NEWSLETTER



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

Christmas 2024 Newsletter



Chairmans Notes

Well, it's late December already, Christmas is just around the corner so I would like to begin by wishing you all the compliments of the season.

2025 promises to be an exciting year for the Thomas Brassey Society. If all goes well, the long-awaited and much anticipated bronze statue of Thomas will be installed outside Chester railway station in March.

2025 will also be the 200th anniversary of the first passenger railway, the Stockton and Darlington railway which opened in 1825 when Thomas was 20 years old and learning his trade as a land surveyor and quarry manager. Rail 200 will be a national celebration in which we hope to play a significant role.

2025 also marks the 50th anniversary of the National Railway Museum in York. Thomas does not yet feature there as much as he should but we are hopeful that this will be remedied as soon as there is space available in the revamped galleries.

Our immediate concern is the strength, sustainability and potential growth of our Society. To that end please remember that membership subscriptions are due in January. The cost remains at £10 per annum so please ask Santa to include this on your Christmas wish list!

With thanks in anticipation and very best wishes to everyone.

Steve

With very best wishes,
Steve Langtree MBE



NEWSLETTER



An update on the progress of our Statue Project by Richard Coackley,

TTTBS Vice Chairman.

As Steve mentioned in his opening remarks in our last (October 2024) Newsletter we were waiting at the time for the results of our planning application to erect our statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester station.

We have great news and are delighted to inform everyone that we have received full approval of our application.

So, the casting of the bronze has been completed. We were hoping to arrange a visit to see the bronze being cast but events overtook us. We are now in discussion with the Council's contractor, highways and planners, with a view to installing Thomas's statue in mid-March 2025.



We have various other tasks to complete in the meantime, such as acquiring Public Liability Insurance for the statue and various licences for working in the pavement areas.

I am sure Thomas would be astounded to learn what we now need to go through before any spade gets anywhere near the ground!

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NEWSLETTER

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2025 will be an excellent time for us to install our statue of Thomas!

The Stockton & Darlington Railway opened on September 27, 1825 connecting places, people, communities and ideas and ultimately transforming the world so 2025 will be the 200th anniversary of the modern railway.

There will be a year-long nationwide campaign, Railway 200, (railway200.co.uk)

to celebrate rail's remarkable past and inspire new generations on its importance to a sustainable future.

Our Thomas Brassey Society will of course be taking part in such an important event and a formal unveiling of Thomas during the year will be a fitting tribute to both the railways and Thomas's achievements around the world.

I would like to offer sincere thanks to our committee members, Peter Bolt, who got us this far and led our discussions with our amazing sculpture Andy Edwards; Peter Cocker, who led our discussions with the authorities and produced our planning application with all the other necessary heritage, environmental and other documents and now John Violet who is heading up the final bronze casting timetable and installation details and negotiations with the Council, Highways and the Contractor.

It has all been an amazing learning experience for us all, but we are almost there!

From all your TBS committee members we wish all our members, their families and friends a very Happy Christmas and look forward to an action packed Railway200 New Year!

Richard

Richard Coackley CBE



NEWSLETTER

Artefact Task Group

By Peter Bolt

The aim of the group is to collate information about Thomas Brassey from various sources and create an on-line reference source for those wishing to know more.

Stewart Shuttleworth has now put together a plan as to how this should be moved forward. David Hooley and Richard Coackley have now joined the Task Group and **we are looking for one more** – please put your name forward to Peter Bolt if you are interested in helping with this project. petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com.

We will then ask you all to send in your list of items, information sources or pictures. An example could be the Parasol - as used at the opening of the Paris/Le Havre Railway by Maria Brassey which one of our members holds.

I have a copy of a letter written by Brassey to Edwin Clark, the Consultant Engineer for the Callow Docks in Peru. The original is held by Heap & Partners in their archives.

Subscriptions

The 1st of January is an important date in our calendar as it marks that time when your £10.00 subscriptions are due. I hope that you have now changed to a standing order as it makes our job so much easier. Otherwise please send your remittance through to our Treasurer, Keith Stoops, details shown below!! Many thanks for your help.

The Thomas Brassey Society by BACS/Standing Order - Sort Code : 01-07-02 Account No: 56481608

Or

Keith Stoops (TBS Treasurer) - 55 Greenbank Road, Hoole, Chester CH2 3RW



NEWSLETTER

The Social Impact of Brassey's work

By the late John Millar

(erstwhile Chairman, Heap & Partners)

Looking through some old documents of mine I came across a paper written by keen Brassey historian, John Millar, who was Chairman of Heap and Partners Ltd, now at Corporation Road, Birkenhead. He also wrote a fascinating history of the Company, formed in 1866 by William Heap, former Bridge Master for Thomas Brassey. ("*William Heap & His Company, 1866*", published in 1976).

