NEWSLETTER



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

Welcome to our April 2025 Newsletter

Chairman's Notes



We've had a very busy and super start to an important year for us.

We had a most successful stand at the Wirral History & Heritage Fair in the last couple of weeks and our thanks go to Trustee, Ian Walker, for leading our Society presence on the day.

Our thanks also go to Society members Stewart Shuttleworth, who recently gave a very well attended talk titled "*Rails into Chester*" and Trustee, John Violet, who gave a packed talk to the Llangollen Railway Society on the life of Thomas whilst Trustee, Peter Cocker, also spoke about Thomas to the Heswall Society.

Stewart has volunteered to lead our new project on recording and archiving information on everything relating to Thomas Brassey which will start after installation of our statue commemorating the man. We will be in touch with more about this after our main event of the year!

....and so to our main event.....

The long-awaited and much anticipated statue of Thomas Brassey is now nearing completion, going through his final patination process at the foundry and in the next few weeks we will be making preparations for Thomas to be installed in front of Chester railway station.

We are now preparing for a very special unveiling ceremony of Thomas on

28th May, 2025, at 1 pm.

All members are most welcome to attend and will receive personal e-card invitations to the event. To be able to make satisfactory arrangements for the day with regard to numbers attending could you please respond to the invitation you will receive in the next few days by replying to our Hon Secretary — saying whether you intend to join the formal unveiling ceremony .

We are hoping that this event will form a significant part of our Thomas Brassey Society contribution to Rail 200, this year's celebration of the 200th anniversary of the first passenger railway.

By apparent total coincidence a new pub and restaurant to be called the "**Station Tap**" is being created at Chester railway station (close to Thomas's statue) by local microbrewers "*Spitting Feathers*" with whom we hope to work to include "*more than a nod*" to Thomas. The pub is now open and proving very popular.



Thank you to all our members who have renewed their membership for 2025. We greatly appreciate your commitment and you make it possible to do what we have accomplished as a Society so far.

At the same time could I remind those still to renew that the subscription remains at £10 and you can easily pay by BACS or, even better, set up a Standing Order to our Society Account,
Sort code: 01-07-02, Account No: 56481608. When paying by BACS or Standing Order please add your name as a reference.

Best wishes

Stephen Langtree MBE

Chairman

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THE CHESTER TO HOLYHEAD RAILWAY

Talk by Dr Philip Lloyd, Report by Ian Walker

The Society received an Invitation from The Chester Society for Landscape History meeting on 24th Feb 2024, as the subject would be of interest to members of The Thomas Brassey Society. Five members of TTBS attended, cake and coffee/tea was available, so, what more do you want?

The speaker started with a brief introduction of his background. His expertise was in the history and social/political aspects of the railway line. He is, by his own admission, not an engineer, or railway buff. When he retired, he decided to do a Ph.D on this rail link, at York University Centre for Rail Studies. He has also written a book from his thesis, published by Pen and Sword, entitled

'The Chester to Holyhead Railway – a new history'.

The brief history is as follows;

In the early 1840's, Chester was losing out to Liverpool, for mail and trade with Ireland; it was also losing out to centres with better railway connections. Chester had lost out to Shrewsbury with Telford's road, now the A5, for the movement of Irish mail. The government of the day, between 1841-1845, led by Sir Robert Peel, wanted to improve communication between London and Dublin to help secure British rule in Ireland. Sir Robert Peel wanted a link that would benefit his constituency, Tamworth, as well as his other vested interests in the Trent Valley. (*What's changed?).* There were a couple of rival routes, the GWR promoted Porth Dinllaen, via Wolverhampton; the increase in the Liverpool route. Holyhead needed this rail link as it was losing out to increased Liverpool – Dublin traffic.

Philip Lloyd's view was that the railway link, wherever it went, was a political railway to secure British rule in Ireland and that politics, not economic or social impact, decided the issue and therefore, the route. It was, in his view, the first 'Imperial Railway'; which he defined as being for political and empire purposes and used the latest technology; railways, the electric telegraph and steamships.

The Peel government, whilst not financing the construction directly, undertook to fund a guaranteed return on investments into its construction of 5%. This was later done in India for railway works on the sub-continent.

The Peel government also supported the route as Peel could use it for his own interests. The rival GWR route, which would have been broad gauge, was finally defeated by the 1845 Gauge Commission coming down in favour of standard gauge.

Philip Lloyd went on to speak about the route as it affected Chester, and worked along the line on the original stations, with some interesting facts, and anecdotes he had discovered. I'll put some of these together for a later newsletter.

All in all, an interesting talk, and a different view of the railway!



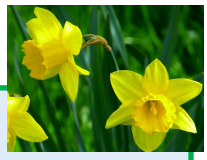


The Brittania Bridge sadly suffered a disastrous fire in 1970:

Here is an interesting photo *(above)* of a piece of the old Tube rescued by a member of the local Fire Brigade. The sign which was inside the Tube stating:

"Last Rivet 5 March 1850 R. Stephenson"

Pictures & text: British Transport Police History Group website



VICTOR-EMMANUEL BRIDGE

('PONT DES ANGLAIS', 'THE ENGLISH BRIDGE')

CRUET, SAVOY, FRANCE By Ian Walker

Those members who assisted with the Society stand in Chester Cathedral for Making Tracks 3, will have seen my model representation of the Cruet bridge. The following is taken from the notes I put together to inform visitors to the TBS stand just why it was there!

