

Dear Member,

### **Welcome to the March newsletter**

At long last, spring has decided to make an appearance — and what a joy it's been to finally feel the sunshine again. Just in time, too, as we prepare for a brand-new season at RMES. There's been plenty of behind-the-scenes activity getting everything ready for our locos to return to the track, and we're delighted to say the railway is now officially open for use.

In this month's newsletter, you'll find a round-up from last weekend's AGM **(p2&3)**, along with updates from around the site **(p4-9)**. There are also lovely contributions from Peter Featherstone **(p15&16)**, Logan Derby **(p17)** and Peter Hill **(p18-23)**, bringing you right up to date with everything happening across the club.

As well as our regular features:

**"Chairman's Line"** – an update from Rolf on club plans **(p2&3)**.

**"Whistle Stop"** – this month our quick-fire Q&A is with Steven Byatt our Treasurer **(p24&25)**.

**"Notices"** – Please take the time to read through our important notices for this month too **(p26)**.



Mario waits for pre-season maintenance to be completed on his loco!

*Photo Credit: Rolf Thomas*

**Chairman's Line**

*Those of you who were at the AGM will have heard about the progress we are making in developing relationships with Rugby Borough Council; a necessary precursor to any further plans we have for our site. Our Dunsmore Ward Councillors are enthusiastic about the expansion project and have confirmed their ongoing support as we move forwards. Likewise, the RBC CEO has committed his senior leadership team to engage with us at the relevant stages as we work our way through this phase of the project.*



*It was lovely to see so many members at the AGM*

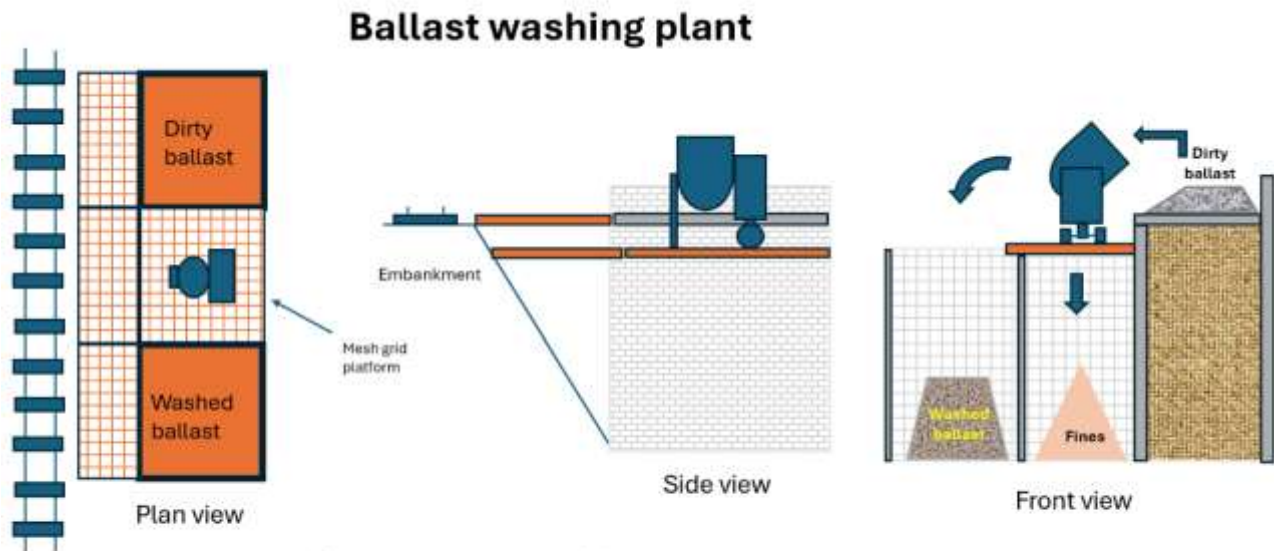
*Photo credits: Howard Brewer & Aubyn Mee*

*Last month I mentioned the ground level track renewal programme. A number of elements will need to come together for this happen, one of which is the construction of a fixed ballast washing plant to be located just before the second bridge over the cutting in the area generally known as the 'leaf store'. The reason for choosing this location is that it enables us to use gravity to best effect as the ballast is washed and subsequently stocked.*



*Geoff Broad making a start on the footings in the hail this week!*

*Photo credit: Peter Featherstone*

**View of the Ballast washing plant**

1. Dirty ballast brought by train in barrows to wash plant.
2. Same level loading from dirty ballast pile into washer.
3. Fines drop through mesh grid into centre bin during washing.
4. Washed ballast tipped into left hand bin.
5. Each bin capacity 2 m3. (Approx 3 tonnes).

