# Welcome to our October 2025 Newsletter



The THOMAS BRASSEY Society

NEWSLETTER

**A message from our Patron, Pete Waterman**

I was pleased to attend the unveiling of the magnificent statue at Chester Station by the Duke of Gloucester at the end of May. The Committee have done a sterling job of steering the project through the Planning Application stage and obtaining the various permissions required for locating the statue in such a prominent location.

## Chairman's Notes



Dear Members

I am writing soon after our well attended Annual General Meeting at the Queen Hotel, Chester.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new members who have joined in the last few months. I hope that you find the objectives of our Society stimulating and are able to support our various activities when possible.

Members will already be aware that Peter Bolt has stood down as Secretary. Quietly determined, talented, knowledgeable and very enthusiastic; these words could be used to describe several members of the TBS Committee but none more so than our friend and colleague, Peter Bolt. As many of you will know, Peter has been a stalwart of the committee since our inauguration in 2019. In fact, he has been a champion of Thomas Brassey and has given dozens of lectures about our local hero over many years. So, as Peter stands down as our Secretary, we wish him well and look forward to his continuing help and advice as a Committee member. Our grateful thanks also go to Peter's wife, Gillian, who has done all our desktop publishing and newsletters. Fortunately, Gillian is willing to continue in this role for the time being.

Now that we have the statue installation behind us it is time to look ahead at other objectives and the Committee has already started on this initiative. There are three distinct areas as follows: -

*Development of public knowledge of Thomas Brassey by public talks, develop Social Media platforms and explore the restoration of the large portrait of Thomas Brassey at the Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

*Ensure the heritage of Thomas Brassey discovered to date is not lost. We would like a dedicated area for artefacts, information etc probably in Chester where there are several possibilities to be explored. On the same theme, we could improve our website, Wikipedia and an App showing where all Brassey's works are in the world.

*Television Programme in the form of a documentary or ideally a series of short programmes.

Since the installation of the statue in May we have written to Cheshire West and Chester Council suggesting that we gift the statue to the Council in order for it to be included with all their other similar objects in the public realm. We have not had a response to date but will keep members informed.

Finally, I would just like to express our gratitude to Keith Stoops who has been our Treasurer during a particularly busy time in terms of money both coming in and going out. He has also ensured that all Gift Aid has been accounted for giving the Society a significant additional income.

With best wishes

*Stephen Langtree MBE*

# MAKING TRACKS 5




**We were pleased to receive a request from the Chester Cathedral authorities for our society to provide a stand for the duration of the exhibition.**

Trustee Jean Fortune did a good job of organising our attendance at the stand on a rota basis such that over the five-week period we were able to cover most days. The period of July-August was ideal for visitors but of course society members also had holidays at that time.

The model railway layout was larger than previously and was ideal for children to operate the trains using electronic tablets, under supervision of course! Our overall opinion was that visitor numbers were somewhat lower than previous years, perhaps as a result of it no longer being such a novel attraction.

We found it very useful to talk to visitors not just from UK but from many parts of the world. We were fortunate to receive a few new members as well. We received many favourable comments about the statue and it was clear that the publicity we received has been effective.

The process of erecting the exhibition showed that we do need to update some of our information now that one of our objectives of constructing the statue has been achieved.

## 2025 CHRISTMAS CARD

We have in the past produced Christmas Cards for Committee members to send. However, the Committee undertook a review considering the significant increase in postage costs which have been implemented recently. We also found that people are starting to use electronic Christmas Cards in response to the higher costs. We have therefore decided to produce our own electronic version for all society members to use. This year's card will of course be based on the new statue and will be sent out in due course.

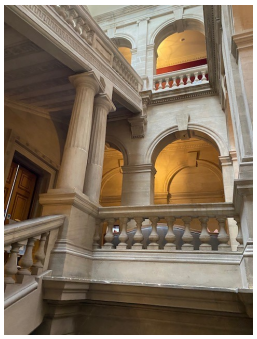
## Another Brassey Legacy — Heythrop Hall

Heythrop Hall in the Cotswolds was bought by Thomas Brassey for his younger son, Albert when he married. Although it had been damaged by fire, the stone structure (originally built in the late 1700's) was intact and Alfred set about restoring it. It has now become a Warner's prime hotel and Peter & Gillian Bolt met up with friends there earlier this year to check it out! The refurbishment has been done beautifully and the Brassey Bar, along with talks on the history of the house, ensured that the Brassey connection was fully acknowledged. It's well worth a visit!



*Peter Bolt checking out the portrait of Thomas in the 'Brassey Bar'.*





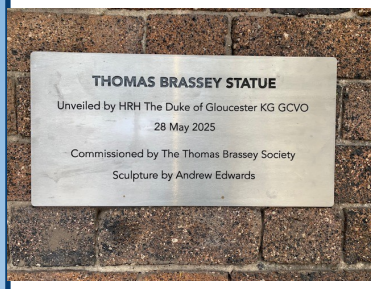


# New Plaque at Chester Station




When the Duke of Gloucester unveiled the statue in May, he also unveiled a small plaque. The plaque was unfixed at the time as we needed to get permission to erect it at our preferred location due to the station being a Listed Building. It has taken a little time to obtain permission and arrange for a contractor to fix it with hidden bolts to the wall.

