NEWSLETTER



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

Welcome to our October 2024 Society Newsletter



Next month (November 2024) will be the fifth anniversary of the inaugural meeting of our Society. A great deal has happened in those five years and how time has flown!

One of the main reasons for setting up the Society in the first place was to commission a statue of Thomas Brassey to be placed outside Chester Railway Station. Our initial discussions with the public statues and sculpture association (PSSA) suggested that most projects of this nature take about five years to complete. Best estimates would suggest that we are running about six months late perhaps the interruptions due to Covid make this quite understandable.

Our planning application was submitted in September and the first comments on the planning portal from members of the public are very encouraging. So, it's fingers crossed that our local authority will agree and will help us through the final stages of delivery and installation.

As I always say, the statue is not the only project in mind. We are very pleased to report that the information panels about Thomas Brassey are now being installed on the Llangollen railway at both Corwen station and Llangollen station. Hopefully, we will be able to view these panels during our next members' outing to Llangollen on Friday 18th Octobe. Meanwhile, we have had an enquiry from Micheldever Station Society to place one or more similar panels at their station, another of the lines built by Thomas Brassey

Further development is that one of our members, Stewart Shuttleworth, has agreed to help us to create an inventory/database of all sorts of information about the life of Thomas Brassey. We do not intend to compile our own archive collection but to record everything we know about Brassey, both here and overseas. If any of you have information or artefacts which you would like to include in the proposed inventory please let us know.

Behind-the-scenes, our talks and presentations continue unabated at all sorts of events and all sorts of groups. I am very grateful to those members of the committee, and others, who have given these talks on behalf of the Society to relieve the burden on Peter & Gillian Bolt. Many thanks indeed.

There is no further news about the proposed photographic competition in memory of Dave Bebb. If anyone is able to help in organising such a competition we would be very pleased to discuss the idea further.

Thank you, as ever, for your continuing support for The Thomas Brassey Society.

Steve

With very best wishes,
Steve Langtree MBE

NEWSLETTER

OUR "GRAND DAY OUT" ON THE EAST LANCS RAILWAY

By Eddie Challoner

As a relatively new member of the Society, I have to confess that I am a latecomer to the "life and times" of Thomas Brassey which is particularly surprising — given that between my Grandfather, my father and myself — we have achieved over 90 years of railway service!

I was an active member of Steamport Southport at one stage and my father a member of the Severn Valley Railway. However, this was my first visit to the East Lancs and it was a great surprise to find such an active, large scale operation so close to the Wirral.

After an early start we duly arrived at Rawtenstall station and the train was surprisingly full for mid week. The addition of 3 extra coaches for 230 school children added some excitement but we left promptly at 11.25 for the journey to Bury pulled by a 0-6-0 Jinty, No 47289. We were seen off by the Station Master, an imposing gentleman with a grand moustache who made the departure announcements as well as chatting to the passengers. It reminded me of being a young child at Chester General station in the 1950's with my grandfather dressed in similar clothing as he was a Traffic Inspector in those days.

For enthusiasts No 47298 was built at a cost of £3,168 by the Hunslet Engine Co Ltd at Leeds and entered service in 1924 as 7138, being renumbered in 1935. (*More details of this 100 year old locomotive and the chequered 13 year history of the ELR's early days are available on line at "Preserved British Steam Locomotives" and "Wikipedia" respectively.)*

These Society outings are invaluable for meeting other members and I had a great conversation with Peter Robson who filled me in on his volunteer duties on the Llangollen Railway. When we arrived at Bury it was interesting to see Peter, deep in conversation with the footplate crew of our locomotive! Sharing experiences no doubt.

In case of future visits, just outside Bury Station there is a superb Italian restaurant which has excellent lunch offers and enabled some of us to get lunch while the school party visited the Bury Transport Museum - all 230 of them!

The Museum is well worth a visit with superb examples of various forms of transport through the ages and some great activities for children including an excellent bridge building kit.

Some of the exhibits were particularly interesting, notably the Scammell delivery wagons with their three wheeled tractors for towing the trailers. These were seen frequently in Birkenhead around the stations and roads in the 1950's. There were also buses, road wagons, a fire engine, steam roller, vans and motorcycles.