*Regular volunteers will have noticed that the whiteboard in the old clubhouse has been re-purposed to now just list jobs that can be tackled by anyone who turns up on the day. So, if you have not been for a while and are wondering what you can do have a look at the whiteboard. The jobs include a contract name who will be able to let you know a bit more about it and where you can find the necessary tools and materials.*

*Now it seems to have stopped raining why not see where you can help us!*

*Rolf*

**Track update**

*Photo credits in this section: Howard Brewer*



*Initial excavations and rails laid to feed the new carriage container.*



*The lads were busy digging more soil out for us to suit the permanent fixed rails.*



*The permanent rails in position (but not fixed).*



*Our first attempt at the connecting rail - I think we were over enthusiastic with the rail bender!*



*Our second attempt was more realistic and a smoother curve to achieve what we need.*



*Rolf and Aubyn have been busy tackling the large spoil heap from the RT Steaming Bay excavations. Howard only just got there in time to see the last of the soil loaded onto the hired Dumper!*

*Photos on this page credited to Aubyn Mee*



*Tree removal near Carriage shed 2*



*George busy painting the 5 inch carriage frames*

**High track traverser update**

March has seen Aubyn making remarkable headway on the new main line traverser. This photo diary shows just how far things have come — and that's after Aubyn put in 40 hours last week to reach this stage!

There's still more to do, but what progress already. Huge thanks to Aubyn.

*All photos in this section credited to Aubyn Mee*





**New Mower**

*Photo credits in this section: Howard Brewer*

This month saw us take delivery of a new mower to help keep the RMES site looking tidy!



*Unloading the new mower - watch out Tony!*



*Phil Hart was soon trying it out on a section of grass.*



*Our Green maintenance team; Greg Winton and Phil Hart.*

**Engineering Update**

*Photo Credits in this section: Kathryn Derby and Ed Parrott*

The engineering team have had a productive month bringing our locos back together in readiness for the 2026 season, with particular progress on The Shay and The Garratt.



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*The City of Johannesburg was ready for the off...*



*...and fired up by Andrew for the first time on the track since over the winter maintenance work.*



*Looking good!*



*John firing up The Princess ready for her steam test*



*Thanks to Logan for his hard work in preparing for the 2026 season.*



*John working on the Royal Scot.*



*Phil has been lapping in the regulator valve on the Garratt, both pilot and main valves had been weeping steam through when the regulator was closed, so this work should make a noticeable improvement.*



*Reassembly of the freshly repainted boiler tins continues now that the engine has been refitted, and Jason has been looking at what's required for rewiring.*



**Great teamwork to get The Shay and The Garratt ready**



**A warm welcome to Dutch visitors**

*Photo credits in this section: Howard Brewer*

This March, RMES had the pleasure of welcoming a family of Dutch holidaymakers to the railway. Avid train enthusiasts, they were thrilled to make their visit to us one of the highlights of their trip.

They enjoyed time out on the line, followed by an in-depth tour of the workshops and running shed, where they were able to see behind the scenes of our operations.

We're grateful for their enthusiasm and would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you for the generous donation they left with us. Their support helps us continue the work we love.



*Having a great time, riding on the raised track.*



*Enjoying some Warwickshire sunshine whilst riding the ground level track!*

**On site training**

On Sunday 29th March, our team gathered for the annual on-site training in preparation for the 2026 Public Running season. Led by Dave Penney, volunteers completed their essential safety training to ensure everyone is fully up to date with current practices and regulations.

A following session on Guard Training was then delivered by Sue Morgan and included both induction training for our new Guards along with a valuable refresher for our returning team members.

A big thank you to Dave and Sue for leading on these crucial sessions and also to everyone who attended and contributed to keeping our railway safe and ready for another great season ahead.



Outgoing Safety Officer Don Currie (right) hands over the safety stamp and role to Dave Penney (left) who is excited to step into the role.

