Welcome to our June 2024 Newsletter

Cruet Special

NEWSLETTER



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society



CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Bonjour Mes Amies

When I wrote my notes for our last newsletter (April 2024) I was eagerly anticipating our forthcoming visit to France. My expectations were more than fulfilled; the trip was *Magnifique*!

It has been said on many occasions by Peter Bolt that Thomas Brassey is probably better known in France than he is in his home country.

After all, Brassey built three quarters of the French railway network in the mid-19th century. This included the line from Culoz to Turin which included the Victor Emmanuel Railway's second bridge, otherwise known as 'Le Pont des Anglais'. A full report is given in this newsletter but, before going any further, I must extend a huge vote of thanks to our Vice Chairman, Richard Coackley, for organising everything so skilfully on our behalf. It was a triumph of organisation, greatly assisted by the warm and generous hospitality of our French hosts. We hope our visit assisted their campaign to save the bridge and promote the former railway route as a heritage trail.

Meanwhile, back in the UK, our sculptor Andy Edwards is nearing completion of the clay model from which the bronze statue will be cast. Negotiations with the council's planners are ongoing and there has been much discussion about the exact position, size and materials for the low plinth on which the statue will sit. Andy Edwards will be our guest speaker at the forthcoming **Annual General Meeting on Saturday 13th July** so I very much hope that members will turn out in force at the Queen Hotel for the meeting and, if so desired, for lunch afterwards.



I cannot end these notes without paying the greatest tribute possible to our friend and former colleague, Dave Bebb. As mentioned in an earlier edition, Dave had been ill for some time and we are very sad to report his passing on 17th May. As a founder member and Treasurer of TTBS Dave made a tremendous contribution to the success of the society and will be very much missed. We also have to thank Dave for his tireless work in searching out information about the Brassey Heritage Railways — and producing fascinating articles for our Newsletters. Our very sincere condolences go to his wife, Jan and their family. RIP Dave.

With all good wishes and as ever, many thanks for your continuing support for the Thomas Brassey Society.

With best wishes

Stephen Langtree MBE

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DAY 1 of the visit to Cruet



Le Cle des Champs hotel

22 Thomas Brassey Society "voyageurs" arrived at their hotel "*La Cle des Champs*" in Montmelian in the early evening, on Monday, 13 May. The sun was shining, the mountains looked magnificent and we were looking forward to meeting our French counterparts.

Following an evening Reception where we were welcomed by Jean-Claude Bouchet (President), Sylvie Seuret-von Zeppelin and



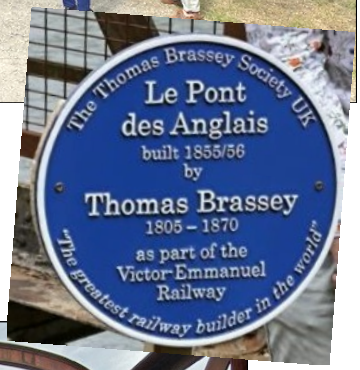
Catherine Chauche of Les Amis de Montmelian et de ses Environs Association; Presidents Denise Cunit, Michel Martin and Roger Decker of the Cruet, Nature et Patrimoines Association, members of the "Grapevine" group and our guide for the three days, Chantal George, we all enjoyed local delicacies, Savoie wines and cheese.

DAY 2



The main reason for our visit had arrived: a visit to the Pont des Anglais bridge and our presentation of a lovely blue plaque to commemorate the construction of the bridge by Thomas Brassey in 1853/55.

Upon our arrival we were pleased to see that a good crowd had gathered including locals, veteran railwaymen and other members of the local societies. With TBS Society members Clare Bruce and Caroline Capel representing the Brassey family, following a talk on the history & construction of the Bridge by Roger Decker, the Blue Plaque was ceremoniously unveiled to great applause.







