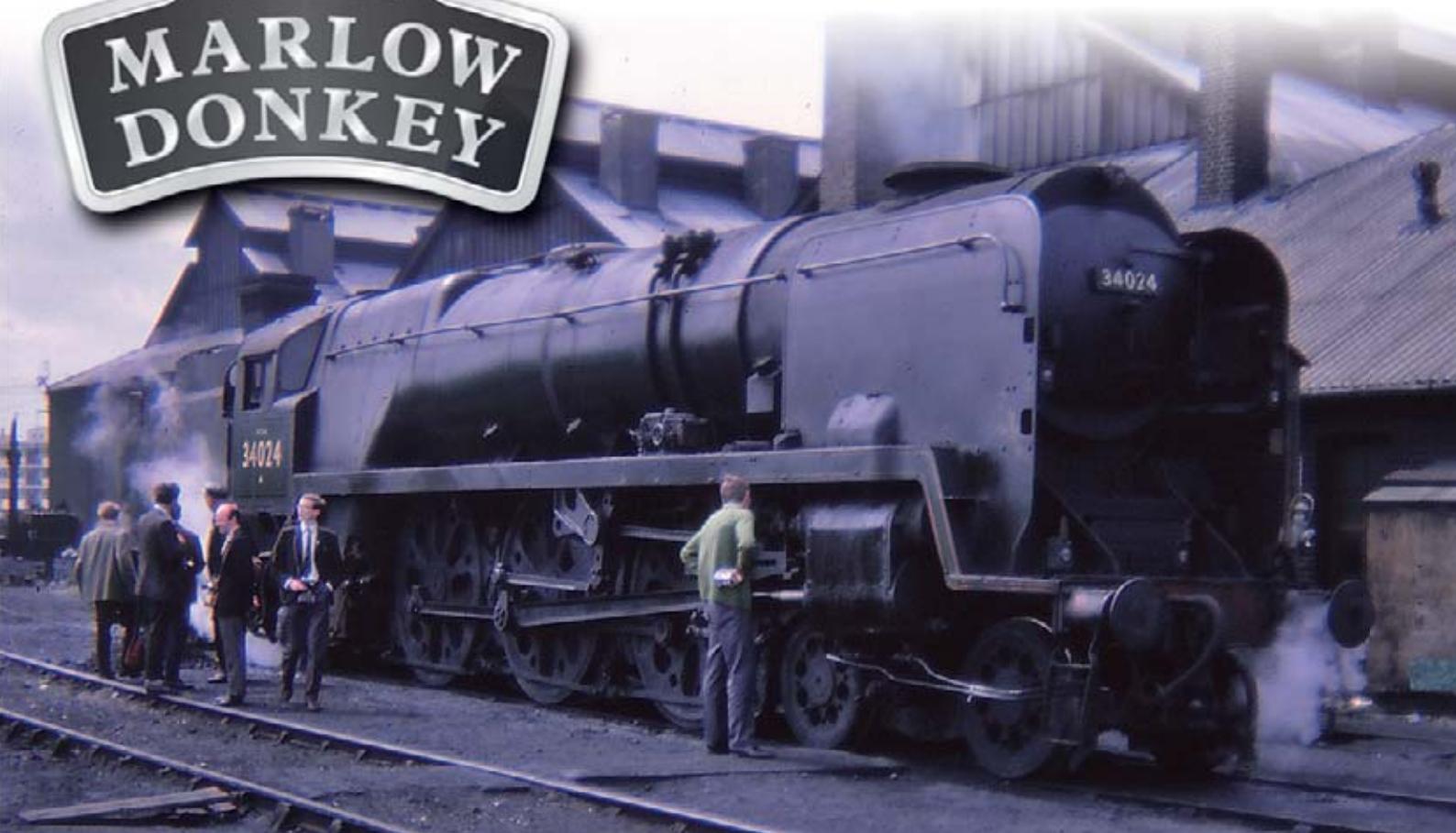


# THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

**157**

June 2017



Contents:

- Waterloo Sunset
- Howay the Lads - Part 2
- Saluda: The Mountain of Challenge
- The Legend of Box Tunnel

# The Marlow Donkey

## The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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The contents of the *Marlow Donkey* represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Society

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### Front Cover Photographs

*Top: West Country 34024 Tamar Valley stands on Nine Elms Shed 2 July 1967.*  
*Photo Tim Speechley. Article page 5.*

*Bottom left: Sir Berkeley at Andrews House Station on the Tanfield Railway.*  
*Photo: Tim Speechley. Article page 11.*

*Bottom right: Three EMD SD40s at Saluda. Photo: Mike Walker. Article page 15.*

# **TIMETABLE**

## **FORTHCOMING MEETINGS**

All meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.45 for 8.00pm  
(except June which is at 7.15 for 7.30pm.)

Thursday 15 June

**55 YEARS OF RAILWAY PHOTOGRAPHY - PART 1**

Dr. Les Nixon

The noted railway photographer makes a return visit to share his remarkable collection. Please note this is our annual joint meeting with the RCTS and will therefore start at 19:30 not the usual 20:00.

Thursday 20 July

**STRICTLY FREIGHT ONLY**

Brian Ringer

Brian a former Freight Operations Manager at the Strategic Rail Authority will give an illustrated presentation that takes us through 50 or more of the freight businesses on Britain's Railways.

Thursday 21 September

**MANGAPPS RAILWAY**

John Jolly

The Mangapps Railway and Museum is a heritage railway centre located near Burnham-on-Crouch in Essex. The 3/4 miles of standard gauge demonstration train-track and museum are owned and operated by the Jolly family assisted by volunteers.

## **FORTHCOMING VISITS**

Thursday 17 August

**DAVID BUCK'S FIFIELD RAILWAY**

Once again we will be visiting David Buck's private railway at Fifield. Departure time around 6.15/6.30 to arrive at 7pm. We will take names at our June and July meetings so that we can advise David how many to expect as well as plan transport. There is no charge for this trip.