In September the plaque was fixed and we have located it directly above the Thomas Brassey information panel. It is within a suitable distance of the statue so the plaque, information panel and statue all now read well together.




We are noticing that station users are now taking more interest in the information panel now that the statue has been erected. At the time of erecting the statue we arranged for the removal of the finger direction post and the litter bins to give a more open aspect around the statue. It is interesting that despite moving the litter bins across the road there has not been any increase in litter local to the statue, wins all round!

# Annual General Meeting 2025

The meeting took place at the Queen Hotel, Chester on October 4th and was very well attended by about a third of the membership. The main points were as follows: -

***The Cruet Bridge in France is beginning to look as if it may be preserved.**

***Keith Stoops, our Treasurer, is stepping down and Jean Fortune will be taking over the role.**

***Peter Bolt has resigned as Secretary and John Violet has taken over the role. The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Peter for his input over many years and presented him with an inscribed glass tankard from the Institution of Civil Engineers.**



***There was an active discussion on the proposal to have a television programme about Thomas Brassey and even possibly a documentary series.**

After the formal part of the meeting Stuart Shuttleworth spoke about the Inventory related to connections with Thomas Brassey. It will include information sources including articles, books and on-line references. In addition, there will be references to places where Thomas Brassey is commemorated such as plaques and the statue of course. There are about 70 roads with Brassey in their names! The inventory will be added to the website to include the reference information.

After a short break we had a talk by Mike Lamport about Railway 200 which is taking place this year. Mike comes from what is probably the oldest railway family in the world and confidently showed the roles of family members over the generations. He was influential in getting the High-Speed Train locomotive restored and is now on display in the National Railway Museum next to 'Locomotion', which hauled the train on the Stockton and Darlington Railway 200 years ago.

The Railway 200 celebration brings back the 'feel good factor' with historic stations having been cleaned and renovated. Railway 200 also includes art and music associated with the railways. There is a train touring the country entitled '***Inspiration Train'*** which not only shows the history of railways development but also encourages young people to consider careers on the railway.

Mike has been fortunate to have been invited to many events this year, but he thought our statue unveiling was certainly one of the best!

# Chester to Crewe Railway

## *How did Brassey build a railway under a canal?*

**Thomas Brassey built 11 miles of the railway and I am reasonably confident that it was the section from Chester to near Beeston. The railway is in a cutting for the first three miles out of Chester and the remainder has few significant engineering features. The reason for such a long length of cutting is the need to take the railway beneath the Shropshire Union Canal at Christleton which at the time would have been an important transport artery to both Chester and Ellesmere Port.**

**I have always been intrigued as to how Brassey built the railway beneath the canal, and it is only in recent months that I have discovered his secret.**

The photograph (right) shows the twin bore tunnels carrying the main line railway beneath the canal. The foliage of the trees hides the canal itself, but it can be seen that there was very little space between the top of the tunnel arch and the soffit of the canal. This small height difference precluded the possibility of constructing the tunnel in a traditional manner. The only way to construct the tunnel beneath the canal would be to remove the canal at that location, excavate down to the level of the required railway, construct the brick arch tunnels, backfill and reconstruct the canal.





There are two locks in the vicinity of the tunnels, and I have always assumed that goods would have had to be transhipped by horse and cart between the locks for the period of the works. However, I have recently discovered that Brassey diverted the canal towards the photographer in the above photo. He was then able to construct the twin tunnels in his own time whilst the boats travelled around the works. The canal was diverted for a length of about 250 metres, and the photograph (left) shows the view from Christleton Lock towards Chester. The further lock can be seen in the distance but there is little sign of the diversion works remaining at this end of the canal. However, a few years ago the lock weir was blocked with the canal water finding the diversion route and flooding the railway tracks, at

## /Chester to Crewe Railway continued



great expense for the Canal & River Trust. At the next lock there is clear evidence of the canal diversion route. The Canal & River Trust boundary even extends to include the route and the adjacent road alignment mirrors the angle of the disused section of canal. The photograph on the right (looking towards Christleton Lock from the Greenfield Lock) shows the land extending well beyond the towpath and the gap in the vegetation is where the diverted canal met the original alignment.

The next photograph (below) shows the diversion more clearly with the garden hoardings erected at the further bank of the temporary canal. Bullrushes can be seen growing in the bed of the diverted canal and the change in vegetation gives a clear indication of the alignment.



The diverted canal in the vicinity of the railway would then have been removed and excavated down to railway level to complete the route. The construction of this relatively small tunnel was very labour intensive and would have needed a large amount of planning as the logistics of moving so much earth etc would have tasked the minds of engineers today.

John Violet

Secretary & Trustee

***With best wishes to all our members***
***from***
***The Trustees, The Thomas Brassey Society***