*Photo credit: Martin Rose*



After training it was fun to get "Alfie" out for a run with the freight carriages. Even though the weather didn't oblige everyone had a good time!

*Photo credit: Ellen Penney*

## **A fun working holiday on the Talyllyn Railway, by Peter Featherstone**

*Photo credits in this article: Peter Featherstone*

Peter and Rachel Featherstone are long-standing members of the Talyllyn Railway, having first visited in the late 1950s. Now approaching 50 years of membership, they've supported the railway in many ways. In 2010, after retiring, they took on the role of Membership Secretaries for what was meant to be ten years (but became fourteen!). Around the same time, Peter also joined the Outdoor Gang, spending a week each spring and autumn working on essential track renewal. Below Peter gives an update on his latest trip.

The Spring project in early March, was to relay a 50-yard stretch of line near the halt named Cynfal (pronounced kunvul). This was shorter than our normal challenge of 150 yds or so. The difficulty in this location is that the line has to cross over a stream and then pass under a road bridge with clearance for our tallest loco.

The first day was a typical Welsh monsoon but we removed the old rails and sleepers so that the excavator could clear the silt/ballast (with some areas being dug out by mattock and shovel). This waste was transported up the valley by train and off-loaded by hand, requiring a dozen wagon-loads or more.



Day 2 and 3 were a total contrast being dry and sunny. We hand loaded the first few tons of ballast and propelled the wagon to the relaying site. This was shovel-spread in order to lay out the new sleepers. The level of these was critical making sure they are just a little low to give the tamper a chance to get ballast under them. The new rails were moved into position with a combination of hydraulic rail-lifters, rollers and man-power. Once fish-plated, rough gauged and clamped the refilled ballast wagon was rolled carefully to the end of steel and the process repeated length by length. The gang continued to gauge and screw down the rail ready for the tamper to do the final packing and levelling in time for the first train on day 6.



Great exercise and good company.

At all times the safety of volunteers was paramount, especially crossing the stream and in the oozing mud on day 1.



**My first six months at the Rainsbrook Valley Railway**

*By Logan Derby*

I have really enjoyed my first six months volunteering at the Rainsbrook Valley Railway. I have been going every Saturday that I can and working with the engineering team. I have been helping do maintenance on some of the locomotives – including disassembling the Shay, descaling its boiler and prepping and painting its front bogie, cladding sheets and dome. I have also cleaned out the Garratt's smokebox and got very dirty! It is exciting at the moment because we are now reassembling the Shay.

The engineering team are really friendly and always find me a job to do. I am looking forward to seeing the Shay fully reconstructed and running on a public ride day.

Since I like my overalls so much, for 'World Book Day' I decided to dress up as Ken Issitt, a steam locomotive fireman, who wrote 'Firing the Flying Scotsman and Other Great Locomotives' - a book I am enjoying reading with my mum.



*Logan as Ken Issitt on World Book Day*

*Photo credit: Kathryn Derby*

**Scribblings for March 2026**

*By Peter Hill (including all photo credits)*

This month I decided to move the 3.5" Gresely 2-8-2 P2 along a bit. It had been parked on a shelf overlooking the workbench a couple of years now. I had been working on the boiler for Chris's A4 and it had spurred me on to get the P2 into a similar rolling chassis/boiler so I had something that actually looked like a P2 and not just another tray of unfinished project bits

I finally turned the main trailing and leading axles and pressed on the left-hand wheels loctiting them in place. The right-hand ones being pushed on with the quartering jig I made last year. Being 3 cylinder, they are at 120 degrees to each other, right hand leading the central cylinder crank, left hand trailing.

The right-hand wheels will just about slip on their axles so once the coupling rods are made and fitted, this allows for any tweaking to get them spot on and rotating smoothly.

The boiler is a new unused commercial combustion space Heilan Lassie design made by Dragon Boilers in Wales. I got this through buying several boxes of Heilan Lassie parts and part built chassis', I sold on what I did not want and kept what could use.

I painted what I could at this stage (I cannot face painting when finished) using etch primer and enamel. I used an airbrush for the wheels and small HVLP gun for the chassis. A lot of needle filing was needed on the wheel spokes and wire wool on the chassis first.



