

The Outeniqua Transport Museum Part 1

A general overview and the locos

This is a synopsis of an article by Andre Strauss which appeared in the November December 1999 edition of S A Rail with additional information supplied by Les Pivnic who was assistant curator of the SAR/SATS Museum for 17 years.

Located in George in the Cape, the Museum forms part of the activities of the Transnet Heritage Foundation.

In the early 1920s the then SAR and Harbours Administration approved the accumulation of artefacts connected to the history of the railways harbours and road transportation in South Africa with the intention of establishing a museum. 20 years passed before premises were reserved at Esselen Park. The museum was moved to premises under the Rissik Street bridge in 1956 and a further move occurred in 1972 to the concourse of the old Johannesburg railway station.

The collection of locomotives and other rolling stock was commenced in earnest in that year as a result of an instruction given by the then Minister of Transport – The Hon Ben Schoeman. The Minister referred to this in an address to Parliament in 1972. At that time the SA Railway Museum was controlled by the Publicity & Travel Department of the SAR. It was only in 1985 that the Museum was transferred to the

General Manager's Parliamentary Section. By this time, many locomotives and coaches were already set aside for museum purposes.

In the early 1980s the Railway Administration sent Les Pivnic to the UK and Europe on study tours with a view to gaining first-hand information on how the large transport museums operated overseas. During the two trips he visited all the major transport museums covering the UK, Germany, Holland, France and Switzerland. At that time there were plans to occupy the old Mechanical Workshops in Pretoria after the Depot was transferred to Koedoespoort. The old Depot was empty and offered an ideal site to establish a major museum along the lines of the National Rail Museum in York. As indicated above locomotives (steam, electric and diesel) as well as coaches and a few goods wagons had already been accumulated for the new museum. In 1985, those plans were dealt a massive blow. Pretoria Municipality needed space to expand their road system coming past the Voortrekker Monument. They needed a large part of Salvokop – the old Workshop premises - namely part of the Locomotive Depot. Pretoria site was lost!

A poor alternative was provided namely part of the Millsite premises at Krugersdorp.

The premises storing engines and rolling stock at De Aar then had to be vacated. As a replacement a 'kraal' was built in the Krugersdorp Loco Depot. The 'kraal' was not large enough to accommodate all the future exhibits with the result that a lot of them had to be staged outside the premises.

A number of these exhibits were burned or destroyed by striking rail workers.

The next blow occurred when the Administration took a decision to curtail what was considered non-essential expenditure. Following a visit to Krugersdorp by Dr Moolman, who was General Manager at this time, a relatively small amount of money was provided to allow the Museum to restore to working order a few engines and a selection of coaches for the purpose of running special steam tours – both departmentally and for private hire. However the plans for a major museum similar to the NRM or museums in Europe, were shattered.

Following the restructuring of the SAR & H in 1981 becoming the South African Transport Services (SATS) and in 1990 Transnet, the Railway Museum's status also changed becoming the Transnet Heritage Foundation controlled by a Board of Trustees.

At about the same time SATS instigated the withdrawal of steam power on South African railways. The announcement of the scrapping of some 500 steam locos precipitated a public outcry. A Task Group was formed to formulate a steam preservation policy. The Transnet Heritage Foundation was vested with responsibility of implementing the undertakings made in terms of that policy.

The main function of the Transnet Heritage Foundation as originally envisaged was to preserve the cultural heritage of Transnet. This encompassed the entire spectrum of the Company's activities and included supporting likeminded external organisations. Funding comprised an annual social grant from Transnet albeit it was envisaged from the start that the Heritage Fund would be converted from an internal to an external fund.

The activities of the Foundation included responsibility for the South African Railway Reference Library and Archive in Johannesburg. The library houses historical books, documents, maps, plans and photographs dating as far back as the turn of the 19th century. The library also houses numerous private collections. These documents are an invaluable aid for researchers, preservationists and model builders.

A second responsibility of the Foundation was operating the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe, the steam hauled preserved line between George and Knysna. Sadly a landslip adjacent to the Kaaimans River bridge in 2006 blocked the line. Transnet declined to spend the money to clear the landslip and implement the necessary reinforcing on the rock face and the service had to be abandoned.

Two views of the landslip at Kaaimans

Looking north



Looking south



Union Limited Steam Rail Tours

George – Knysna was a light branch line. In order to put the heavier classes of preserved steam locos to work the Foundation operated the Union Limited Steam Train. The primary route of this train was between Cape Town and George. Sadly this operation ceased in 2004.