The Victor-Emmanuel Bridge, 'Le Pont des Anglais' is an important part of the Industrial Heritage of Savoy, France. Constructed by Thomas Brassey in 1853 – 1856, and opened 20th October 1856 as part of the Choudy (Aix les Bains) to Saint Jean de Maurienne railway line.

The Victor-Emmanuel bridge was the first in France to be constructed using hot rivetted wrought iron which predated by a couple of years the footbridge in Bordeaux, constructed by Eiffel, and by 33 years, the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

The wrought iron had been manufactured using the 'fat puddling' process, which had only been developed in 1847. The Victor-Emmanuel bridge was also the first in France to be constructed as a lattice frame bridge, which had first been developed by Whipple in the USA in 1847.

The bridge supports were constructed using the Triger pneumatic caisson method, this again, was the first time it had been used in France.

So Thomas Brassey was at the forefront of engineering construction!

The Victor-Emmanuel bridge was used as a railway bridge until 1887, when it was converted into a roadway, and, latterly, a cycle way/footpath.

During its life as a railway bridge, it was on the route of 'La Malle des Indes', for 1872-1876, this route formed part of the (mainly) overland mail train route between London and Bombay, avoiding the voyage around Cape of Good Hope in South Africa.

The bridge is constructed over the River Isere, which rises in the French Alps west of Mont Blanc. As it drains glacial and snow melt water, the river level is highest in the summer/autumn months. It has a very high peak flow rate, and thus the river bed consists of stones and boulders brought down by these high flows. The high flows also account for the bridge being built on raised dykes. The bridge is angled to the river direction as this enabled the maximum radius curves to be used to suit the rolling stock of the day.

The Thomas Brassey Society has provided the Department of Savoy in France, via the Savoy Industrial History groups, the information on the historical importance of the bridge, and why it should be maintained and retained for future use. There is a copy of this document on the TBS website, in the section for previous newsletters.



The model is merely a 'representation' of the bridge, detailing the main features. It is built to 'OO' scale, 1:76. An accurate scale model of the whole bridge would have been about 2.25 metres long! The model was constructed from four Dapol girder bridge kits (C03). These kits include the necessary parts to join multiple kits together to produce a longer bridge. Additional girder sections, to resemble the Cruet bridge more accurately, were made with styrene strips, sold for modelling, cut to size and fitted accordingly.

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Cruet Bridge model continued ...



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When completed, the bridge structure was primed with a grey acrylic primer, followed by a finish coat of dark red oxide acrylic paint. A section of track was just stuck down, in reality, the rails would have been fixed directly to a combination of transverse and longitudinal timbers directly fixed to the bridge structure.

I built the model on a sheet of 9mm chipboard, that I had spare. The river banks, and bridge abutments, were constructed from expanded polystyrene, (ex furniture packing), shaped to suit. The river banks were given a coat of filler, painted and covered with a scenic scatter. The bridge abutments were formed with DAS air drying clay, with stonework scribed on, and painted to suit.

The river bed was given a coat of medium grey acrylic paint, as, form looking at other glacial supplied rivers, this seems a fair colour match. The river gravel/cobbles were collected from the lane behind my house, washed, dried, and fixed with a coat of PVA adhesive. The river 'water' itself is again a few levels of PVA glue! A thin layer when dry will dry almost clear, just gradually build up a few layers for the thickness required. I estimate the 'water depth' on the model to be about 5mm, this was the end result of 2 weeks worth of PVA layers and drying time! Cheap in costs, but expensive in time!

The river banks are fairly straight at the bridge site as the river has been straightened, with dykes raised, to contain the snow melt flood waters.

By Ian Walker, Events Co-ordinator

Reminder re Subscriptions !

The 1st of January was an important date in our calendar as it marks that time when your £10.00 subscriptions were 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

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RAILWAY 200 UPDATE

Our colleagues in Michel Dever, Winchester will be hosting a Grand Railway 200 Celebration weekend on Saturday & Sunday 10 & 11 May.

TBS Committee members will be attending with our display stand and if any members are in the vicinity we would be delighted to see you.

200 Years of Train Travel 1825–2025

Sunday 11th May 2025

"MICHELDEVER STATION the Community Created by the Railway"

185 Years since the completion of London-Southampton railway with the opening of Andover Road - now called Micheldever Station.

We encourage people to arrive at Micheldever station by train wherever possible. There is a reliable, hourly, service on Sundays arriving from either direction. Limited Car Parking is available at the premises of EPR, The Barn, Warren Lane which is a private road behind The Warren Centre.

Booking is essential for all TALKS and all WALKS. Please book through our LINK on Railway200 website.