No supplier lists a 3.5" P2 so Chris and I translated Michael Breeze's 5" plans for laser cutting the frames and spent hours over catalogues to find suitable wheels. A guy on eBay was selling a load of raw wheel castings, and he managed to find eight of the correct size, number of spokes, and even a pair with larger balance weights for the driving axle. They also came with the balance weight offset for a 3-cylinder loco. I still don't know their origin.

I had a number of suitable used gun metal axle horns and axle boxes. Once rivetted in position I reamed through slightly larger and turned up new axles to fit. All were assembled once the paint was dry. I turned up a set of crank pins from silver steel, pressing them in before mounting the wheels on their axles

New springs were chosen from the sorts box that would give a mid-floating ride height when the loco was completed.

The rear Cartezzi axle and trailing frame was from a part-built Clarkson A3 I had stripped for parts, for practical purposes it was identical. I am also using the outside cylinders, while the inside slide valve one is a raw casting and will have to have between the frames mounting plates.

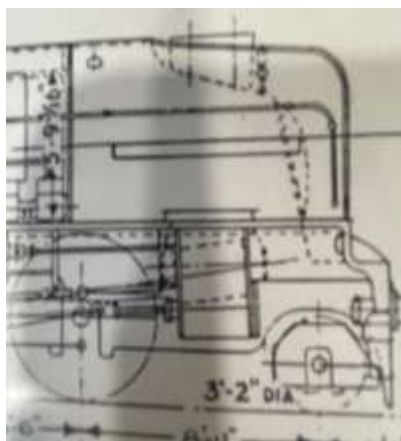
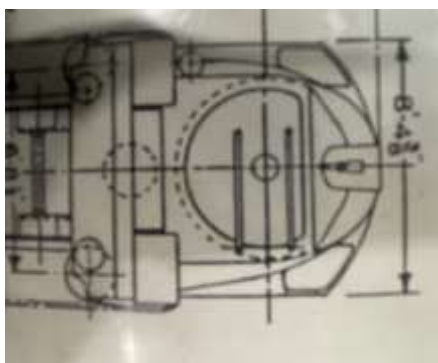
I made up the smoke box saddle boiler mount, gun metal A3 components silver soldered together. This was then machined to fit the frames. A Heilan Lassie one is too small. A Heilan Lassie is an A2/2, Thompson's substantial 4-6-2 rebuild of the P2

So next was the actual smokebox. This is the defining feature of the P2. Hooded integral smoke deflectors, sloping smokebox door and double chimney mounting. Cock o the North 2001 was built as this, together with 2002 Earl Marischal, but the latter soon had additional smoke deflectors fitted.

I think my model will be 2002 as built but with Baker and not Walchaerts valve gear. 2001 had Caprotti poppet valves as has the brand new 2007 Prince of Wales.

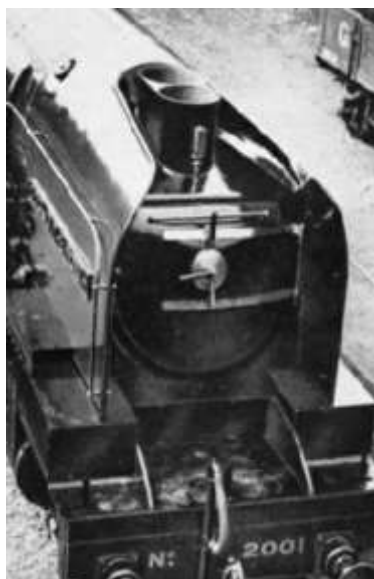
2003,4,5, and 6 were built with the Bugatti sloping front of the streamlined A4's and all with Walschaerts All were turned into 4-6-2's by Thompson with plain smokebox fronts. All got scrapped.

Not having any proper scale drawings I used dimensioned illustrations in some old



magazines and books containing P2 articles. I fiddled the camera and printer settings to produce these A4 sized print outs that were full 3,5" gauge size. I then rolled up and silver soldered some brass sheet into a smokebox barrel of the correct length that would fit the boiler. Then carefully marked out the cut needed for the sloping door plate. This was then silver soldered to a 3mm thick brass plate for the door frame. Once trimmed the second cut was marked out and disc cut off. A piece of 2mm brass plate was silver soldered on to form the flat sloping top.