Kimberley Railway Museum

Established by Spoornet in 1994 and located in the Kimberley station building, responsibility for the museum passed to the Heritage Foundation in 1999.

South African Historic Flight

A collection of operating and static historic aircraft was established by SAA. In 1999 and following the restructuring of SAA, responsibility for this collection was also taken over by the Foundation.

The collection is housed at Swartkops Airforce Base.

Preservation of the Steam Heritage and a National Collection of Steam Locomotives

From the roster of approximately 500 locos which became redundant after the ending of steam power, according to Andre Strauss, 120 were selected for preservation in a national collection. (It is unclear if this included the ones for which the South African National Railway and

Steam Museum – SANRASM) initially took responsibility. My understanding is the actual number recommended to the Heritage Council for classification as Heritage at the beginning of 2016 was 78 of which 9 are electric, 2 diesel electric and 3 narrow gauge leaving 64 as Cape Gauge steam. In retrospect and in the light of developments, particularly the SANRASM debacle and Transnet having other responsibilities and priorities, arguably the plan to preserve 120 locos was overly ambitious.

Outeniqua Transport Museum

The Heritage Foundation acquired the former PX shed at George located at 2 Mission Road (just off Courtenay Street which is the main road into George from Knysna). The first phase of the museum opened in September 1998. Although the bulk of the collection comprises locos and rolling stock there are also many other exhibits of interest including road transport vehicles, photographs and models of SAA aircraft, nautical items and a large collection of privately owned vintage motor vehicles. In addition, the shed which covers 14000 square meters is the terminus of the Outeniqua Power Van which climbs the pass on the route to Oudtshoorn. Finally the museum houses the Outeniqua Railway Society which has built a large Cape themed HO layout. The latter two items will be covered in subsequent North Star Chronicles.

The Loco Display

3 Garratts (2 ex Voorbaai) and 2 tank locos (ex Millsite) greet the visitor at the ***entrance to the museum.*** ***GO 2575 Henschel 1954***



GEA 4023 Beyer Peacock 1946



GF 2041 Hanomag 1928



Dubs A class 103 1889



Dubs G class 221 1904



Railway lines still run into the museum (including those from which the Outeniqua Choo-Tjoe used to depart and the one from which the Powervan up the pass to Oudtshoorn still does). The bulk of the railway collection of 21 locos which depicts the development of railways in South Africa is exhibited on these lines or on rail on the old platforms.

These include locomotives built in the late 19th century for Nederlandsche Zuid Afrikaans Spoorweg Maatschappij (NZASM) and used during the Anglo Boer War e.g. Emil Kessler (Rand Tram – restored in 1990) and NZASM (Roos)

'Emil Kessler' 0-4-0 WT 2317 1889 'Roos' Emil Kessler B class 1889



Another named loco is the 1903 Hudswell Clarke built dock shunter
'Stormberg' an 0-4-0ST **The rest of that G class Dubs!**



There are 12 other Cape gauge steam locos. The classes represented include a H2, 6J, 16B, 7A, 7BS, GB, GL, 19C, 24, S2, and the mighty GMAM. There are also two narrow gauge locos, a NG15 and a class 91 diesel both ex the Avontuur line.

The museum houses many other interesting exhibits such as dining cars, maintenance coaches, private saloons, White Train coaches used during the Royal Family tour in 1947, replicas of a typical railway station and signal cabins, signal and track equipment and some magnificent models. There is also something for the ladies with catering equipment – silverware, cutlery and crockery when rail was the grand way to travel.

A catalogue of the remaining locomotives on display at the museum follows.

Dubs H2 330 of 1915



6J 645 Dubs, Neilson, etc 1896



16B 805 North British 1917



7A 1007 Dubs, Neilson etc 1896



7BS 1056 Neilson 1900



GB 2166 Beyer Peacock 1921



What makes the collection so valuable is that the bulk of it being under cover, it has not suffered the ravages of rust experienced by the locos which were exposed to the salt air out in the open at Voorbaai. In fact many of the locos could be brought back into service relatively easily as they are intact. Of course boiler certificates would be required!

7GL 2351 Beyer Peacock 1929

19C 2439 North British 1935

"Princess Alice"



24 3668 North British 1949



S2 3706 SAR &H 1952



GMAM 4070 Henschel 1954



NG15 122 Societe Anglo Franco Belge 1950



Information about the National Collection can be obtained from the Foundation website: <http://www.transnetfoundation.co.za/heritage.html> (hint – click on the year to obtain a short history on the locos)

According to my understanding it currently comprises 64 locos, the bulk of them located at the Bloemfontein loco depot and the George and Kimberley museums. The rest are scattered around the country and include locos plinthed at Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria stations.