An exceptional model layout of Bury — Bolton Street Railway Station is a must to see, surrounded as it is by the domestic and commercial infrastructure which existed in the day. Next to it were larger scale display models of various locomotives which reminded me of a short stay in the Apprentice Training School at Crewe Works in the early 1960's.

I would highly recommend this trip and knowing that Rawtenstall was a little over 30 miles from Wigan, the home town of two accomplished engineers of our age, Wallace & Gromit, it could certainly be titled "***A Grand Day Out***".





Ian Walker, Peter Bolt & the writer, Eddie Challoner



NEWSLETTER

Railways at War

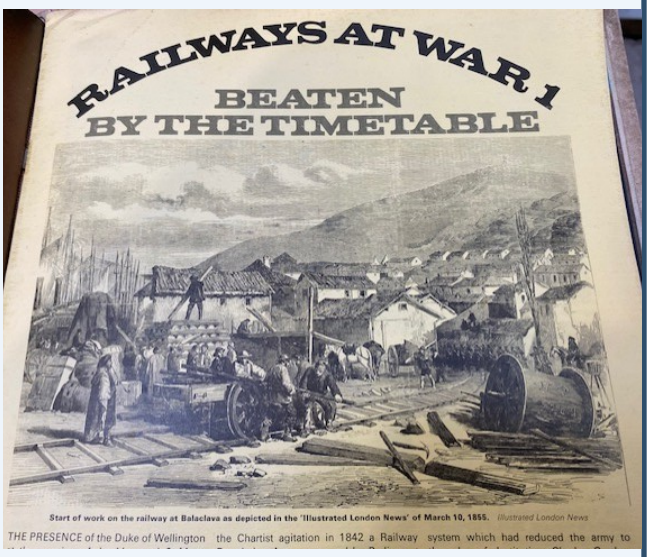
BEATEN BY THE TIMETABLE

Published by the Amalgamated Press, "Railway Wonders of the World" appeared in 50 weekly instalments from 1st February 1935 through to 10th January 1936. This article about the Crimean War was in the Year Book "Railway Wonders of the World 1".

During our visit to the Bury Transport Museum there were "pre loved" books for sale, one of which had a chapter entitled "Railways at War" which included a large section on Brassey's work in the Crimea.

"The real vindication of the railway came during the Crimean War of 1854-6 and then chiefly on the initiative of private enterprise. In the harsh winter of 1854-5 Russell's despatches to "The Times" from the battlefront revealed to a shocked public the total failure of the supply system which had reduced the army to the edge of destitution. The battlefront was only 7 miles away from the fortress of Sevastopol but it might have been 700 ..... The largest expeditionary force to leave England for 40 years was steadily decimated by starvation and frostbite and military operations came to a total standstill.

The answer was, of course, a railway ... and it was sent out from England by that titan among engineers, Thomas Brassey, at his own expense. It arrived complete with wagons and a small army of navvies and was in operation by March 1855. At first the trains were horse drawn with a stationary engine to help with steep gradients .. But later small locomotives were sent out. " (*The first time that trains had been used in a war zone — see our earlier Newsletter article about them in August 2022.)*



"Another distinguished engineer, I K Brunel, also lent his talents to the war effort, designing a prefabricated hospital which has remained the basic model for all such field medical units in subsequent wars."

NEWSLETTER

A statue of "the world's greatest railway builder" is planned for outside Chester Railway Station.

By Mark Dowling

(Chester Standard Newspaper)

Throughout the 19th century, Thomas Brassey became a prolific railway contractor, responsible for building one third of all railway lines in the United Kingdom by the time of his death in 1875, and one in 20 of all railway lines in the world.

Now the Thomas Brassey Society is hoping to install a statue that will help Chester better recognise the pioneering achievements of the man who was born in Buerton (Aldford) in 1805. A heritage statement submitted as part of the planning application to Cheshire West and Chester Council acknowledges there is a bust of Thomas Brassey in Chester Cathedral, commemoration plaques at Chester Railway Station, and two streets named after him in the city, but currently there are no statues dedicated to him.

The statement says: "He deserves to be better recognised as the world's greatest railway builder. "*How better to achieve this 'heritage' objective than by erecting a statue of the man in front of the station he built in his home city*?"