Saturday 9 September

**STATFOLD BARN RAILWAY**

As usual, much has changed at Statfold since our last visit in 2015 so it's worth a return visit. See page 3 for further details.

## **CHAIRMAN'S NOTES**

With the lead times required for production of the *Donkey*, this is my first opportunity to write following our AGM in February, at which Peter Robins won the Norman Aston-Smith Award for the best article in the magazine, as voted for by the membership. It was therefore very embarrassing when the actual trophy was unavailable for presentation but last year's winner, our esteemed editor, Mike Walker, is adamant that he cannot find it, so Peter has had to be satisfied with a "virtual" trophy in the form of a photograph. Now in no way do I want to diminish Peter's success but in recent years the number of members who have voted for this award has been reducing steadily, to the point where only 18 people (less than a third of the membership) could be bothered to do so this year. Given this obvious lack of interest and participation, plus the unfortunate disappearance of the physical trophy, it has been decided to cease this aspect of the society's AGM activity and sadly the Norman Aston-Smith trophy will no longer be awarded. I'm sure some of you will be as upset as I am over this but frankly I don't see any alternative.

With the abandonment of the award, the name Norman Aston-Smith will probably disappear completely from future editions of the *Donkey* and other society documentation, so here may be a good opportunity to give a brief outline of this man, because I suspect very few current members, me included, ever knew him. Malcolm Margetts has done some research on my behalf from back numbers and it appears Norman Aston-Smith was not one of the 16 people who attended the inaugural meeting of the society in February 1977 but he must have joined

somewhere in the middle of that year because he died very soon afterwards, on 11th September. He was a passionate and knowledgeable enthusiast, with a large (400+) collection of books, which were catalogued by the society's Alan Wheeler in order to help the solicitor handling the estate. The short obituary in edition no.4 of the *Donkey* says he was well known in Bourne End and latterly had been very active in the MMPA.

In fact he was a founder member in 1972 and on the committee until his death. On the suggestion of Ken Riley, BR (WR) Divisional Passenger Manager at Reading, an ex-GWR bench was provided for Bourne End station, to which, in a formal ceremony, they affixed a plaque stating "Marlow/Maidenhead Passengers' Association. This seat is dedicated to Norman John Aston-Smith for his services to the Association and local community - May 1978". That bench is still there and in remarkably good condition, though apparently it was replaced by a horrible NSE metal one and had to be rescued from a pile of scrap at Maidenhead, being returned and relocated in the booking hall for safe keeping. One person who did know him is Mike Walker, who tells me he lived in Furlong Road, Bourne End and worked at nearby Jackson's Mill. A life-long bachelor he had many plans for his retirement but sadly, very soon after reaching 65, he suffered a heart attack in Lloyds Bank in Bourne End and died a few days later. He must have made quite an impression on people, otherwise why would there be a society trophy named after somebody who was a member for just a couple of months?

*Continued on page 3*

Page 2

# SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

## WELCOME AND FAREWELL

Once again we welcome two new members, Allan Wheeler from Bracknell and Bryan Styles from Booker. We hope you enjoy our activities.

Sadly, however, we have to record that Tony Ball passed away on 12th April after a fight with cancer. Tony was an engineer and made not only 00 gauge locomotives but also miniature marine steam engines for model boats. He visited all the heritage lines and once drove *Flying Scotsman*.

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Brian Stephenson returned for our March meeting with another fascinating dive into his remarkable photographic archive. This time he included not just railways but also some other forms of transport including a few buses, trucks and ships.

The Pullman car was the subject of our April meeting. Phil Evans took us through the history of the Pullman company from its origins in the USA and operations in this country followed by a review of the surviving cars - not all exactly "operational".

Local celebrity Norman Topson MBE was our guest for the May meeting. Having spent more than half a century working on the railways at Henley, Reading and latterly Twyford he entertained us with amusing anecdotes and stories all without the use of illustrations.

## STATFOLD BARN VISIT

Our second outing planned for this year is another visit to that "narrow gauge utopia" Statfold Barn for their annual enthusiasts' open day on **Saturday 9th September**.

Although we have made several visits previously, returns are never disappointing as the railway is in constant state of development and change, much having been added since our last visit in 2015 including a street tramway.

As we have to book the tickets for this event in advance, it is essential you book your place as early as possible with Brian Hopkinson - details as above.

A great day out is assured - even if it rains!



## CHANGING THE GUARD

The May timetable change marked the end of two eras and the start of a new one locally. Firstly, the last through trains between Bourne End and Paddington ran on 19th May with 166213 running the final 1P97, the 08:28 from the branch [Below] in the morning.



The destination "London Paddington" displayed on the screens at Bourne End for the last time.

both photos: Mike Walker

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES *continued from page 2*

The original trophy was a full-sized wooden signal arm (replaced at Bourne End in 1956) that came from Norman's collection, via Alan Wheeler but I can't find out when an award was first made for a *Donkey* article, though suspect it was sometime in the early 1980's. It was Alan who subsequently made the attractive, later trophy, a miniature signal arm on a hardwood plinth, that was much lighter to handle, more acceptable indoors to non-railway minded partners and, as events testify, unfortunately much more easily mislaid.

It's a shame this aspect of the Society's activities must come to an end but perhaps it had run its course. The *Donkey* is such a brilliant production for a small society

and the overall quality of the articles extremely high, making the selection of one annual "best" a difficult task, which maybe explains the diminishing number of votes. The important thing is for the magazine to continue to thrive and for that to happen it needs articles, so can I ask all of you to think seriously about contributing, please. Mike does a fabulous job as editor but he does need material, so please do your bit.

Kind regards to you all.

Tim Speechley

Norman Aston-Smith is on the right of his fellow MMPA committee members gathered in front of 1450 at Buckfastleigh on 12th September 1976.