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DAY 2 continued

Following the unveiling ceremony, we all went back to Cruet village hall for presentations by Roger Decker again, followed by Gillian Bolt who talked about Thomas Brassey's early life and time in France (in French), which was followed by Richard Coackley's discussion on Thomas's global influence through such projects as massive sewer systems and dock schemes.



After an excellent lunch the group then travelled into Chambery for a guided tour of this lovely, historic town. Later we moved on to the Chateau for a tour of the Chapel which had held the "Turin Shroud" before it was removed to Turin. This was followed by a reception with the Academie of Sciences, Belles Lettres & Arts. Richard gave his global perspective talk and honorary membership certificates were exchanged with the other French societies.







DAY 3

Day 3 was an early start as we headed off to Aix les Bains with a stop at the Rotonda on the way. This is an amazing piece of engineering, used on a daily basis by the railways and part of the railway museum ! The locomotives come in to the circular building, onto a central turntable and are then turned around so they can go back down the line. A remarkable sight.









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DAY 3 continued

Our next stop was Aix les Bains to meet up with the Grapevine group (including ex-pats) and Queen Victoria who was located on a plinth in the middle of the town! Apparently it had been a favourite holiday destination for her before discovering Nice. Once again we had made the local paper which was great news and following a tour of the town, we headed down to the marina and boarded a boat for lunch and a cruise to Hautecombe Abbey.









Vineyard visit



On our return we felt obliged to visit the local Cruet Vineyard *'Domaine de l'Idylle'* as it would have been rude not to!
They specialize in organic Savoie wine production and members were keen to taste their products.



Dinner followed in an unusual setting — the wine vat room — creating just the right atmosphere for a great evening.

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DAY 4



Thursday saw the group travelling to the lakeside town of Annecy which is beautiful and has a fascinating history.

Chantal, our guide, took us for a tour of key points before heading for lunch at a nearby bistro. A casting at the Paccard Bell Foundry and concert followed as the owner's wife is a renowned singer with a lovely voice. What is more unusual is that she was accompanied by a carillon of bells.



Annecy centre



Annecy canal leading to the lake

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DAY 4 continued



In the foundry, casting small bells



Anne Paccard and the carillon

DAY 4 evening: Gala dinner



Starter

To end our visit in style, we attended a Gala Dinner at a lovely venue in Challes les Eaux. With speeches honouring our hosts and thanks all round, it had been a memorable experience and one which none of us will forget.



Sylvie Seuret-von Zeppelin & Richard Coackley

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All of the "Voyageurs" wish to thank Richard Coackley for his hard work in putting the trip together. Steve has, of course, made reference to it in his Chairman's Notes but we would like to recognise the huge amount of research, (including a prior trip to the area), which Richard (and Ella) undertook. The arrangements ran like clockwork, everything was in place at the right time and this could only have happened with his exacting attention to detail. Will our intervention be enough to save the Pont des Anglais? We don't yet know — although Richard is already writing further letters of support to various senior members of the French Savoie Department and other bodies.

What we do know is that we have raised the profile of the bridge to new levels both locally and in the wider French community so 'fingers crossed'. In addition we have made valuable contacts in France which we hope to maintain whilst also promoting Thomas Brassey and his many achievements on the continent.

Thomas Brassey Society AGM

The Society AGM will be held on Saturday July 13th 2024 at the Queen Hotel, Chester (opposite Chester Station) at 10 am for 10.30 am start. Lunch will also be available at a cost of £29.50 for a two course meal plus coffee/tea.

Andy Edwards will be our guest speaker. He will talk about his approach to making statues and give us an update on the progress of our own.

We do hope you will come and join us so please let Keith Stoops (our Treasurer) know whether you intend to come and whether you would like to join us for lunch. If so, payment in advance would be much appreciated

Email: keithstoops@gmail.com

I hope you have found our TTBS French adventure interesting and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM. Many thanks to Ian Lawrence for additional pictures.
With best wishes
Peter

Peter Bolt
Secretary: The Thomas Brassey Society
www.thomasbrasseysociety.org