Welcome to our January 2024 Newsletter



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES



May I begin by wishing every recipient of this Newsletter a very happy New Year.

2024 promises to be a landmark year for the Thomas Brassey Society.

In November it will be five years since our official inauguration in 2019. Those present on that occasion will well remember how surprised and thrilled we were to receive a generous offer of 50 per cent funding for the proposed statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester station. Soundings at the time suggested that it would take five years to achieve this ambition so, I am pleased to say, we are 'on track'.

A further step forward took place on 21st December when a small group of us visited the William-son Art Gallery in Birkenhead where a large portrait of Thomas had been brought out of storage for us to view. This proved to be extremely interesting and a particularly valuable opportunity for our sculptor Andy Edwards. Our thanks go to the museum curator for enabling this rare viewing; let's hope it encourages him to display the portrait again soon. *(A full account of our visit is on page 2 of this Newsletter)*



Williamson Art Gallery

Finally, please can I remind you that your annual subscription is due this month and remains at £10 per member. Details about how to pay can be found below. We value the support of each and every one of our 120 members and hope that you will renew accordingly. Thank you!

With best wishes

Stephen Langtree MBE

TALKS ON THOMAS BRASSEY

Members will be interested to know that a number of talks on Thomas Brassey will be taking place throughout this year and into 2025.

16th January 2024 at 7.00 pm the Grosvenor Museum Society Chester – Richard Coackley
12th February 2024 (via Zoom) Somerset Industrial Archaeology Society – Richard Coackley
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 am 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.

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE NOW! 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

NEWSLETTER

VISIT TO THE WILLIAMSON ART GALLERY

By Peter Bolt



I have always known that there was a large picture of Thomas Brassey in the Williamson Art Gallery and before that the portrait had hung in Birkenhead Town Hall - but I have never seen it.

Following prompting by our Chairman I had a talk with the Curator at the Gallery and somewhat reluctantly he agreed to locate it in their store rooms and put it on show for a two hour period one afternoon in December.

From the Minutes of the Birkenhead Council General Purposes Committee of December 1886, it is shown that the portrait was presented to the Council by Lord Brassey of Bulkeley in that year.

The painting was viewed by members of the statue committee, along with Andy Edwards (*Sculptor) a*nd two or three local society members who live on the Wirral.

The painting was sadly very dusty and the frame has certainly seen better days. The portrait stood 2.36m in height and Andy was able to take away with him details about Brassey's facial features and height. One thing is certain and that is Brassey was not a small man hence him not being seen with a chimney hat!

The Statue committee was able to sit down with Andy and I am pleased to advise that we have now agreed the plinth design and Brassey's pose on the plinth.

One other interesting thing is that the painting was painted by Hugh Carter in 1874 and that was 4 years after Thomas's death! That raises all sorts of speculation of what Carter based his facial features on in the portrait as they seem to be very accurate although clearly Thomas is portrayed as being possibly in his early 40's at the time.



Andy Edwards explaining his design ideas to the Society's Wirral members



TBS members with the portrait which gives a good idea of the scale of it.

NEWSLETTER

CHESTER RAILWAY LINES BUILT BY THOMAS BRASSEY



Having celebrated the 175th anniversary of Chester railway station in 2023, we think you all know that it was built (in 1847/48) by Thomas Brassey. It may not be quite so well known that he built most of the railway lines which radiate in six directions from or near Chester station.

Among the most 'Frequently Asked Questions' (FAQs) is exactly which of these lines Thomas built, so here is the definitive list, compiled by our colleague John Whittingham.

"*I list below a number of lines constructed, bearing in mind he was still finishing off lines in France and other projects in this country at the same time.*

1839 – 1840 Chester to Crewe (11 miles)
1847 – 1848 Chester to Shrewsbury (25 miles)
1843 – 1848 Chester to Holyhead. Bridges built by Robert Stephenson, William Fairbairn and William Evans. William Heap was the Jun. Engineer.