Photo: Mike Walker

The Marlow Donkey



The final down service, 1N42, the 16:42 from Paddington, was formed of 165133 with the destination properly shown. The driver welcomed all aboard what was dubbed the "Bourne End Flyer" as it ran non-stop to Maidenhead. It arrived at its destination two minutes early.

*both photos: Mike Walker*



The same day saw Chiltern bid farewell to their Bubble Cars on the Aylesbury - Princes Risborough peak hour shuttles. Extra trains were run during the day although one round trip had to be cancelled due to a radio fault. Both cars were in use for the extras and evening runs with blue 121020 making its first appearance in service for many months having been side-lined by a transmission fault (it ran on one engine only).

Here the pair pass Askett forming 2Z92, the 12:50 Princes Risborough to Aylesbury.

*photo: Peter Robins*



With the summer timetable Great Western introduced peak hour electric services to and from Maidenhead from Monday 22nd May.

The first train was 1P92, the 06:28 which runs non-stop and was formed of 387132 and 387133 seen standing at Maidenhead.

Unfortunately the launch was marred by a GPS fault which prevented the doors from opening at Maidenhead and Taplow on the second train which therefore had to be cancelled!

Additional services are planned to operate from 3rd July and a full service through to Didcot in December.

*photo: Mike Walker*

# WATERLOO SUNSET



Tim Edmonds

Fifty years ago this summer we bade farewell to the last steam-worked main line in this country, from Waterloo to Weymouth. To mark the anniversary, various MDRS members have dug into their photo collections to present this pictorial tribute.

Bulleid Pacifics were the dominant power in the closing years. 35023 (formerly *Holland-Afrika Line*) awaiting departure from Waterloo on 2nd July 1966.

Some of the unrebuilt West Countries lasted until the end including 34102 (*Lapford*) after arrival at Waterloo with an Ocean Liner Express from Southampton on 30th June 1967.



Tim Edmonds



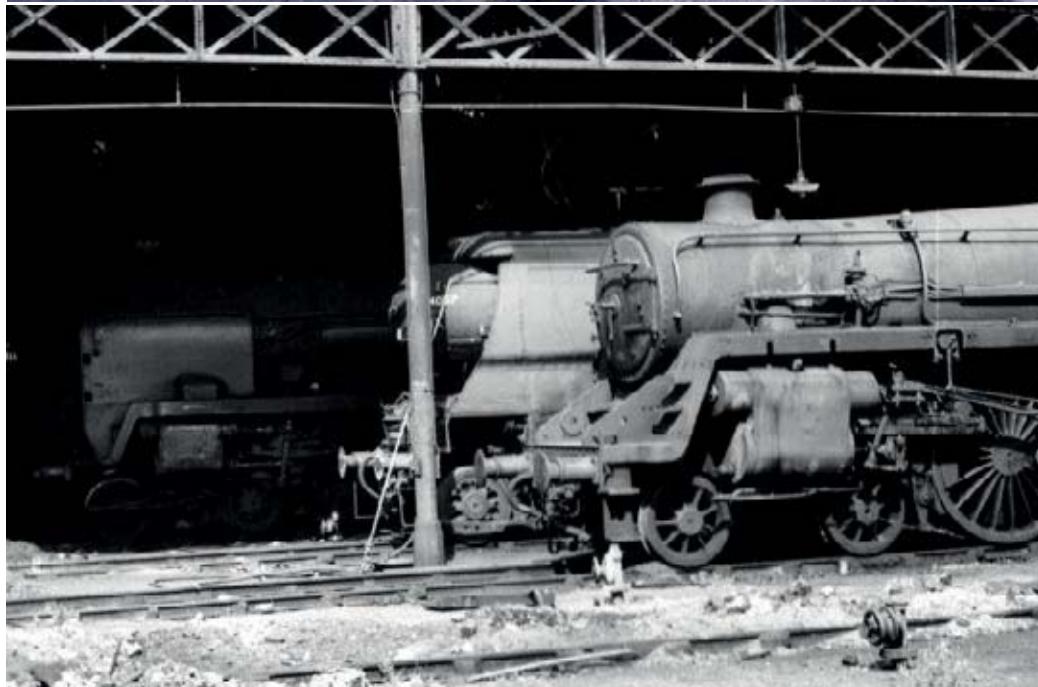
With steam seemingly leaking from every joint, Merchant Navy 35027 *Port Line* backs out of Waterloo bound for Nine Elms depot.

Ron North

Nine Elms, as the last steam shed in London, was a mecca for enthusiasts in the final months. The local staff seemed to turn a blind eye to those bunking the shed and even doing a spot of unofficial engine-cleaning.

On 2nd July 1967, the day of the official end of Southern steam, Standard Fives 73093 and 73065 plus West Country 34024 were on shed, the latter commendably clean despite having lost its *Tamar Valley* nameplates as had nearly all the Bulleids by this late stage.

Both: Tim Speechley



Nine Elms depot was notorious for its rundown condition long before the rundown of steam began thanks to wartime bomb damage which had not been repaired.

On 30th June 1967 Merchant Navy 35013 (*Blue Funnel*), Battle of Britain 34057 (*Biggin Hill*) and 73022 await their fate amongst the same detritus so superbly captured by David Shepherd in his evocative painting *Nine Elms The Last Hours*.

