy beach; discharged into flats on the shore at low water; carried across the river; discharged into carts on the beach in Liverpool, nearly opposite the site of the Albert Dock warehouses; then carted to the custom house in course of erection. How were the difficulties incidental to so much handling to be 'overcome'? Here we see the resource of the man who was to win world-wide fame as a railway contractor.

After working out the problem, he called upon a firm of Liverpool timber merchants; and arranged for a quantity of rough planking to be sawn into certain lengths. From these, with cheap nails, were made rough boxes; each to hold three dozen bricks; no top lids required. Thomas Brassey calculated the number of packages; and the cost; what the carts would hold; and the weight. The contract was finally completed to the satisfaction of all concerned; and, I believe, the boxes were afterwards sold, and realised more money than they originally cost. (to be continued in the next Newsletter ...)

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on our "Grand Days Out" and hope you have found this Newsletter interesting. Don't forget, any donations that you can spare will be much appreciated to help "plug the gap" in the statue funding!.
With best wishes

Peter Bolt
Secretary: The Thomas Brassey Society