Thomas Brassey's first job was as the manager of Storeton Quarry on the Wirral, but after being persuaded by fellow industrious figure Thomas Telford to help in surveying for the A5 London-Holyhead trunk road in North Wales, his first railway project was the construction of the Penkridge Viaduct on what is now the West Coast main line.

He banked at the Chester bank of Dixons & Wardell (which later became NatWest Bank) in Northgate street, and the heritage statement adds that at his peak, he had more money going through the bank than in the treasuries of most small European countries.

Chester railway Station was built by Thomas Brassey to the design of Francis Thomson, and opened in August 1848, along with many of the railway lines still in use today – Shrewsbury-Chester, Chester-Crewe, Chester-Holyhead, and part of Chester-Birkenhead. The proposed statue would feature Thomas Brassey, in his 40s, at the time when he completed the station, reading a map of the Shrewsbury-Chester rail route. It would be cast in bronze, at slightly larger than life size, standing alongside a piece of contemporary railway also cast in bronze. He would be facing Station Road, so visitors arriving from the station would see him as a side profile on the pavement.





A short inscription on the statue base would explain the pioneering figure's significance and the proposed sculptor would be Andy Edwards, who created the statue of the four Beatles at Pier Head, Liverpool.

To see the full Planning Application and comment, please follow the link:

https://www.chesterstandard.co.uk/news/24596573.chester-statue-worlds-greatest-rail-builder-planned-station/?ref=suit

reference number 24/02527/FUL

NEWSLETTER

Some interesting comments received so far on our Planning Application

Comment submitted (to the Council) date: Thu 03 Oct 2024

I have tried to register a comment on your website (*the Council's website*) about the above Planning Application to erect a statue of Thomas Brassey outside Chester Station but failed, so am using the alternative route mentioned on your website.
I was born in Altrincham and moved to Chester in 1985. It amazes me that there is no formal recognition in Chester of the contribution which Thomas Brassey (who was born near Chester) made to not only progress in railway communications in the UK but across the continents of Europe, the near East, and North America. He was the foremost railway builder at the time and built more railways in the world than anybody has, or will ever build. He was honoured and respected by Royalty, Governments, Engineers etc in Countries around the world, but Chester has failed to inform residents and visitors of one of their most eminent citizens.
My eldest daughter lives with her family in Montreal. When visiting her and I mention to her friends that I am from Chester, many of them immediately mention Thomas Brassey who was instrumental in building a 2 mile long bridge over the St Lawrence River in Montreal and hundreds of miles of the trans continental railway, which achievement is recognised on a Plaque and in the City Museum. They cannot believe that we do not honour him in Chester. This application to erect a statue in his honour in Chester, where he was born, educated and lived for a while, has my full support. The location outside the Station he built is very appropriate such that Residents and visitors from around the world will be informed of this remarkable Civil Engineer from Chester.

Comment submitted date: Fri 20 Sep 2024

As a local resident & someone that passes by the front of the railway station daily, I fully support this proposal - Chester has a strange lack of public statuary for such an historic city. Adding this kind of 'local detail' adds value to the experience of visitors and locals.

Comment Date: Thu 26 Sep 2024

The above application has been assessed and it is considered that the proposal would not result in harm to the setting of the grade II* listed station buildings, the adjacent grade II listed buildings, or the surrounding conservation area.

The proposed statue has been the subject of extensive pre-application discussion with multiple teams within the council. The siting, orientation, design, and materiality of the proposal has been carefully considered taking into account the surrounding built environment as well as the key historic links of the subject matter to the development of Chester Station.

NEWSLETTER

Thomas Brassey's Early Years as recalled by Henry Aspinall, in his book *"Birkenhead & its Surroundings"*, 1903

(continued from the August Newsletter)

"During the summer season, for some years, my family used to reside at West Kirby. One day I received a letter from Mr Brassey, saying he was coming to Birkenhead to stop with his brother-in-law, George Harrison for a few days; and would like to visit us with Mrs Brassey and spend a long afternoon; as he had not been in West Kirby since he was a boy. I wrote back to say how gratified we should be to have the pleasure of a visit from him and his good wife; and asked him to let me know what time they would be likely to arrive; and whether they would prefer dinner or tea. This brought a prompt answer, couched in these words;

*"Certainly, **tea, shrimps and bread and butter**; nothing else. We can get plenty of dinners in London."*

Nearly the whole afternoon and evening were spent upon the shore."