Tim Edmonds

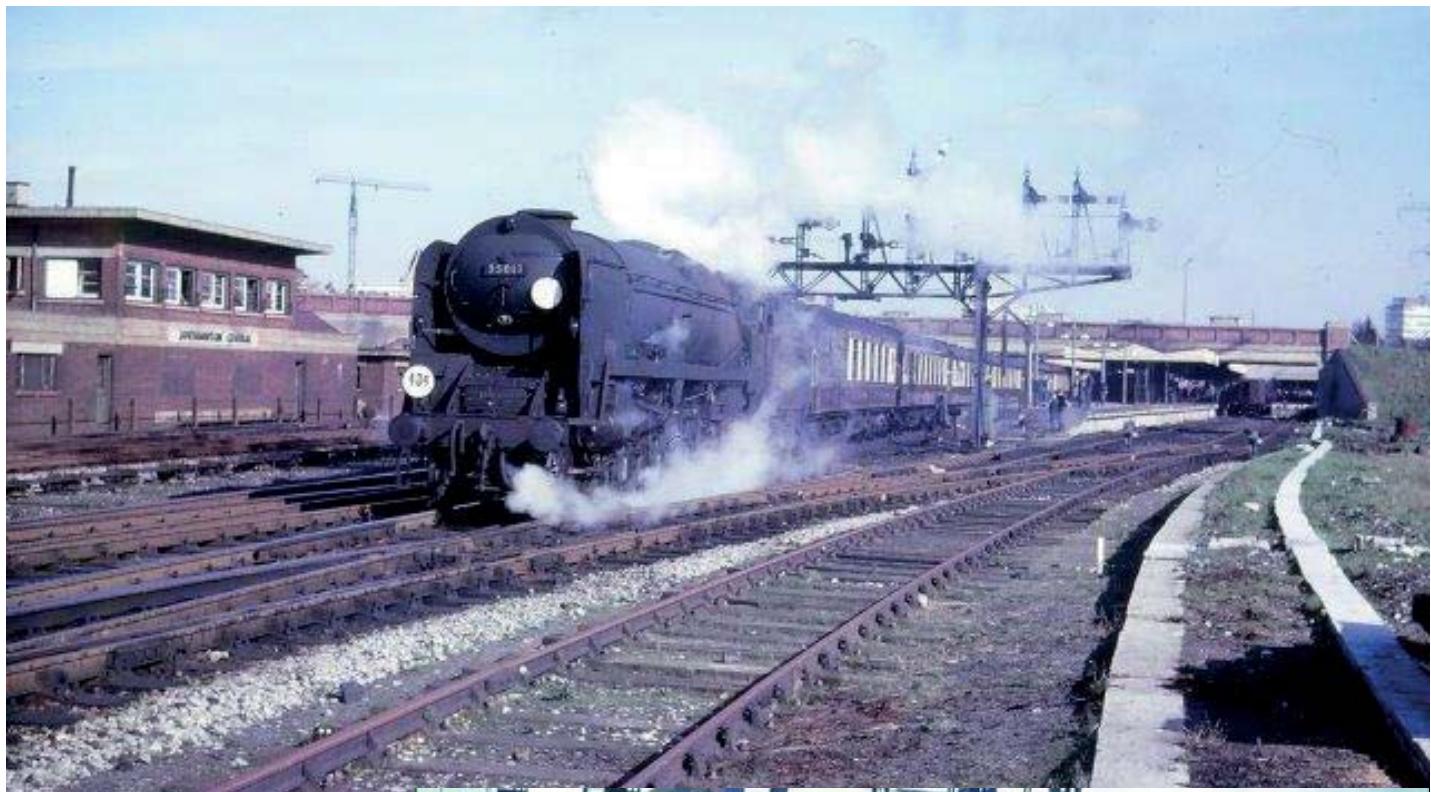


A couple of years before the end, West Country 34104 *Bere Alston* thunders past Hook on a down boat express bound for Southampton.

34002 *Salisbury* approaches Basingstoke with another Southampton-bound express.

34010 *Sidmouth* approaching Worting Junction having come off the Battledown Flyover from the Southampton line.

*All: Ron North.*



Southampton Central was another mecca for photographers especially with its impressive signal gantry.

35013 *Blue Funnel* restarts the down *Bournemouth Belle* which remained steam-hauled until the end.

34071 *601 Squadron* awaits departure as 34091 *Weymouth* approaches with the *Pines Express*.

Much less glamorous, Standard 4MT tank 80093 sets out with a local bound for Bournemouth.

All: Ron North.





Steam operation wasn't just confined to the main line, both the Lymington and Swanage branches held out until 1967.

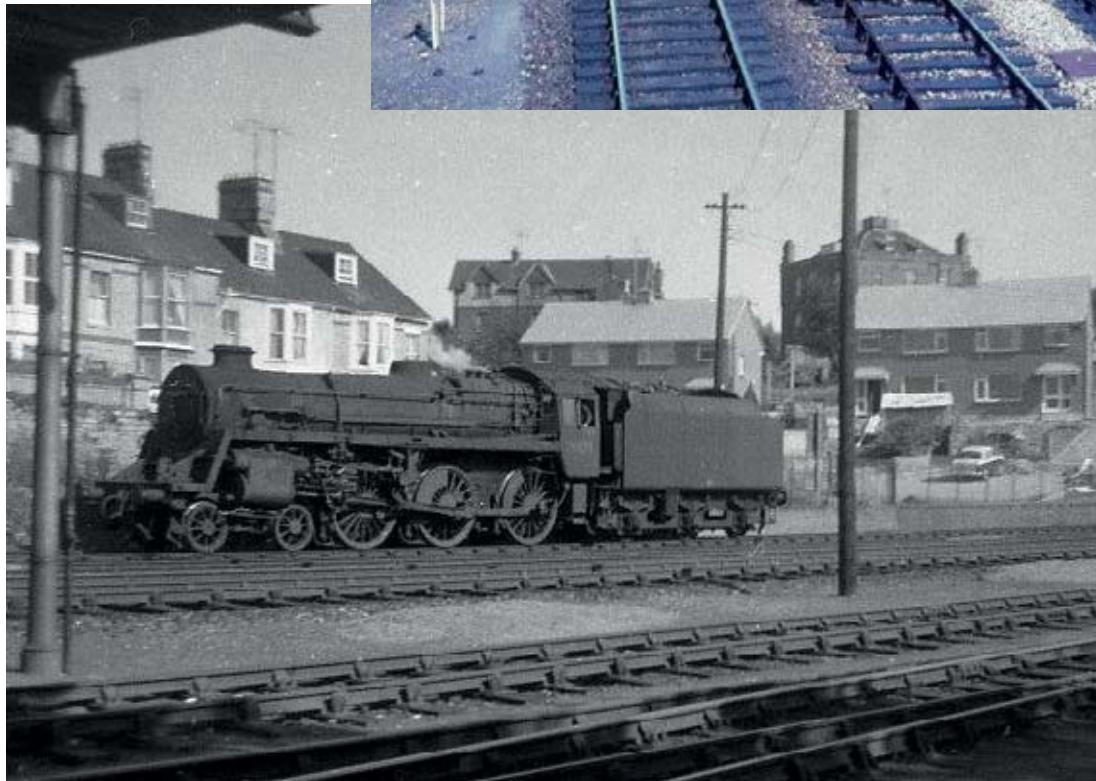
Ivatt 2MT tank 41230 waits to leave Swanage for Wareham on a fine summer day - what a contrast with the same view today.