TALKS are in Warren Hall, Andover Road, Micheldever Station, Winchester. SO21 3AR

11.00 - 12.00	***"From Stockton to Micheldever: 185 Years of Micheldever Station."*** Illustrated talk by Howard Sprenger; Author and Transport Historian. The London & Southampton Railway was one of the earliest lines to open and Howard places our station in the context of the development of railways across the country.
12:00 -13:00	***Test Valley Brass*** playing in marquee on the Recreation Field during the Lunch Interval
13:00 -14:00	***"Thomas Brassey: The Greatest Railway Builder in the World."*** Illustrated talk by David Jones, member of the Thomas Brassey Society. We have *Brunel Close* at Micheldever Station, but, who was really responsible for accomplishing this feat of engineering?
14:00 -15:00	***"Trains of Thought and Moving Words: The Language of Railways from the beginning to the Present Day."*** Emeritus Professor of the English Language, Christopher Mulvey, will track the contribution made by the railways to the English Language and how this vocabulary travelled throughout the world.

EXHIBITIONS in Warren Hall throughout the day.

To what extent does The Dove Inn demonstrate the Victorian Railway Companies' concept of Hotel Accommodation for the modern traveller?
Research paper carried out by a student of Southampton University.

Micheldever Station: The Community created by the Railway.
14-panel poster display compiled by Micheldever Station Heritage Group

Needlework Panel forming a textile timeline of train travel depicting lost railways.
Presented by the Mid Hants Railway – Watercress Line to commemorate Railway200

Children's Competition Entries
"The Railway was invented 200 years ago, what will (rail) transport be like in 200 years' time?"

GUIDED WALKS depart from the Station Forecourt

09:30	***Micheldever Station's Hidden History: Guided Tour of the WWII Oil Terminal.*** Patrick Craze, Local Historian & Winchester Green Badge Guide. Steps. Max distance 1 mile.
15:10	***The Windpump Walk*** – a four mile, off-road walk taking you out across the fields parallel to the railway and returning along an ancient drove road. Lynsey Sweeney – Local Rights of Way Volunteers
15:00	***Tour of Micheldever Spoil Heaps – unique environment & SSSI with rare flowers and butterflies.*** At 15:00 Mervyns Coach will drive us from the Station Forecourt to the site. Rough terrain - walk half a mile. Led by: Farm Manager/ botanists / archaeologists / historians / entomologists / railway engineer.
15:30	***Micheldever Station's Hidden History: Guided Tour of the WWII Oil Terminal.*** Patrick Craze, Local Historian & Winchester Green Badge Guide. Steps. Max distance 1 mile.

Railway Modellers display and working models **in the Booking Hall of the railway station.**

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Making Tracks 4

Pete Waterman, in collaboration with Chester Cathedral, is exhibiting a new large model railway in the South Transept of Chester Cathedral from
Saturday 26th July till Saturday 30th August.

We have been invited to bring our stand again and engage with the visitors about Thomas Brassey and his work during the early years of railway building. This means we need your help to 'man' the stand as in previous years. This will be done on a rota basis.

We will be operating each day except Sunday from 10.00 am till 4.00 pm. I can promise you an interesting day - one which I am sure you will enjoy. Refreshments are available from the Refectory.

Please email our Committee member, Trustee Jean Fortune, with your name and availability, if you would like to help us out by joining the Rota
jean.fortune@btinternet.com.

We look forward to seeing you at the unveiling of the statue or during Making Tracks.
With best wishes
Peter Bolt, Hon Secretary



Pete Waterman & Peter Bolt in 2023

Who were the other Railway Builders?

Have you ever wondered who the other Contractors were — operating at the same time as Thomas Brassey? The following table shows how busy they all were but with Brassey leading the pack.

Leading Public Works Contractors Prior to 1914

Name	Dates active	Number of Contracts	Number of Railway Contracts	Mileage	Value
Thomas Brassey	1834–1871	c. 190	174	6,415	£65–£100m
Brassey and Ogilivie		45	42		£10m
Sir R McAlpine and Sons	1868–(1914)	125	53		£7.3m
S Peto	1830–1872	123	98		£38m
H & D McIntosh	1790–1841	119	35		£6.5m
George Pauling, etc.	1881–(1914)	119	109	4,904	£32m(1930)
S Pearson and Sons	1854–1926	115	26		£63m
Joliffe and Banks	1789–1834	102	1		£4m
J Aird and Sons (incl. Aird and Lucas)	1848–1912	83	31		
W Scott and Middleton	1849–1910	66	38		£5m
(Sir) J Jackson	1875–(1914)	64	5		£35m
Fox Henderson	1841–1856	63	5		
Woodiwiss and Benton	1840–1880	62	56		
Nowells (incl. Hattersley Monk)	1780–1890	61	49		
William Mackenzie	1834–1851	61 (incl. M&B)	54		£18m
W Dargan	1819–1856	58	37		£10m
Warings	*c.* 1835–1880	31	31		
G Wythes	*c.* 1837–1875	42	39		£10m
Jackson and Bean	1821–1880	41	20		
J & J T Firbank	*c.* 1841–1900	38			
Mousley and Lovatt		25			
Davies and Savin		20	20		

Courtesy of the late John Millar "*Epilogue to Thomas Brassey & Canada Works*"