This additional paper gives an insight into the wrecking that was going on in Wallasey during the early 1800's.

"*Thomas Brassey first small contract for the Saughall Massie bridge and road illustrates in a very small but important way, how his work improved life for so many people.*

Up to the 1830's roads in north Wirral were either very poor or non existent and this made parts of the north of the peninsular very isolated and lawless with even the magistrates corrupt and in cahoots with the lawbreakers.

One form of lawbreaking was that shipwrecking continued in West Wirral long after it had been stamped out in Devon and Cornwall.

One reason why the wreckers were able to continue their dreadful trade was that some of the villages in North West Wirral, in particular Bidston and Saughall Massie, were surrounded by swampland and only the locals knew the paths through the swamps to the villages.

*In 1829 Cheshire County Council decided to make a start by making Saughall Massie more accessible to the outside world and so they invited tenders for the construction of a bridge and road in Saughall Massie which would help drain the swamps into the Arrowe Brook. This was the contract that was won by William Lawton and his 24 year old partner Thomas Brassey who undertook to do the work for the astonishingly low sum of £200 (about £30-40,000 at today's values ((*1970-'s..))

This work eliminated the isolation of Saughall Massie and law and order ruled thereafter.



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NEWSLETTER

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"In 1839, ten years after this small contract had been undertaken, there was a hurricane that caused shipping using the Hoyle Channel into Liverpool great problems. The wreckers were still working from their sanctuary in Bidston Moss and they blacked out the light house at Hoylake and Leasowe and a number of vessels foundered on the sandbanks of the north west Wirral shore.

The wreckers, like dark vultures, decided on the poor unfortunates and those that were still alive were soon clubbed to death and robbed. In some cases fingers were cut off to get rings and one witch bit the ear off a passenger lying on the beach to get her earrings.

Those dreadful crimes infuriated the Liverpool ship owners, they despatched Superintendent Quick to north Wirral with 20 Constables and they raided homes and arrested a number of wreckers.

In 1850 Thomas Brassey built Birkenhead Docks and drained Bidston Moss via the River Fender into Wallasey Pool so destroying the wreckers sanctuary.

The construction of the Crosby Channel also meant that shipping need no longer use the dangerous Hoyle Channel and that was the end of wrecking in north Wirral.

*A small part of the heritage left to us by Thomas Brassey, his managers and his navvies." (*copied as per the original*)*

Another anecdote from Aspinall's book:

"I have heard Thomas Brassey say that his lawyers' bills and his hotel bills in his busy contracting days bothered him very much. At last he determined never to examine them; but simply gave instructions for them to be measured with a two foot rule. This, he said, brought him to the conclusion that they were so many pounds a foot; and that the only thing to do was to pay."

"Birkenhead and its Surroundings"

By Henry Kelsall Aspinall (early 1900's)

(reproduced as the original)

NEWSLETTER

OUR TTBS DAY OUT No 2

LLANGOLLEN RAILWAY TRIP 18TH OCT 2024

By Ian Walker, TTBS Events Co-ordinator

On 18th October, 10 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', (well, it was October!), 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!

Whilst at Corwen, members inspected two information boards about the links between Thomas Brassey and the Llangollen Railway. These were jointly funded by the Society and the Llangollen Railway. Both boards have the same text, one in Welsh, one in English!

(*As an aside, I visited the Llangollen Railway a week later with a friend from 'the South'. Whilst he was busy with the camera, I noticed a fair few folk reading about Thomas Brassey)*





The station shop was also visited, with a stock of Llangollen Railway souvenirs and an extensive collection of second hand books for sale.

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! The current bridge isn't the original construction, but it uses the same site.

NEWSLETTER

After lunch, we caught the train for the short trip back to Llangollen, where we all went our separate ways. Our train was late into Berwyn, and only consisted of one unit, the second unit having been taken off due to a hot axle box!



Motive power was a 1st generation 2 car DMU wonderfully restored and maintained by Llangollen Railcars. The huge windows in these units do make them ideal for just watching the world go by! (Especially if you sit at the front just behind the driver!)

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 grey day in winter, in a 'railcar', buy some postcards, support those running the lines, so the line can survive!

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

A big welcome to Marion Coackley and Ian Lambert. We look forward to meeting you at one of our events in 2025.

With best wishes for Christmas & the New Year

Peter

Peter Bolt
Secretary: the Thomas Brassey Society
petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com