Ron North.



Approaching journey's end, West Country Pacific 34008 *Padstow* coasts down the hill into Weymouth passing the loco shed where a Hymek lurks having no doubt brought a train from Bristol.

Ron North.



BR Standard 4MT 4-6-0 75079 simmers at Weymouth on 20th August 1965. This locomotive was one of the lucky ones which survived the end of steam and is currently being overhauled at Ropley.

Nigel Hunt.



Towards the end of steam, a number of BR Standard and LMS designed locomotives were transferred to the Southern to replace elderly native stock.

One such immigrant, Ivatt 2MT tank 41301 shunts at Weymouth with Jersey Sidings in the background.

Ron North.



The end. Merchant Navies 35007 *Aberdeen Commonwealth* and 35008 *Orient Line* attack the climb out of Weymouth at Upwey with BR's official *Farewell to Southern Steam* special returning to Waterloo on 2nd July 1967.

Colour-Rail BRS14.

Several locomotives lingered around the network awaiting their call to scrap including Standards 4MTs 76033 and 80019 seen at Salisbury shed in September 1967. The cut-out in the cabside of the mogul formerly contained the automatic token exchange equipment when it was allocated to the S&D.

Tony Allerton.



# HOWAY THE LADS

Tim Speechley visits the North East  
Part 2 The Tanfield Railway



Next morning was dull and damp and not at all what we had wanted for our visit to the Tanfield Railway's "Legends of Industry" gala. However, spurred on by Jim's enduring enthusiasm, we were up and out pretty early for me and it didn't take very long to get to the railway, seeing that 8 wheel Sentinel from Beamish on the back of a low-loader en-route. Fortunately any rain had stopped by the time we arrived but the sun remained singularly absent.

The Tanfield bills itself as "the World's Oldest Railway" having been laid down as a horse-worked waggonway in 1725, a full hundred years before the opening of the Stockton and Darlington. More recently it had been part of a colliery line and the central focus of operations is Marley Hill engine shed that remained in use until about 1970. Since then volunteers have worked hard to preserve and relay track about a mile to the north (Sunniside) and a couple of miles south, to Causey Arch and beyond to East Tanfield, creating stations at these three places and one close to the shed, named Andrews House. The railway very much reflects its industrial past and operates a variety of small locomotives, mostly from the local area that was, of course, criss-crossed by all manner of industrial lines until the 1960's. For this particular gala two visitors were present, *Sir Berkeley* an 1891 Manning Wardle 0-6-0ST, owned by the Vintage Carriages Trust (who had been the



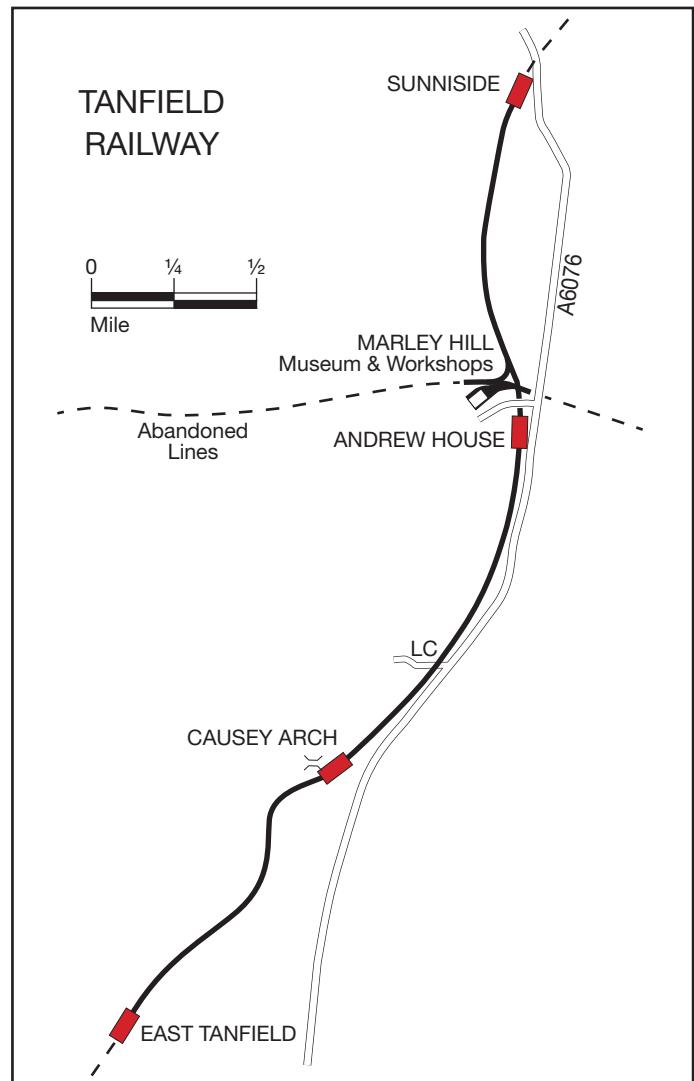
*Sir Berkeley* brewing up at Andrews House station [Right] and working with some of the line's lovely four wheeled coaches [Top].

recipients of my magazines earlier) but currently on loan to the Middleton Railway and all the way from the Kent and East Sussex Railway, USA tank 30065, which must be one of very few, or maybe the only ex-BR loco to have run here in preservation. Nevertheless, for these two days it had been transformed into a recreation of NCB Northumberland Area No. 35, because the NCB did operate three USA tanks to the north of the Tyne for about a decade after WW2. I have to say the conversion into this guise was very well done and the loco did not look at all out of place.