Unlike the A4 both the smokebox front and top slope. One illustration was marked 19 degrees!



At this point I brought the loco down to RMES for a push around to check it runs on the rails ok. Also, for a "show and tell" over a cup of tea. I borrowed the tender from my finished running Heilan Lassie.

Then back in the workshop I marked out and disc cut a piece of 3mm brass plate for the smokebox door, annealed it, and bashed it into an ashtray shape with an 4oz ball pein hammer. Once linnished and shaped it will be ready for hinges and fitting. Polished steel hinges and clamp as per pic.



I cut out the front aperture for the door, and for the chimney top. I decided that smokebox access would be better if the sloping top with the chimneys and petticoats were removable.



I used Allen CSK 2.5mm stainless screws as they won't corrode and hardly noticeable.



I tried making a pair of copper chimneys but found some thick-walled brass tube instead.

The distinctive smoke deflectors were next. Studying the diagrams and photos,



I drew out a flat projection on a Shreddies packet and wrapping it around the smokebox I got the top chimney cut out to look right. When satisfied, i disc cut a brass sheet rectangle leaving the top cut out intact until after rolling to shape. Several annealings were necessary as the brass quickly hardened and became very difficult to work. On reflecting I should have chosen thinner brass but I wanted it substantial so not to be easily damaged in use.

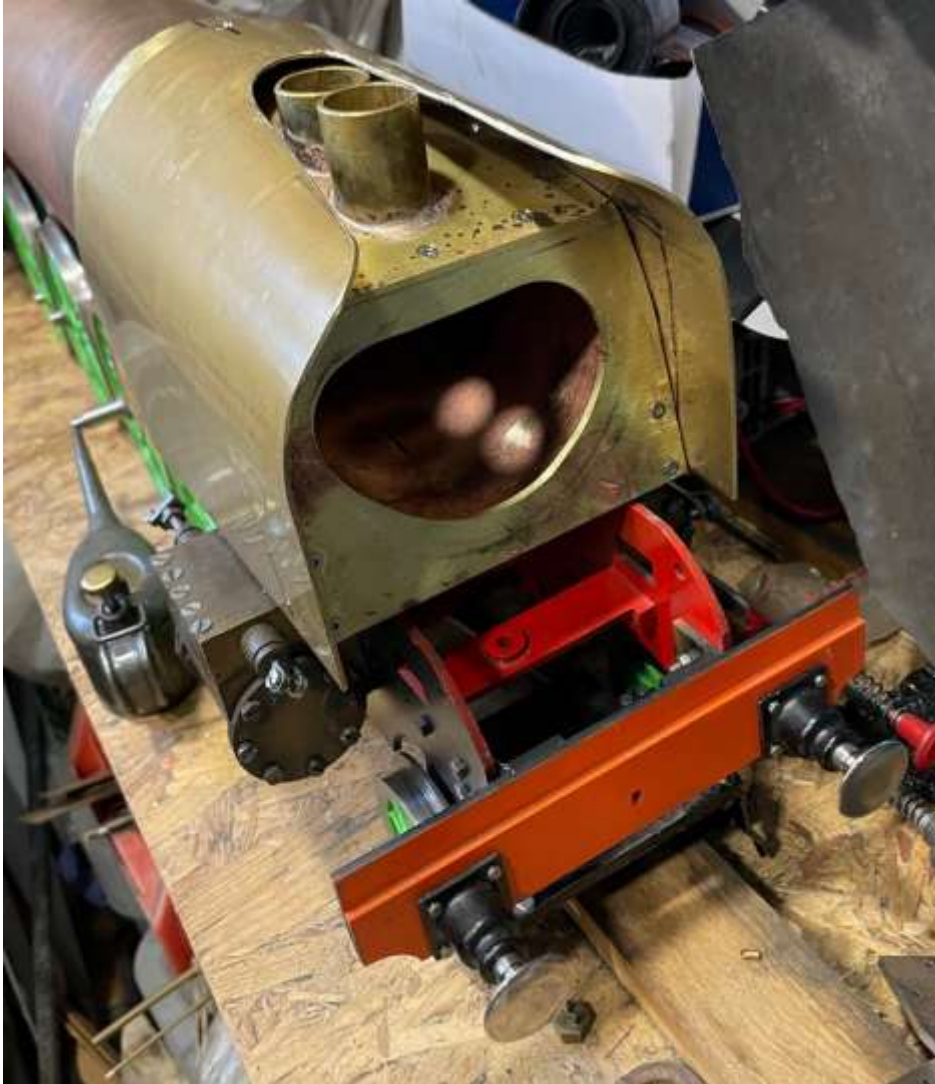
Rolling just the middle of the sheet was quite awkward and a bit of a wrestle, but without the chimney slot at least the bend was even. I marked out the slot with the shreddies template and disc cut it out out finishing with hand files.