Class 91 001 GE 1973



Dubs 7A no 1009



There is also a plinthed loco adjacent to the entrance to the Outeniqua Museum (photo above right) - a Dubs built 7A no 1009. Arising from the state the loco is in it has obviously been there for some considerable time exposed to the elements but is planned to be moved and cosmetically restored in Transnet's new financial year.

In addition to the 12" to the foot locos on display there are some interesting models, several of which fall into the model engineering category. The photographs below do not do justice to the models because of being taken through glass. Undoubtedly the star of this show is the late Basil Palmer's 16E (below right).

Identity and builder unknown

Basil Palmer's 16E

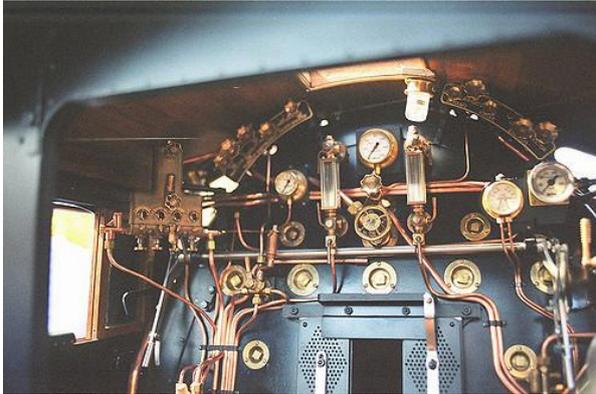


Basil was one of the most gifted model engineers this country has ever produced. He was brought up in Shongweni just outside Durban and with some poetic licence the 16E was named accordingly. This loco built to 1/2" scale and 5" gauge is complete in every detail and won a gold medal together with the Bill Hughes Memorial Trophy at the 1989 ME Exhibition in London.

Those who wish to know more about Basil and his locos should refer to www.rsme.co.za/data/newsletters/RSME%20Newsletter%20Dec10.doc In order to give people a better idea of the quality of this model, below are some more photos - courtesy Hannes Paling. (Basil Palmer to the right of the tender)



**Incredible backhead detail
Difficult to believe this is a model!**



Class B (2 cylinder) Shay



With respect to another model engineering display item, the Shay (above right) apparently was built by a sheep farmer in the Karoo to 10¼" gauge. It was acquired and operated by the George Lions Club, then the municipality before finding its way to the Museum. This is one of the exhibits which does not have a description.

Finally, with respect to locos there are numerous models in different scales on display. These are undocumented. (Apologies for the poor quality of the photo below taken through glass)



While perhaps nothing on the scale of what was originally envisaged, in my view the Museum is a gem. Like Sandstone, this country is fortunate to have such a facility. In my experience it compares well with similar museums in the UK. You would not be disappointed by paying it a visit. The Museum needs all the support it can get. I was amazed to discover it has a total staff of 2! In earlier years there was a museum-trained staff complement of approximately 20 people (admittedly in total not just the Outeniqua Transport Museum) – these included persons who had a comprehensive knowledge of SAR locomotives and rolling stock as well as artisans trained in restoring small artefacts for display and finally people who were equipped to undertake professional research. It is also

true that services such as cleaning and maintenance are outsourced but still..... The 'sharp end' of the operation, namely the interface with visitors at the entrance is not even manned by Museum staff but security personnel. Attempts to persuade volunteers to assist as guides for example have not been successful to date.

I do have one criticism: that is Transnet hides its light under the proverbial bushel! I do not recall seeing the Museum being marketed There is no budget for promotional activities with all advertising decisions being made in Johannesburg. In a way that is understandable in that running a museum is not exactly Transnet's core function!

Perhaps the Museum would benefit by entering into a partnership with a more market orientated organisation to "sell" it to the public.

Another idea would be to establish a 'Friends of the Outeniqua Transport Museum' but that would require the bulk of the support to originate from the George area.

One operation where non George residents could assist is with the identification (and repair of damaged items?) of some of the models in turn enabling them to have descriptions attached to the displays.

However, overall my conclusions are that under the circumstances Mr Volschenk the manager (whose assistance with the compilation of this article is gratefully acknowledged) and his number 2 do an amazing job and to repeat the Museum is well worth a visit.

Wednesday and Saturday are the recommended days as the Outeniqua Railway Society operates its layout on those days.