Three other steam locos from Tanfield's own stock were also in operation, the most interesting of which was *Twizell* (named after a local wood, not the TV character from my early childhood) a fairly sizeable 0-6-0T built by Robert Stephenson and Co in 1891 and latterly based nearby at the oddly named Morrison Busty Colliery. A fairly intensive service of both passenger and coal trains was operated by individual or double headed locos and activities were made more interesting with some trains starting or finishing at Marley Hill yard, often being banked out of there onto the main line. I hope the photos give some idea of the atmosphere generated.

Part way through the Saturday afternoon Jim and I abandoned the gala for a while, returning towards Birtley in order to see *Flying Scotsman* passing the Angel of the North whilst heading south with a special returning to Cleethorpes, having worked to Morpeth in the morning. Can you think of two more unlikely end points for a steam special ?

*The USA tank, not looking out of place on a coal train, heads for Sunniside.*





Twizell (RSH 2730/1891) at Marley Hill with an authentic NCB backdrop of general dereliction. It was new to Joicey Colliery.

Inside the running shed at Marley Hill with NCB Austerity 49 (RSH 7098/1943) closest and Lambton, Hetton & Joicey Collieries No.14 (HL 3056/1914) beyond.





*Two of the line's resident locos, Keighley Corporation Gas Dept. No.2, (HL 2859/1911) and Newcastle upon Tyne & Gateshead Gas Co. Sir Cecil A Cochrane (RSH 7409/1948) on a passenger train heading for Sunniside*

We returned for the last of the gala action and had a brief look at what remains of Tyne Yard on our way back to the hotel. We thought we would try to find somewhere to eat in Washington this evening but I found it virtually impossible to navigate in this new town, consisting of new tree-lined roads with virtually no landmarks (I have the same difficulty with Milton Keynes!) We eventually found somewhere but quite frankly it wasn't a patch on the Italian.

I had thought we might both go to Beamish on the Sunday but Jim was very keen to return to Tanfield, so that's what we did. The north-east managed to produce an even duller day than on the Saturday, which did not help the photography at all, though I have to say the railway has a fairly "laissez-faire" attitude towards lineside access (as some of my shots may show) which makes life a lot easier than at most of our local lines. We did some travelling on the trains, which consist of four wheelers much in keeping with the motive power, and everyone we met was very friendly and the volunteers include a high percentage of youngsters, which is very heartening and hopeful for the future.

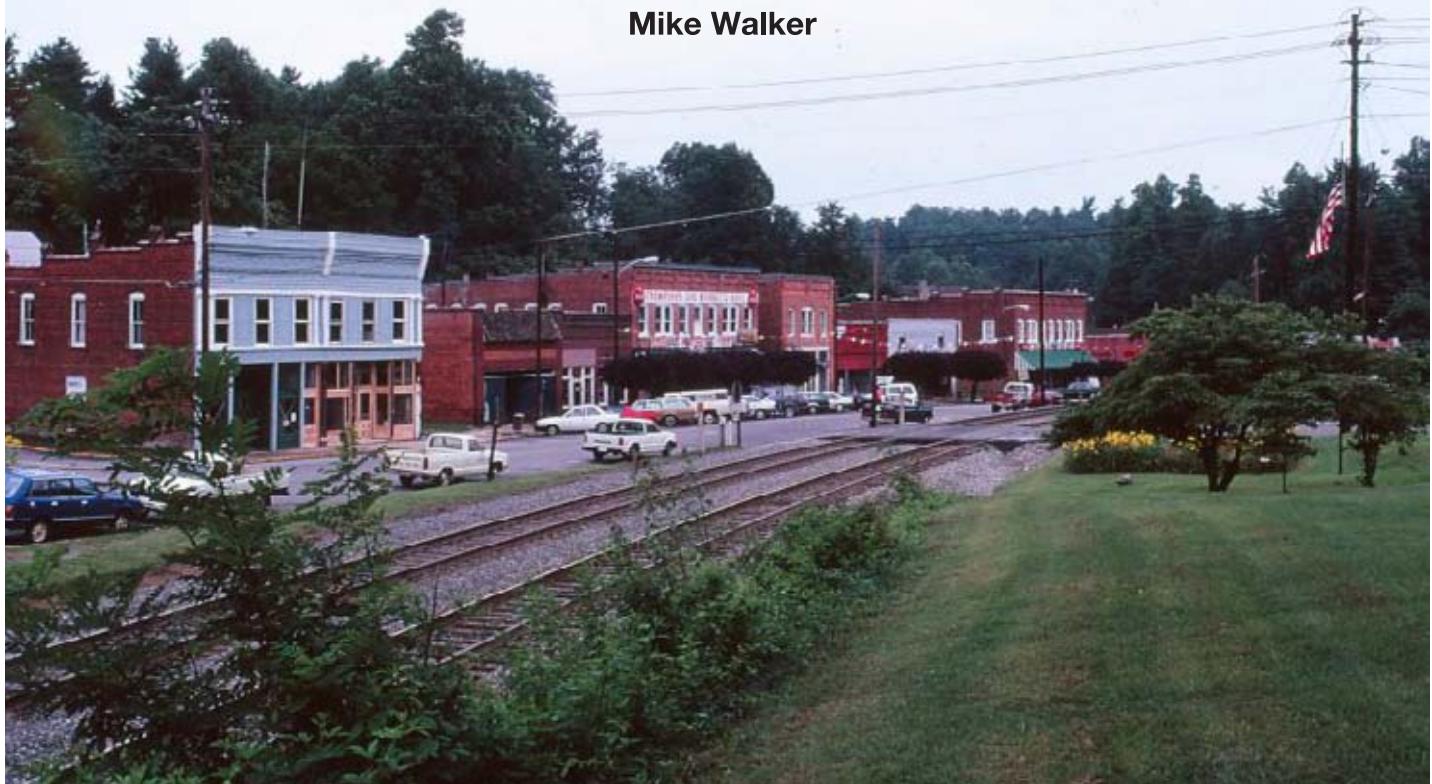
Mid-afternoon I had to take Jim back to Chester-le-Street for his train(s) home to Sheffield. I thought of a quick visit to Beamish but it was too late, so I went back to Marley Hill where most activities were coming to a close. I had a wander round the yard and sidings that contain a huge number of candidates for restoration and I suspect many others that may never make it that far. The biggest surprise was a 3'6" gauge 4-6-2 from Tasmania, that is