1847 – Birkenhead and Chester Junction Railway including widening the 1840 Railway up for 17.5 miles.

1848 – 1st August Chester Station officially opened."

List compiled by local historian John Whittingham, retired railwayman, Station Guide and Committee member.



Inside Chester Station during Victorian times

NEWSLETTER

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

We have had a good response to our November Newsletter piece on our proposed TTBS Spring 'Voyage' to Cruet in Haut-Savoie, France. 11 members and partners have confirmed that they would definitely like to join and 6 additional people responded that they are potentially interested to join us.
So our TTBS Spring visit is definitely on.

If any other member (and partner) is interested in joining us please let Peter Bolt know immediately (petergillianbolt1@btinternet.com).

If you don't have your November Newsletter to hand with the initial itinerary you can download it from our website (www.thomasbrasseysociety.org) to see the proposed visit programme. As well as our guided visit and technical talk on Brassey's "*Pont des Anglais*" on his Alpine Victor Emmanuel railway, (*see our Dec '21 and Feb '22 Newsletter features*) the programme will include visits and guided tours of Aix les Bains, Chambery, Cruet and Montmelian, incorporating delicious local cuisine and wine tastings.

Members who have already expressed interest will receive a full visit programme, hotel and tour details by 14th February, four months ahead of our visit.

In addition to our initial itinerary our Society has just been invited to a formal welcome and reception by the dignitaries of Savoie at the Academie des Sciences, des Arts et des Belles-Lettres located in the Chateau de Chambery. A huge honour for the Society.

Just for interest: "*the Savoie people had a very close connection with the UK then. Queen Victoria went there on her holidays with her daughter. That's why Brassey was so well thought of there with King Victor Emmanuel. The Savoy Hotel in London was the original base ("embassy") for the people of Savoie, hence the name. It is an amazing history and relationship with UK. And it was Savoie engineers who built the castles along the North Wales coast."*

We hope other members will want to join us on this "once in a lifetime" trip for TBS members so please get in touch with Peter asap if you would like to come.

Richard Coackley
4 Jan 2024



Chambery



Cruet Bridge, 1822



Bust of Queen Victoria in Aix les Bains

NEWSLETTER

WIRRAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE FAIR 2024

23 March 2024
Hulme Hall, Port Sunlight, Wirral
10 am — 4 pm.
Good parking available or a short walk from Port Sunlight station.



Members will be interested to know that your Society is once again taking our stand to the History & Heritage Fair in Hulme Hall in Port Sunlight on 23 March 2024.

You will remember that last year the organisers had the best ever attendance of over 1400 visitors and we are hoping for a similar response this year. The Fair will be open from 10 am to 4 pm so we hope to see as many of you as possible during the day as well as hopefully recruiting some new members of course.



Your Secretary, Peter Bolt and Committee member, Ian Walker, were able to engage with the Mayor and many other visitors during the day in 2023.

2025 — A YEAR TO CELEBRATE THE COMING OF THE RAILWAYS

Various railway societies are planning a year of celebrations in 2025 in recognition of the 200th Anniversary of the first railway being inaugurated.



The Station Adoption group at Micheldever, Wiltshire is planning specific celebrations to commemorate Brassey's building of the line from Nine Elms to Southampton and 2025 will be the 185th Anniversary of the opening of the station. This marked the successful completion of this challenging section between Basingstoke and Winchester which had defeated previous engineers.

There will be an event on Sunday, 11 May 2025 and the Station Adoption Group have invited Thomas Brassey Society members to join them. The Dove Inn was built at the same time as the station and has "letting rooms". TBS member David Jones has kindly agreed to give a talk about Thomas Brassey's life and achievements during the weekend and we hope that any members who could join them on this auspicious occasion will do so.

Wishing all our members a Happy New Year and looking forward to meeting up at some point.
With best wishes
Peter

Peter Bolt
Secretary
The Thomas Brassey Society
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