(to be continued in the next Newsletter)

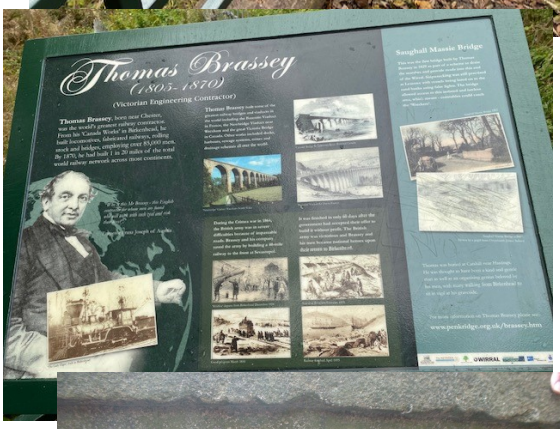
Refurbishment of the "Brassey Interpretation Panel" In Saughall Massie

It's 219 years since the birth of the worlds most prolific railway engineer, Thomas Brassey (www.thomasbrasseysociety.org) and nineteen years since Saughall Massie Village Conservation Area Society celebrated his birth by formally arranging listed building status for his very first engineering structure, the Saughall Massie bridge, when he was only 24. Born near Chester but running his global business from Birkenhead he became one of the world's wealthiest men, at his peak employing over 85,000 men throughout every continent. PERHAPS THE GREATEST EVER UNSUNG WIRRAL PERSONALITY?

With the passing of time and inclement weather, the Thomas Brassey commemorative display on the Saughall Massie bridge had deteriorated, so in September 2024 the Saughall Massie Village Conservation Area Society took it upon themselves to refurbish the railings and display area adjacent to the bridge.

At the same time the village notice board was repaired and refurbished, with a fresh lick of paint and a reference to the history and conservation status of the village.







NEWSLETTER

"Our TB statue is delivered" (in miniature form .....)

Some of our members will have met David Millar, Managing Director of Heap & Partners Ltd. If you recall, William Heap was Thomas Brassey's bridge master and so the company has always had a great respect for Thomas and has significant items in their archives. David has kindly donated significant sums to the statue fund and when he saw the design that Andy Edwards had brought forward, requested a miniature version for the company's board room. Andy was, of course, very happy to oblige and the miniature, bronze maquette was delivered recently much to David's delight.

We are sure that it will create a great talking point for their many visitors to the company, from all over the world.

The maquette comes with a Certificate of Provenance and was the first casting from his design which he is using to construct the main statue.



David Millar (on the left) with Andy Edwards and the bronze maquette

REMINDER

TB Society Grand Days Out

Friday, 18 October, 2024

Llangollen Railway

Make sure you don't miss the second of the Society's Grand Days Out.

Arrangements are:

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 and the current plan is to get off at Berwyn and go to the Chain Bridge Hotel for lunch. Returning from Berwyn at 13.55 so back in Llangollen by 14.16.

Please let Ian Walker know if you would like to join them.

ian.walker131@gmail.com

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome two new members this month.

Ian Fulton from Mold

and

Karen Leeson from Chester

We look forward to meeting you at one of our get togethers.



TTBS members on the Chain Bridge

NEWSLETTER

Promoting Thomas Brassey and the Society's work at Northop History Day

Organised by Northop Heritage Group, the Society was invited to take part in this Annual event and give a talk about Thomas and his achievements.


Ian Walker in full flow

The day is quite prestigious and the Society charge £5 for tickets to the various talks they host during the event which was very well attended.

Ian Walker, our Events Co-ordinator, gave the talk about Thomas Brassey & his achievements on our behalf and Committee members Richard Coackley, Peter Bolt and John Violet "manned" the TB Society stand along with member Eddie Challoner. There was a great deal of interest and at least one new member signed up.

Thomas Brassey Information panels on the Llangollen Railway

This project was first discussed some little time ago and various designs have been prepared and then amended.

The Society would like to thank Peter Dickinson (Principal Consultant, and Llangollen Station Master) and TTBS member Peter Robson for helping to bring the idea to fruition.

Currently Corwen Station has both panels in situ and they will also be installed at the main station in Llangollen in the near future.



With best wishes from

Peter

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