here because it was built locally by Robert Stephenson and Hawthorns in 1951. Then I was able to have a private look at the shed area, having found a door unlocked. It was just like the old days of bunking a depot! I had no idea just how much stuff was there and found numerous steam, diesel and even electric industrial locomotives under cover in various stages of restoration, some of which I recognised as "old friends" from my industrial visits in the 60's and 70's. I could have spent much longer looking around but, conscious that I probably shouldn't have been there unescorted, beat a retreat to the outside. The sheer quantity of locomotives was astounding and looking at their web site there must be almost 30 steam plus a dozen diesels and several electrics, not to mention narrow gauge stuff as well.

The Tanfield is a unique railway and I wish I hadn't left it so long to go there. I will return before too long and hope on that occasion I might see some sunshine too. I can recommend a visit, especially when they are holding one of these gala type events and have a fairly intensive timetable. In combination with Beamish, the Bowes Railway and perhaps the North Tyneside Railway there are plenty of things to occupy a few days and I thoroughly recommend a visit to the north-east. Unfortunately, any thoughts of my own return to Beamish on the Monday were completely dashed when I looked out the window at torrential rain, so it was a case of checking out, getting breakfast (good old Morrisons again) and hitting the road for home. But I shall be back.

# SALUDA: THE MOUNTAIN OF CHALLENGE

Mike Walker



*All photos by the author unless noted.*

Saluda, North Carolina, population 488, is small town America at its best. A place that modern times have largely passed by especially since the opening of Interstate 26, it nestles in the verdant folds of the Appalachian foothills and comprises a few unmade streets containing neat clapboard houses. Main Street, the only surfaced road in town is dominated by the classic brick built general stores of W A Pace & Co. Walk inside and you are transported back nearly a century. No self service here, the staff with their white aprons look like they belong in a barbershop quartet. A wonderful old brass cash register has pride of place on the counter and a wood burning pot-belly stove dominates the centre of the store. Those few strangers that make into town are soon made welcome with that legendary Southern hospitality. This is the kind of place where life moves ever so slowly and folk would never think of locking their homes or cars.

Like so many other small towns, across Main Street are the railroad tracks, in this case Norfolk Southern's secondary main line from Asheville NC to Spartanburg, South Carolina. Few lines in North America can match our or European standards of traffic and those such as this may see as few as one or two trains in a day - hardly the kind of place to draw flocks of railfans.

But on this sultry July day in 1989 a number of examples of this species are to be found dozing beneath the shade trees on the opposite side of the tracks. The National Railroad Historical Society is holding its annual convention in Asheville and today is a rest day. With no steam excursions to chase, the railfans have come to see for themselves what makes this town so special. But as the hours pass nothing stirs except the odd car on Main Street. Nobody really cares, Saluda has that effect on you.

Suddenly, in the late afternoon, a yellow Norfolk Southern pick-up truck pulls up outside Pace's. The driver, a tall man in his late fifties, casual but smartly dressed, gets out and avails himself of the omnipresent Coke machine outside the store. Your scribe wanders over to enquire if any trains are due.

'You're in luck, there's a local due in about ten minutes and the Belmont is about half an hour behind it. I'm the Road Foreman to accompany both'.

You see, what made Saluda special is that as those twin lines of steel pass through town they almost literally fall off the side of the mountain! From Saluda to Melrose, 3 miles to the south is North America's steepest main line grade, parts of it reaching 5.1% (1 in 24.3) but with an average grade of a mere 4.24% (1 in 23.6) and climbing 606 feet in 2.6 miles! To make it more interesting, Saluda is actually a summit with a lengthy but less steep climb from the Asheville direction.

The line was built in 1878 by the Spartanburg & Asheville Railroad which was competing with a rival line to reach Asheville first. Speed of construction therefore took precedence over operational practicality and led to the fearsome grade. It was thought it could be replaced later but it never happened.

Unsurprisingly, the hill saw several runaways over the years and the Southern Railway (successor to the S&A) added three safety tracks to trap such events. With improved braking, by 1989 only one of these remained but company rules governing working the hill took two pages in the employee timetable and still required a management grade engineer, a Road Foreman of Engines, to take control of each train on its descent.

The Road Foreman drove off to meet the local on the levelish piece of line just north of town, site of the old station, which provides a safe place for trains to stop and pick him up.

Presently it emerged from the road bridge [Right] led by three EMD SD40 3,000 hp Co-Co's which were gently moving on minimal power. It turned out to be out to be a classic case of overpowering as the local on this day comprised just two hopper cars and a caboose.

The sign on right commemorates the grade and stands opposite the relocated station, now an antique shop.



The local has made it safely down the hill to Melrose [Right] where the line levels out and the Road Foreman prepares to disembark. He will be met by a colleague who has also driven the pick-up down from Saluda.

The leading locomotive is passing over the switch that leads to the last surviving safety track. This is controlled by a timing circuit on the hill, if a train takes less than 8 seconds to cover it the switch sends it to the safety track.