I used some 3/8" brass angle and more CSK 2.5mm screws to secure the smoke deflectors in place.

A bit more trimming needed and this can then be painted, black inside and apple green outside.

A name plate and handrails soon, plus lining

Next jobs are the coupling rods and motionwork.



## The Whistle Stop: A monthly Q&A with one of our members

This month the tough questions are posed to **Steven Byatt**, our Treasurer.



### **1. Tell us about your professional background.**

12 years as a weapons mechanic in the Royal Navy Submarine Service. 25+ years working on industrial sized banknote sorting machines. Which I'm still doing.

*The "Warship" Diesel-Hydraulic at Severn Valley Railway.*

### **2. How did you first get into model railway engineering?**

My father asked me to keep an eye on my grandfather who was a member of Andover Model Engineering Society. We bought a 5" battery loco together so he could easily carry it himself. He left me the loco in his will.

### **3. When did you join RMES?**

I can't remember. It was somewhere between 10 and 15 years ago.

### **4. What do you enjoy most about being part of the society**

I really enjoy interacting with the public.

### **5. What RMES activities are you known for?**

Most people know me as the Treasurer. I hope I'm known to be a good guard.

### **6. What has been your favourite locomotive experience?**

Riding behind a class 50 doing over 100 mph somewhere between Salisbury and Exeter as the driver tried to make up time.

**7. What is your preferred gauge?**

I enjoy the thrill of the 5" raised track. I prefer the variety and leg room of our ground level track.

**8. Do you have any hobbies or clubs outside RMES?**

I support my two daughters in dog agility, horse care and competitive trampolining. Once or twice a year, I watch Portsmouth Football Club play.

**9. Tell us about last Heritage Railway that you visited**

I visited the Severn Valley Railway last August and got my money's worth from an all day ticket. I also had my first ride behind a Warship hydraulic.

**10. Please tell us one thing about you that no-one at RMES would know**

I don't like to eat raw tomatoes!

## Notices and Updates

### Help needed to support our online activities

Please don't forget to share the QR codes below to get friends and family to review us.



### Public Ride Day Tickets

Tickets are available for the Public Ride days in April, May and June.

Sessions can be booked quickly and easily by following the QR code below, which will take you straight to our ticket page.



### Defibrillator Appeal Update

#### **We have already raised over £1,000 towards our defibrillator appeal**

Thank you so much to everyone who has contributed towards our defibrillator appeal. We are delighted to have already raised over £1,000 towards the £2,500 needed to get a defibrillator unit at Ranisbrook.

**If you're able to support this important project, your donation will help us protect the people who make our railway such a special place.**

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/rainsbrook-valley-railway-defibrillator-appeal>

**Thank you for your generosity and continued support**

**Help needed for Public Ride Days and parties**

We continue to rely on member help for the Public Ride Days and parties. We need your help to offer a great experience and keep the public safe at these events. Please do get in touch with Howard at [rmes.sec@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rmes.sec@hotmail.co.uk) if you are available to help out (next dates below).

**Dates for your diary**

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April (pm) – Public Ride Day, help needed, please email [rmes.sec@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rmes.sec@hotmail.co.uk) if you can join us

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> April – Children’s party, please let Sandra know if you can help with this

Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April (pm) – Public Ride Day, help needed, please email [rmes.sec@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rmes.sec@hotmail.co.uk) if you can join us

**That’s all for March!**

We look forward to seeing you at the track soon and hope you have a good March.

If you have any stories and updates to share for the April newsletter, please send them over by 15.04.26 to [newsletter@rugbymes.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@rugbymes.co.uk).

A big thank you to everyone who contributed this month!

Edited by Dawn Culling  
(30.03.2026)

Note: All photos by the author unless otherwise credited.