

AS BOLD AS BRASSEY

This summer, a special excursion train, complete with headboard, ran on a return journey from Crewe to Holyhead along the North Wales coastline. It was a special tour to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of a highly decorated railway engineer, Thomas Brassey. Stéphanie Durrant provides a special review of this extraordinary character.

MOST people applaud the likes of Richard Branson and his Virgin Company for having forward thinking and good business politics, but two hundred years ago there was a man who paved the way for others to succeed.

Thomas Brassey was born near Chester on the November 7th 1805. He received an ordinary commercial education at a local school. Leaving at sixteen, he started an apprenticeship at a surveyor. On completion of his training he became a partner of the firm and spent his early years building a reputable foundation for his future.

In 1835 he was invited by the engineer Joseph Locke to work on the Grand Junction Railway. With Locke he also completed the London and Southampton Railway, whilst also taking on other projects north of the border.

By 1840 Brassey's men could be found worldwide. Across the channel he worked on the Paris to Rouen line; and many others in France and UK. One of his largest contracts was in Canada. 1100 miles of track on the Grand Trunk Railway this included a fine bridge over the St. Lawrence River. By then his workforce of navvies were over 75000, and he was responsible for over £36,000,000 in

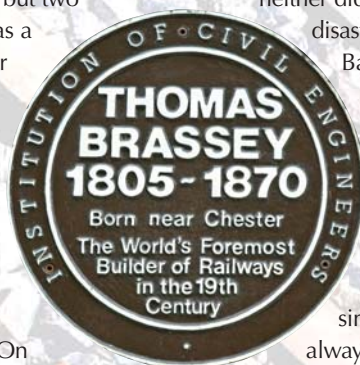
contracts.

Brassey ventured out into coal, ironworks and even dockyards. Wealth did not distract him, neither did failure. One of his greatest disasters was the collapse of the Barentin Viaduct on the Rouen Harve line. Brassey investigated the problem and took responsibility; this resulted in improving communication between the various factors of his workforce.

He was considered a kind and simple man and led by example, always aware what his great power could commend but never abused it. During his lifetime, he received the Legion of Honour, the order of St Maurice and St Lazarus, and from the Austrian emperor he even received the Iron Crown - never before awarded to a foreigner.

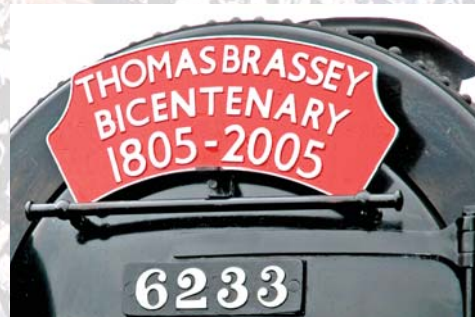
He died in St Leonard's on 8th December 1870. He left three sons. His eldest became Lord Brassey and entered Parliament. Other family are still alive and spread around all corners of the globe, and still involved in railways. ■

Below Locomotive No 6233, *Duchess of Sutherland* pictured at full speed hauling a Thomas Brassey Bicentenary steam special between Crewe and Holyhead. Photograph by Stéphanie Durrant.



Above An old portrait of the highly decorated railway engineer, Thomas Brassey.

Below A special headboard was attached to the *Duchess* to commemorate Brassey's 200th birthday. Photograph by Stéphanie Durrant.



Above A view of Richmond Bridge.