The safety track also affords a good photo angle and that switch is closely watched - if it doesn't move, you do - fast!

As the local passed and tipped over the crest of the grade (Left) the engineer pushed the selector from power to dynamic to engage the dynamic brakes which turn the traction motors into generators turning the train's kinetic energy into electrical energy which is dissipated as heat through resistor grids.

The railfan audience having recorded the local's passing went to their cars and gave chase. A road follows the line down to Melrose but the dense forest offers only one intermediate view near the halfway point called Sand Cut.



After the overture comes the main event, the Belmont. This is a mile-long 13,000 ton loaded coal train heading for Duke Power's Belmont power plant north of Spartanburg.

It is un-nerving to stand at the top of the grade as this monster passes and heads off downhill [Right] on FULL POWER!

This is because most of the train is still on the uphill section and it is the skill of the engineer to switch to dynamics just as the train reaches its balancing point.

In addition to the head end power, a 3,800 hp SD60 and a pair of 3,900 hp GEs, there are two more SD60s remotely controlled midtrain.



Having reached Melrose without incident, the Road Foreman climbs down the leading SD60 6556 [Right]. Note that the train is still on the grade. Whilst the dynamic brakes were used for most retardation, the air brakes were used too and a descending train would be wreathed in blue smoke.

Operations on the hill came to an end in December 2001, NS had been trying to achieve this for some time but faced opposition from Duke Power who claimed it would need an additional trainset to maintain deliveries to its plant due to the longer alternative routing.

The Belmont is under full control as it descends past Sand Cut [Left] having made the audible transition from power to dynamic braking only just before it came into view.

The leading SD60 6556 is displaying white flags on each side of the cab. This was traditionally used by North American railroads to denote the train was running as an extra or special but by 1989 most trains were running as extras rather than to a fixed timetable so the provision of such symbols were by then rare.

Note also the presence of a signal - pity the poor engineer of an uphill train stopped there!





What goes down, must come up to misquote an old expression and two days after witnessing The Belmont go down the hill I was back to see a set of empties come up.

These, like most trains going up the hill, were divided into sections and “doubled” or sometimes “tripled” up to Saluda where they would be reassembled, the locomotives running light downhill to fetch each section.

SD60 6555 and GE C39-8 8624 start their attack of the hill [Left] with one portion of the Belmont empties.

As with the descending trains, it didn't take a lot of effort to beat climbers to the summit and here 6555 and 8624 crest the summit opposite Pace's Store [Right] giving a good idea of how the gradient changes so sharply, the crossing marks the actual summit.

Since the suspension of service the rails have been left in place although severed at both ends of the route just in case but as nature slowly takes over a revival seems unlikely.

The sleepy town of Saluda is now even more forgotten than before visited only by the locals and not by railfans.



There was one last hurrah for the line that brought hundreds of railfans to town including the late Dave Theobald.

On Sunday 25th October 1992 steam tackled Saluda for the last time when Norfolk & Western 4-8-4 611 ran a trip from Charlotte NC to Asheville.

Working without Diesel assistance for its five-car train, 611 made it almost to the top before the mighty Northern lost its grip and stalled. Incredibly, the crew managed to restart the train and made this awesome pass through town seen from the road bridge.

# THE LEGEND OF BOX TUNNEL



Photo: Adam Scott/GWR

Ever since its opening in 1841, there has been a legend surrounding Box Tunnel, namely that as the sun rises on April 9th, Brunel's birthday, it shines right through the tunnel from end to end.

Many observers have claimed that Brunel had no real need to construct the 1 mile 1452 yard long tunnel at all as the line could have been built on a more southerly alignment following the Avon valley and that it was the great man's folly.

Certainly there are some interesting points to take into account. Leaving Chippenham the line climbs at a constant 1 in 660 until just before it reaches the east portal where the gradient changes to 1 in 100 to descend through the tunnel. The east portal is quite unremarkable being a simple flat arch with vertical tunnel walls within an almost sheer-sided rock cutting whereas the west portal takes the form of the well-known triumphant arch which is in fact a dummy, extending only a hundred yards or so into the tunnel itself. The tunnel is not only on a constant gradient but it is also dead straight so, in theory, the legend could be correct.

April 9th this year, which would have been Brunel's 211th birthday, fell on a Sunday and conveniently the line was shut for engineering work which gave Network Rail and Great Western Railway a unique opportunity to investigate whether the legend has any truth. Meteorologically, conditions were perfect as teams from both organisations took up positions at both ends of the tunnel.

Those at the east end were treated to a spectacular sight as the sun rose from the left in the deep cutting and illuminated the interior of the tunnel. At the western end, it was not quite as striking. Matthew Golton, commercial development director at GWR, said: "We could see the sun had risen but we weren't getting full-on sunshine through the tunnel."

Possible reasons why the sun didn't fully penetrate the whole tunnel was that originally the 30 million bricks that line the tunnel had a glazed finish which would help the sun to reflect and shine through as would water lying on the base of the tunnel. Since then of course, steam and diesel locomotives have for 176 years coated the brickwork with soot and fumes whilst much

improved drainage means there is little lying water to be found in the tunnel.

So, is there any truth in the legend? Well this year's investigation failed to either fully prove or disprove the theory.

The supposed link with Brunel's birthday was first reported by the *Devizes Gazette* in 1842. The *Daily Telegraph* followed the story up some time later but, as far as is known, there have been no photographs of the supposed phenomenon.

The building of the tunnel, which at the time was the longest constructed, was highly controversial and was debated in parliament. George Stephenson said passengers would be "terrified" even though it was only around 700 yards longer than his son's Kilsby Tunnel. Whilst Brunel enjoyed considerable power and influence over the GWR board one has to ask if he would really have been allowed to undertake such a hugely expensive construction (which ended up being delayed and over budget) without good reason?

Whatever the truth, it makes a good story and one which will probably never be conclusively proven one way or the other.

Photo: Mike Walker



The Marlow Donkey